Navigating the Intersections of Migration and Motherhood in Online Communities: Digital Community Mothering and Migrant Maternal Imaginaries

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Author’s Declaration

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

This thesis has not previously been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

No external editing or proofreading services have been involved in the preparation of this thesis.

This thesis meets the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.

Leah Williams Veazey

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17 December 2018
Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of contemporary migrant mothers in Australia, through the lens of their online communities. Facebook groups created by and for migrant mothers from particular national, ethnic or linguistic communities have proliferated in the last decade. The analysis of these groups acts as a springboard to investigate how migrant mothers in Australia experience and respond to migration and motherhood, centring on four key areas: community-building and leadership; friendship and sociality; the emotions of motherhood and migration; and migrant mothers’ maternal practices, narratives and imaginaries.

In this “age of migration” (Castles et al. 2014) and “age of connection” (Zuckerman 2013), the figure of the ‘connected maternal migrant’ remains largely unexamined outside a transnational carework framework. As such, literature and concepts from three distinct fields – motherhood studies, migration research and digital sociology – inform the research. Understandings of migration are extended and troubled by highlighting the importance of maternal social connection, not simply in relation to their partners and children or to the labour market, but also between mothers. In turn, the investigation of the role of migrant maternal Facebook groups in the everyday lives of migrant mothers also extends scholarship in digital sociology by bringing feminist, matricentric (A. O'Reilly 2016) and intersectional approaches into conversation with key themes relating to belonging, mobility and connection.

The thesis involved a scoping exercise which mapped Australian online migrant mother’s groups, an online survey of women ‘mothering away from home,’ and semi-structured interviews with 41 migrant mothers from ten different countries living in Sydney and Melbourne, who were members of migrant mothers’ online groups. Fifteen of the interviewees held an administrator role in their group, and the digital and emotional labour involved in managing the groups became a central theme. The migrant maternal narratives elicited across the study demonstrate the role of the digital in managing the ruptures and connections of migrant motherhood. Mothers, as both consumers and producers of digital information and community, are shown to be working to effect settlement and create belonging for themselves and others.
This thesis works to bring mothers out from the shadows of migration and digital social research. In order to achieve the task of making migrant mothers visible, new concepts have been introduced, such as ‘digital community mothering,’ ‘relational settlement,’ ‘affective settlement’ and ‘migrant maternal imagined communities.’ The groups are representations of their collective maternal imaginary, as well as mechanisms for forging ‘real’ connections.
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“I began to realise that mothers were with me everywhere I went, and that ‘we were everywhere,’ mothering in strange, loose, unacknowledged, shadowy groups, like members of a sect who knew about each other’s presence, but couldn’t openly greet each other; and that we watched each other surreptitiously as we mothered in public, learning from one another, silently criticizing one another, and occasionally signalling to one another via small enigmatic gestures of solidarity.”

*Mothers Who Make Things Public*

(Baraitser, 2009, p. 22)
Preface

This research project is deeply entangled in core areas of my life, from my educational background in migration research and personal experiences of migrant motherhood, to my experience in online community management in both professional and voluntary capacities. Born and raised in London, with an Australian mother and British father, I have had dual British-Australian citizenship since birth. I had never lived in Australia, however, until I migrated to Sydney with my British husband and our then two-year-old and three-month-old sons. I had been in Sydney for just over a year when I commenced my research, partly motivated by an interest in how other mothers had experienced and responded to those two upheavals: migration and motherhood.

I am also the daughter of a migrant mother. My mother migrated from Sydney to London in the early 1970s, remaining there for four decades after meeting my father. They raised two children who as adults now live in Cape Town and Sydney, raising our own young families ‘away from home.’ Growing up, I remember my mother exchanging fortnightly letters with her parents. I remember stories of my grandmother flying for the first time in her life so she could attend my parents’ wedding, the annual crackly phone call on Christmas Day, arguments about politics conducted across the lightweight blue airmail paper, and the worries about health and relationships as my grandparents aged and eventually died. When we announced our decision to migrate, my mother took it hard, at least partly because she felt she understood the emotional impact of such a move. In some ways, our experiences and challenges have been similar but in other respects, those four decades have changed everything. The weekly airletters have been replaced by a family Whatsapp group, pinging messages, photos, jokes and videos between New York, London, Cape Town and Sydney multiple times a day. The crackly annual phone call has been replaced by weekly FaceTime video calls during which my children can share songs, news and bedtime stories with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Nevertheless, the distance and time zones create barriers to the sensory intimacies of daily life, and, three years after we arrived in Sydney, my parents joined us.
Talking to acquaintances, and participants who migrated before these instant technologies became commonplace, confirms that while technological developments have transformed some elements of both migration and motherhood, other elements remain familiar. A family friend, who migrated from Switzerland to Sydney in the 1980s remembers how, shortly after her daughter was born, a nurse put her in touch with another new Swiss mother, sparking a close and long-lasting friendship. The lasting connections that can spring from an encounter with another person from the same country, experiencing migrant motherhood in the same country, clearly precede the advent of Facebook groups. Curiosity about these migrant maternal connections has driven this research.

In the months after my arrival in Australia, as I sought to orient myself in my new environment, I observed migrant and non-migrant mothers creating and using Facebook groups and other online platforms to connect with other mothers in their local communities. Yet in this “age of migration” (Castles et al. 2014) and “age of connection” (Zuckerman 2013), the figure of the ‘connected maternal migrant’ remains largely unexamined. Or rather, examination of connected migrant mothers has been largely confined to a transnational carework perspective, focusing on their connections to children, husbands and parents from whom they have become separated by migration (Ahn 2017; Francisco 2015; Madianou 2012; Peng & Wong 2013). In Australia, which has historically accepted family migration, most migrant mothers are co-located with their children and therefore research based around a “migration-care-work nexus” (Williams 2018) provides only limited insight into their experiences. At a time when the Australian Census figures make headline news, reporting that “nearly half” of people in Australia are born overseas or have at least one parent born abroad (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016; Hunt 2017), and that the overseas-born population is now predominantly Asian-born rather than European-born, it seems timely to present a thesis exploring the experiences of first-generation migrants in contemporary Australia, and bringing together the experiences of Asian, European, and South American migrants in a single study.
Chapter 1  Introduction

This thesis explores the experiences of migrant mothers in Australia who participate in online groups created by and for migrant mothers. It is a study of migrant maternal community-building and sociality, migrant mothering and home-building practices, and the digital labour that underpins them. Importantly, although the word ‘mother’ intrinsically suggests a mother-child relationship, this research foregrounds the relationships of mothers with each other. Using a feminist sociological lens, it seeks to understand how women are making use of the affordances of online communities to meet their needs as migrant mothers.

Stimulated by personal, professional and political observations, the project brings together migration research, motherhood studies, and digital sociology scholarship to explore the experiences of migrant mothers in Australia. Facebook groups created by and for migrant mothers from particular national, ethnic or linguistic communities form the basis for this research, and I have analysed their origins, activities, and impacts. Yet the thesis goes beyond a study of the Facebook groups. Rather, the careful analysis of the groups is used as a springboard to investigate firstly, migrant mothers’ experiences of community-building and leadership; secondly, their experiences of friendship and sociality; thirdly, the intersecting emotions of motherhood and migration; and finally migrant mothers’ maternal practices, narratives and imaginaries. In broad terms, I sought to understand how migrant mothers are using online communities, and to thereby deepen scholarly knowledge about migration, motherhood, online communities and the intersections between them.

A series of research questions were developed to guide the project. The top level of research questions addressed the online communities themselves: what are they, why do they exist, what happens in them, how do they work, what do migrant mothers use them for? Taking a view of community that sees a community’s significance as residing in the meanings ascribed by community members to their interactions (Cohen 1985), the next level of research questions sought to investigate the meanings and emotions that the participants in the communities ascribe to the groups’ existence, and their participation in them. This also involved asking broader questions about women’s experiences of migration and motherhood. Circling back to the original question about the role migrant mothers’ online communities play in women’s experiences of
migration and motherhood, I sought to discover what the answers to these previous questions could tell us about contemporary migrant motherhood in Australia. Finally, I hoped to expand current knowledge about migration, motherhood, and digital cultures, by exploring the intersections between them. Here another set of questions emerged. How might a focus on motherhood extend or trouble current understandings about migration? What insights into motherhood can be obtained by centring the experiences of migrant women? What can be learned about online behaviours and digital cultures by exploring the experiences of migrant mothers online?

1.1.1 The study

In order to investigate these sets of interrelated questions, I designed a three-stage study, each of which built on the preceding one. The first two stages, a mapping exercise to identify online groups by and for migrant mothers in Australia, and an online survey of migrant mothers, together formed a foundation for the rest of the study. Having scoped the field and identified some key areas of interest, I embarked on the third stage: in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 41 migrant mothers living in Sydney and Melbourne in 2016. The analysis presented in this thesis has predominantly been drawn from a thematic analysis of the data generated by these interviews, although the first two stages also played a vital role in informing the analysis. The research participants were all members of Facebook groups for migrant mothers in Australia, such as groups for Indian mothers in Sydney, or for Brazilian mothers in Melbourne. Seeking to avoid the “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2003) that characterises many studies of contemporary migration, I interviewed women from ten different countries and three continents. Of the 41 women I interviewed, fifteen held an administrator role in their group, and their digital and emotional labour in creating and curating the groups emerges as a central theme of the thesis. In line with the study’s research aims, the interviews focused on four key areas: experiences of migration, experiences of motherhood, experiences of migrant motherhood, and experiences of migrant mothers’ online groups. Thus, while the Facebook groups were the starting point for the thesis in terms of recruitment and research questions, I was also interested in how women talked about their broader experiences as migrant mothers in Australia.

A focus on migrant mothers in relation to each other is the ‘golden thread’ that ties this thesis together. This contrasts with the more common perspective in migration studies, in which
mothers are viewed in relation to their partner and children, or in relation to macro-processes like the ‘global care chain’ (Hochschild 2001; Parreñas 2000). Taking migrant mothers’ Facebook groups as a starting point for this study facilitates an emphasis on lateral relationships and connections between mothers. This thesis also takes a temporally open approach to migration and motherhood, suggesting that both experiences remain salient well beyond the temporally limited periods of transition that have received sustained attention in the relevant literatures. Because the groups are used by mothers of infants as well as of teenagers, and by recently arrived and longer-settled migrants, drawing participants from the groups broadens the scope of the study beyond the pregnancy-birth-postnatal period, and the early months of migrant settlement, which are commonly the focus of research studies in these areas. While making for a complex sample, this diversity brings together the experiences of women often analysed separately, or not at all, offering the opportunity for new insights, connections and contrasts.

1.2 Conceptual approach and understandings

From the beginning, this thesis has been firmly grounded in a conceptual framework that draws together feminist epistemologies, ontologies and research principles – specifically standpoint and matricentric feminist perspectives – with social constructionism and intersectionality. These perspectives have guided the project from the formulation of the research topic and questions, the exploration of relevant literature, the research design and implementation, to the analysis, representation and presentation of the findings. The research is grounded in an understanding that mothers’ lives are worthy of scholarly attention and yet have been sidelined in mainstream social research, including migration research. Investigations of mothers’ lives have often been fragmented into splinters of experience, such as experiences of pregnancy, birth, early motherhood, care work or employment, or have been premised on a white, middle-class, heterosexual norm. In this thesis, social lives and processes are understood as significantly structured by gender, and motherhood is understood as being experienced and regulated in socially, culturally, and historically specific ways. Within those social structures and regulations, migrant mothers are positioned as active and creative agents, capable of self-initiated projects and of co-constructing interpretations of their experiences (Gatt et al. 2016; Manohar 2013a).
Across this research project, I have balanced a matrifocal perspective, that is, a focus on mothers and mothering, with an attention to women’s lives beyond motherhood. Women’s experiences of friendship and homesickness, for example, and their personal narratives and imaginaries, are seen as shaped by motherhood but not determined by it. In addition, women’s identities and experiences are understood intersectionally, as being “shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways” (Collins & Bilge 2016, p. 2). Societies and structures of power are also understood intersectionally, as “shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other” (Collins & Bilge 2016, p. 2). Women’s experiences of motherhood are shaped by their experiences of migration and vice versa. Furthermore, their experiences and the way they understand them are shaped by factors such as class, race, ethnicity and age in ways that “build on each other and work together” (Collins & Bilge 2016, p. 2). That such factors and their intersections are dynamic and unstable, not static or unchanging, is foregrounded in this thesis, with its focus on change, movement and transitions.

Throughout the research, I have remained attentive both to the specificities of participants’ experiences and to the commonalities between them, using the principles and tools of relational intersectionality to manage this complexity (Collins & Bilge 2016). Relational intersectionality emphasises the interconnectedness not just of people, but also of social movements, power structures, theory and praxis. Relationality, with its focus on the “fundamental interconnectedness among human beings” (Nedelsky 2011) is described by Collins and Bilge as one of the “guideposts” for thinking through intersectionality (2016, p. 25), and it has also been a guidepost for this thesis.

These matricentric, relational and intersectional perspectives have driven my re-framing of certain widely used concepts. For example, I have suggested that the concept of “middling migration” or “middling transnationalism” (Conradson & Latham 2005c; Luthra & Platt 2016) should take greater account of gender, relationships, networks and circulating knowledges. In migration literature, “middling” relates variously to migrants’ class position in both country of origin and arrival, their self-perception, or to an assessment of their level of skill, education, or stage in their career. It is sometimes also related to migrants’ reasons for moving: travelling for opportunity, love, or lifestyle, rather than economic necessity or safety at one end of the scale, or for elite careers at the other. Given the increasing focus on skilled, employed, and educated migrants in Australia’s managed migration system, most migrant mothers in Australia could be described as “middling migrants.” Yet, I suggest, mothers have remained largely invisible in “middling migration” research, which has thus far tended to focus on students, working holidaymakers, and young
professionals seeking “overseas experience” (Conradson & Latham 2005b) or hoping to “build a global career” (E. L.-E. Ho 2011), perhaps before returning home to raise a family (Conradson & Latham 2005a). Centring the experiences of middling migrant mothers encourages a shift of focus away from individualistic socio-economic analytic categories. In this thesis, I have drawn on feminist and intersectional concepts of relationality (Collins & Bilge 2016; Nedelsky 2011) to suggest alternative ways of conceptualising “middling migrants” that emphasise migrants’ networks and relationships of interdependence.

1.3 Key areas of inquiry

Returning to the research topics, which I briefly outlined in Section 1.1, this thesis addresses four key areas of inquiry in the context of migration, motherhood and digital cultures. The first of these is the nature of contemporary community-building, in which online communities play an important role. The analysis of the digital and emotional labour performed by the groups’ administrators provides insights into the labour that underpins community building today. Built on this analysis, the thesis advances a series of concepts which have been developed in relation to migrant mothers, but which may also provide a platform for further research into the role of online community managers in non-commercial spaces. In the wealth of research on digital cultures and communication, relatively little has addressed ‘closed’ online groups specifically, and even less has interrogated the labour of those who create and maintain those spaces. To conceptualise this online community-building labour, I have developed the concepts of ‘information agriculture,’ ‘meta-maternal practices,’ and ‘digital community mothering.’

The second key area of inquiry is the nature of contemporary friendship and sociality. By analysing the connections and interactions between migrant mothers in their online communities, I have devised a theory of migrant maternal sociality that extends current understandings of the different types of maternal social connection that are important for migrant mothers. In particular, I argue that migrant mothers create a sense of security through interdependence, by establishing latent ties in migrant maternal online communities, and that this may be a gendered process of “migrant home-building” (Hage 1997). While Haythornthwaite (2002, 2005) has established the concept of latent ties as connections which are “technically possible but not yet activated socially” (2005, p. 137), I argue that the shared visibility of interactions in the Facebook groups creates an awareness of those latent ties, and what those ties might offer, providing a significant source of
comfort for the groups’ members. Thus my theory of migrant maternal sociality enables me to explore how Facebook groups provide a space in which migrant mothers’ shared identities and experiences intersect with the “mediated intimacy” (Chambers 2013) of online sociality, and how that space, and the relationships produced there, may be used to bring about migrant mothers’ relational and affective settlement (Diminescu 2008; Hage 1997).

Related to the ways in which mothers interact with each other, I propose and deploy a concept of ‘compassionate mothering,’ understood as a mode of mothering in which women are encouraged to engage with other mothers with empathy, especially when they encounter differences in maternal practice. This mode of mothering can be set against more confrontational tropes such as “combative mothering” (Moore & Abetz 2016) or “the mommy wars” (Douglas & Michaels 2004; Moore & Abetz 2016) and is specifically aimed to facilitate maternal communities, in which women can exchange information and support.

The intersecting emotions of migration and motherhood constitute the third key area of inquiry. In particular, the thesis explores the emotional motivations for migrant mothers’ creation and use of online communities, and the emotional impact of that usage. By researching women’s emotional responses to migration and motherhood, and tracing how these intersect and manifest in their migrant maternal online communities, this thesis contributes to contemporary research agendas around the emotional responses to parenthood (Kokanović & Michaels 2018) and migration (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015), and extends this agenda into the online sphere. Centring the notion of settlement, in the sense of finding a place for oneself both literally and affectively, the research focuses on the ways in which migrant mothers construct new attachments of belonging. Home and being at home are intrinsically emotional matters, and can only be understood in relation to how “one feels or how one might fail to feel” (S. Ahmed 1999, p. 341). I propose the concept of ‘affective settlement’ to describe these relational and emotional processes of (re)building self, home and community after the disruptions occasioned by migration and motherhood. Affective settlement, in this thesis, is understood in relation to locally emplaced attachments of belonging, to meaningful relationships, and to imaginaries of belonging.

Finally, this thesis investigates migrant mothers’ practices, narratives and imaginaries. Those practices include the digital, home-building and relationship-building practices outlined above, and
they also include practices specifically relating to the care and education of their children. In relation to this latter set of practices, the thesis explores the ways in which maternal practices in migration become a site of increased intentionality, charged with meaning about identity, connection, and hope. Utilising concepts from the sociology of the imagination (Adams 2004; Kanno & Norton 2003), I explore how migrant mothers in this study appear to draw on imagined communities of maternal practice and identity to shape their choices and how they frame them. Imaginaries are understood as “affectively laden patterns/images/forms” which reveal “the emotional contours of the subject’s world” (Lennon 2015, p. 1). In this thesis, I develop the concept of migrant maternal imaginaries, which have a temporality, drawing on the past and projecting into the future, as well as a geography, bringing ‘back there’ into ‘over here.’ Lennon’s description of the imaginary as “the way in which we not only think, but also feel our way around” (2015, p. 1) is particularly pertinent to this thesis, which explores the ways migrant mothers activate and manifest their imaginaries as they “feel [their] way around” new places and roles.

1.4 Thesis overview

Chapter Two situates the research within the landscape of existing literature. Reflecting the project’s position at the intersections of migration research, motherhood studies, and digital sociology, the literature review draws together work from these three core areas of scholarship. The chapter draws attention to the research that exists in the borderlands of these fields of study, namely, research on migrant motherhood, digital motherhood, and migrants online. As the analytic work of this thesis has also drawn on concepts from the fields of the sociology of emotions, information studies, and feminist digital sociology, the literature review highlights scholarship where those fields intersect with the core themes of the study, for example, the emotions of migration, the information practices of migrants and mothers, and intersectional inequalities online. Overall, the review considers literature relating to the core concepts that underpin the thesis: community, belonging, connection and disruption.

Highlighting current research on migrant mothers in Australia, much of which has focused on mothers during pregnancy, birth and early parenthood, and has noted the problem of social isolation, I suggest that the experiences of migrant mothers beyond this limited period have been neglected. Noting the relative paucity of literature relating to families and migration in Australia, I
argue that it is necessary to look beyond the binary migration categories of temporary/permanent, labour/family, and skilled/unskilled to capture the complexity of the migrant experience, and in particular, to bring mothers out of the shadows of migration scholarship. In this endeavour, I situate this project within the auspices of feminist migration scholarship, which seeks to integrate women’s experiences into mainstream migration research, and which proceeds from the premise “that gender is a dynamic and constitutive element of migration and immigrant integration” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2012, p. 181).

**Chapter Three** provides an account of the dimensions of this thesis as a feminist digital sociology project. Firstly, I introduce the conceptual framework for the thesis, which is based on four perspectives: feminism, matricentric feminism, intersectionality, and social constructionism. I then explain how this framework has been implemented in the empirical study, outlining how it has guided my choices and interpretations. The third section details the research design and methods. I introduce the preliminary scoping and survey phases of the research, before focusing on the qualitative interviews and analysis that form the main part of the study. Finally, I situate myself in the research, reflecting on my position as a migrant, mother, researcher and online community manager, and discuss the strategic, performative, contextual nature of ‘shared social locations’ in qualitative research.

**Chapter Four** introduces the migrant maternal Facebook groups at the heart of this study. Using concepts of identity and boundaries, I explore how the parameters of the groups are shaped by their creators. I discuss the phenomenon of ‘closed’ Facebook groups, focusing on notions of privacy, publicness and visibility. I note the relative paucity of research relating to Facebook groups, in comparison to the body of research on social interactions revolving around individuals’ personal Facebook profiles and related network of ‘friends.’ Next, I place the migrant maternal Facebook groups in the context of an established landscape of mothers’ groups in Australia, which includes a history of face-to-face mothers’ groups dating back to the early twentieth century, and the more recent development of online mothers’ groups and forums. The remainder of Chapter Four outlines how these migrant maternal Facebook groups came to be established, introduces the research participants, and outlines the core activities of the groups. Information grounds theory (Fisher et al. 2004; Pettigrew 1999) and “social information foraging” (Peter Pirolli 2009) are used to conceptualise the social, informational and affective interchanges that occur under the auspices of the groups. Acknowledging the significant role of the administrators of the groups, this
Chapter Five highlights the importance of the administrators’ unpaid labour in creating, maintaining, and shaping the migrant maternal online groups, noting that many studies of online communities focus only on the experiences of end users. The chapter analyses two key areas of administrative labour: boundary work and emotional curation. I outline the boundary practices by which the administrators set the parameters of membership for their group, and how these practices shape the groups into gendered and geographically-based sites of belonging and trust. Administrators take great efforts to curate the emotional atmosphere in the groups, reducing conflict and weaving a “narrative of sameness” (Seligman 2012, p. 190) to increase the trust and empathy shared by group members. Here I propose the concept of ‘compassionate mothering’ to describe the behavioural norm encouraged by the administrators, understood as compassion between mothers with differing (maternal) practices. In the final part of Chapter Five, I define the administrators’ boundary work and emotional curation as ‘meta-maternal practices’ and introduce a series of terms to help conceptualise their role. Should the administrators be viewed as accidental community managers, information agriculturalists, accidental micro-celebrities, maternal leaders, digital housewives (Jarrett 2016) or online community mothers? I argue that the administrators’ meta-maternal practices constitute a form of maternally-based community service and maternal community building in migration.

Chapter Six focuses on the concepts of migrant maternal sociality, “relational settlement” (Diminescu 2008) and affective settlement. I investigate how migrant mothers become an affective resource for each other, thereby counteracting widespread isolation and constructing spaces and relationships of belonging. While research exists on maternal isolation, and, to a lesser extent, on migrant maternal isolation, the converse issues of friendship, sociality and relational belonging in migrant motherhood remain relatively unexplored. This chapter outlines how the interactions facilitated by the online groups produce relational and affective settlement into migration and motherhood. As part of the analysis, I propose a tripartite framework of migrant maternal sociality, clarifying the significance of the different modes of sociality produced by interactions in and around the online communities, from casual intimacy, through intermediate ties, to heartfelt friendship. In the final part of the chapter, I focus on the emotions of migrant motherhood. Emotions such as failure, homesickness, guilt, disconnection, and insecurity worked
against participants’ ability to feel ‘at home’ in Australia. Participating in migrant maternal communities helped participants not to overcome these emotions, but to reconcile them with the possibility of belonging. Gently pushing back against scholarship that (correctly) describes migrant mothers’ community-building as “an integral component of their care work” as migrant wives and mothers (Manohar 2013b), I argue that it is also designed to meet women’s own needs for intimacy, friendship, support, and advice. I suggest that subsuming women’s “relational settlement” practices into a framework of “care work” risks losing sight of what women do for themselves and each other.

Chapter Seven extends the notion of ‘connected maternal migrants’ established in Chapter Six and develops the concepts of ‘imagined maternal communities’ and ‘personal maternal narratives.’ This chapter draws on Kanno and Norton’s re-working of Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’, in which the concept provides “a theoretical framework for the exploration of creativity, hope, and desire in identity construction” (Anderson 1983/2006; Kanno & Norton 2003, p. 248). It also builds on work by Adams (2004) that explores how the imagination can be deployed as a decision-making tool, rhetoric device, and coping mechanism. Drawing together these two sociological perspectives on imagination, and placing them in conversation with concepts of “mothering for ethnicity” (Manohar 2013a) and maternal communality across time (Baraitser 2012), this chapter explores how migrant mothers imagine themselves within local, national and diasporic maternal communities, and within an individual maternal narrative that may have been disrupted by migration. This chapter circles around notions of rupture and discontinuity, connection and attachment. Migration introduces rupture and discontinuity into women’s maternal narratives. In response, mothers draw on attachments and connections to imagined maternal communities, to frame, understand and reconcile themselves to the challenges of migrant motherhood. The migrant maternal online communities are sites in which these connections are forged. While other attachments and networks remain salient, I argue that the migrant maternal online communities constitute a metonymic representation of their diasporic imagined maternal community.

Finally, Chapter Eight brings the thesis to a close by outlining the key findings, theoretical contributions and implications for practice, and suggesting directions for future research.
Chapter 2  Literature Review

2.1  Introduction

Reflecting the position of this thesis at the intersections of migration research, motherhood studies, and digital sociology, this literature review draws together work from these three core areas of scholarship, paying attention to the research that exists in the borderlands of these fields of study, namely, research on migrant motherhood, digital motherhood, and migrants online. In approaching the four key areas of inquiry as highlighted in the introduction – community-building, friendship and sociality, emotions of motherhood and migration, and the practices, narratives and imaginaries of migrant mothers – the thesis has also drawn on concepts from the fields of the sociology of emotions, information studies, and intersectionality studies. The literature review highlights scholarship where those fields intersect with those key areas of inquiry, for example, the emotions of migration, emotions online, the information practices of migrants and mothers, and motherhood and intersectionality. Firmly situated in the realm of feminist sociology, this thesis takes gender as a central analytic category in the study of human social relations and institutions. Extending this grounding in sociology, the research has drawn on concepts and discussions from feminist inquiry across disciplines and fields. Further, the fields of motherhood, migration, and digital sociology, around which this thesis is oriented, all lay claim to a necessary interdisciplinarity (Christou et al. 2015; Gatt et al. 2016; Orton-Johnson & Prior 2013; Rye et al. 2017). This interdisciplinarity presents both a challenge and an opportunity when reviewing literature relevant to this thesis. The following review attempts to cast a broad net, selecting those works and concepts most useful in situating the thesis, and drawing them together in a coherent and critical narrative.

2.2  Motherhood

In this thesis, I have drawn on some key concepts, themes and principles from the field of motherhood studies. “Motherhood studies” is a term coined by Andrea O’Reilly in 2006 to demarcate “scholarship on motherhood as a legitimate and autonomous discipline,” grounded in traditions of feminist maternal theory developed by thinkers such as Adrienne Rich, Sara Ruddick, and Patricia Hill Collins (A. O'Reilly 2016, p. 10). In an Australian context, Goodwin and Huppatz
note that Australian motherhood research tends to be produced within broader disciplinary areas such as sociology and history rather than through the “autonomous discipline” of motherhood studies identified by O’Reilly in the North American context (Goodwin & Huppatz 2011). This thesis aims to meet Arendell’s call for maternal scholarship that integrates theory and empirical research (2000, p. 1193). In line with its Australian context, it does so broadly within the discipline of sociology, while applying a firmly matricentric lens. In this way, it draws on the “rich feminist tradition of thinking about motherhood” (Kawash 2011, p. 970) that distinguishes motherhood studies from scholarship about motherhood grounded in other theoretical perspectives.

‘Mother’ is a noun (identity, role), a verb (practice or activity), and an interpersonal relationship. The parameters of the term ‘mother’ may be narrowly applied to refer to women who have gestated and birthed their child, and who are actively engaged in their development, cohabiting with them in a family-based household. Alternatively, the parameters may be drawn more broadly. The term ‘mother’ is not restricted to people who have given birth; it may be applied to adoptive mothers, foster mothers, stepmothers, women whose children are born by surrogacy,1 and lesbian mothers regardless of their biological connection to the child or experience of pregnancy or birth. Neither is the term applied only to those who live with their children, as women with older children who have left home, those who are separated from their children by migration, incarceration, child protection orders or maternal choice, may still be understood as mothers. Indeed, motherhood is not strictly the preserve only of women. Men who provide primary care may be said to engage in mothering as a practice (Risman 1987), and people who identify as trans men, or gender non-binary, may also be understood to be mothers (Karaian 2013). While literature in the public health and sociology of migration areas tends to focus on mothers narrowly defined, matricentric feminist literature has attempted to broaden its focus to include those who fall within broader parameters of motherhood.

For most contemporary motherhood scholars, motherhood is primarily a social construction, although it may also be a deeply embodied experience. Arendell states that, according to the feminist constructionist view of motherhood:

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1 The surrogate’s access to the term ‘mother’ may be legally and socially more tenuous, despite their experience of pregnancy and birth (Christiansen, 2015; Gerber & O’Byrne, 2015).
What is vital to explore is not that women, as females, have the capacity to conceive, gestate, give birth, and lactate, but that some women engage in the ongoing, demanding activities of child rearing and nurture. How these biological activities are culturally organized and given meaning are the provocative questions (2000, p. 1193).

O’Reilly, following Ruddick, goes further, arguing that mothering, and by implication motherhood studies, is not limited to “biological mothers” – and therefore only to women – but can include the experiences of “anyone who takes on the hard work of mothering as a central part of their life” (A. O’Reilly 2009, 2014a; A. O’Reilly & Ruddick 2009). By contrast, Kawash criticises what she sees as the tendency of feminist motherhood scholars to ignore biology, asserting that “biology is the third rail of motherhood studies” (2011, p. 990). She calls for maternal scholars to confront biology and “work for better biological understanding” rather than glossing over the relevance of biology to motherhood. While in theory, the decoupling of motherhood from biology opens the door to including experiences of men who mother (Doucet 2006), it has tended to be used to broaden the scope of women’s experiences to include adoptive, surrogate, trans (Haines et al. 2014; Hines 2006), lesbian non-biological/co-mothers (Dahl & Malterud 2015; Mason Bergen et al. 2006), stepmothers (Weaver & Coleman 2005), and the “othermothers” and “community mothers” cited by Black motherhood scholars (A. E. Edwards 2000; Hill Collins 1994; hooks 1984; A. O’Reilly 2004).

Matricentric feminist principles (A. O’Reilly 2016, p. 4) drive the thesis. Those principles assert the value of studying the lived experiences of mothers, not simply for the important insights this provides into the lives of mothers, but also for the analytic benefits such an act of “shifting the centre” (Hill Collins 1994) provides. For example, a matricentric approach to the study of “middling transnationalism” (Conradson & Latham 2005c; Luthra & Platt 2016) exposes the dominance of labour market frameworks, individualist paradigms, and focus on youth and mobility in that literature. I have extended this matricentric approach, choosing to focus on the lateral relationships between mothers, and placing less emphasis on mothers in relation to their children or on mothers as part of a global care chain (Hochschild 2001; Parreñas 2001). Another key concept drawn from motherhood studies is that of “maternal practices,” which distinguishes mothers’ work from their identity or biology (A. O'Reilly 2009; Ruddick 1989) and positions mothering as an intentional social practice that involves both rationality and emotion (Ruddick 1980). Motherhood scholars use terms like “maternal practice” and “motherwork” (Hill Collins
1994) to embed mothering in its social and political context and emphasise the intentionality and labour involved. By separating practice from identity, motherhood scholars indicate the potential for those activities to be undertaken by people other than those with the identity ‘mother,’ while resisting a gender-neutral “turn to parenting” (Daly 2013) that may obscure the work that continues to be predominantly performed by women who are mothers.

In focusing on the experiences of migrant mothers from diverse origins, this thesis contributes to the ‘de-centring’ of white motherhood in motherhood studies, uncovering “rich textures of difference” in maternal experiences as called for by Patricia Hill Collins in the 1990s (1994, p. 62). Despite the continued centring of white, middle-class, heterosexually-coupled motherhood in mainstream feminism and sociological research, in the past few years a flourishing scholarship has emerged that explores experiences beyond this narrow parameters, focusing on, for example, lesbian/queer motherhood (for example, Alang & Fomotar 2015; Gabb 2017; Hayman & Wilkes 2017; Park 2013); mothering with a disability (for example, Filax & Taylor 2014; Guerin et al. 2017; Lawler et al. 2015; Walsh-Gallagher et al. 2012); Indigenous motherhood (Bourassa et al. 2017; Ussher et al. 2016); and migrant motherhood (see Section 2.3.1). The intersection of motherhood with other factors such as race, class, migrancy, disability, age or sexuality, produces specific assemblages of identity, equality and experience (Jolly 2017). Scholarship on intersectionality frames this thesis, as outlined in Chapter Three, yet such theory-based scholarship rarely takes account of motherhood as a salient social location for intersectional analysis.

In both popular and academic motherhood discourses, motherhood is conceived as a distinct life phase and role. Therefore the transition between ‘not-mother’ and ‘mother’ is viewed as momentous and often challenging (Crouch & Manderson 1993; Darvill et al. 2010; Fox 2009). Notions of change, adjustment, settling, transition and rupture are common to research about the lived experiences of migrants and of mothers. In both contexts, change and adjustment are viewed as both practical and emotional (Hage 1997; Kokanović & Michaels 2018). Literature addressing the role of the internet in contemporary mothering (for example, Arias 2016; Madge & O’Connor 2006; Sundstrom 2015) and migration (for example, Leurs & Ponzanesi 2018; Madianou & Miller 2013; Platt et al. 2016) also implicitly or explicitly rests on notions of change, asking how these technological changes have altered the experience of the changes associated with migration or motherhood.
Three edited collections of essays about contemporary motherhood in North America (A. O'Reilly 2010), Australia (Goodwin & Huppatz 2010) and Asia (Devasahayam & Yeoh 2007), published within a few years of each other, explore the specificities of motherhood in their respective areas of geographic focus. Considered together, some common themes emerge, including the regulation of motherhood in discourse and practice, the complex and fraught relationship between motherhood and employment, the need to more fully recognise the significance of mothering work, and the importance of recognising diversity, intersectionality and change in maternal practices and representations. These themes also underpin this thesis, and in the following sections I address the scholarship exploring those themes as they relate to this research.

2.2.1 Regulation of motherhood

The various ways in which motherhood is regulated is a key concern of motherhood scholarship. Scholars have developed a range of concepts to describe how motherhood is regulated by discourse, ideology, institutions and normative practice, such as the figure of “good mother” (Goodwin & Huppatz 2010; Thurer 1994/1995), normative motherhood (A. O'Reilly 2014b), hegemonic motherhood (Arendell 1999), intensive mothering (Hays 1996; Henderson et al. 2016) and hegemonic maternity (Brock 2017). Motherhood scholars also highlight the ways in which mothers ignore, resist or subvert such regulation (Hager et al. 2017; Mackenzie 2017). Kawash argues that much of the motherhood scholarship since the late 1990s has focused on “the various ways in which mothers cannot or will not submit to the (white, middle-class, heterosexual) norms of good mothering” by advancing a contextual understanding of motherhood, and exploring the diversity and intersectionality of mothering practices and experiences (2011, p. 979). Whether resisting, ignoring or subverting dominant modes of motherhood, those modes remain salient to the experiences of mothers. As Henderson et al note in relation to intensive motherhood, “even when mothers are not drawing specifically on the ideology of intensive motherhood, they are often responding to it as the dominant ideal” (2016, p. 513) (see also Arendell 1999; Elliott et al. 2015). In this thesis, which explores the lived experiences of migrant mothers in Australia, an attention to discourses and narratives regulating motherhood is central, both those operating in Australia and those operating in their country of origin.

Within the framework of motherhood studies, scholars focusing on the experiences of migrant mothers have noted how they navigate between parallel or conflicting modes of motherhood, or...
rework dominant modes of motherhood to meet the requirements of their new context (DeSouza 2006; Liamputtong 2006; Manohar 2013a; Manohar & Busse-Cárdenas 2011). For example, Manohar has analysed how middle class Tamil Indian migrant mothers in the United States reworked some elements of their hegemonic model of Tamil motherhood, positioning professional work as complementary to mothering rather than detracting from it, while reinforcing other elements, such as the notion of mothers as keepers and transmitters of culture. This complex navigation of maternal norms enabled the participants in Manohar’s research to simultaneously “mother for class”, by providing money to pay for class-appropriate activities and education, and “mother for ethnicity” by transmitting key elements of their heritage to their children (Manohar 2013a). This notion of navigating, negotiating, and reworking maternal frameworks in the context of migration relies on an understanding of mothers and migrants as active participants in their lives, while acknowledging the societal forces that also structure their experiences, and of migration as a process of negotiation rather than straightforward assimilation (DeSouza 2004, p. 4; Gatt et al. 2016).

Societal regulation of motherhood relates to a key theme of this research: mothers’ information-seeking behaviour. Research has suggested that mothers’ fear of judgement from health professionals or other mothers shapes the way they seek information, and may inhib it information-seeking (Loudon et al. 2016; McKenzie 2002). Loudon et al noted the presence of “confusion, tension, conflict and information overload” in their participants’ accounts of information seeking and the tendency to withhold the extent of their information needs from others, due to pressure to be “good mothers.” In a study of Spanish mothers who practised attachment parenting – a minority maternal practice in Spain – Montesi and Álvarez Bornstein found that when mothers seek information to support practices that challenge dominant maternal discourses, this constitutes maternal identity work (2017). This sense that mothers’ information-seeking takes place in the context of a judgemental societal gaze relates to broad claims about “surveillance society” and specific claims that mothers are particularly subject to societal surveillance and judgement. Douglas and Michaels link this additional surveillance to the ideology of intensive mothering:

With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves and other mothers, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves (2004, p. 6).
Scholars of digital culture have suggested that contemporary technologies and social media have enhanced the level of everyday surveillance, to the point where it is almost inescapable. The degree of “social surveillance” (Marwick 2012), “participatory surveillance” (Albrechtslund 2008) and “self surveillance” (Lupton 2016a) that has been facilitated by social media intersects with the maternal surveillance described by Douglas & Michaels, making maternal online communities potential sites of intense self-consciousness, judgement of self and others. However, as Albrechtslund notes, surveillance may not be inherently negative: “it can empower – and not necessarily violate – the user” (2008). Participatory (voluntary) surveillance in online groups is what makes possible the sharing of information, the offering of support, as well as the production or reproduction of norms of behaviour and thought. To create online communities where the surveillance is participatory and supportive, rather than involuntary or judgemental, may require careful labour on the part of those who manage those sites.

Somewhat contradicting the finding that mothers fear judgement from other mothers, studies of mothers’ information-seeking tend to conclude that mothers prefer to seek information from other mothers with whom they have an “experiential overlap” (K. E. Davis 2015, p. 168). Such experiential knowledge is seen as trustworthy and relevant, (K. E. Davis 2015; Fisher & Landry 2007; Loudon et al. 2016; McKenzie 2003; Montesi & Álvarez Bornstein 2017) and the exchange of such information may also help mothers make social connections to each other (Fisher & Landry 2007). These connections between information and sociality, and between shared experiences and trust, are investigated in this thesis, in the context of migrant mothers and online communities. The ways in which mothers experience multiple forms of regulation and surveillance, and how they seek to navigate those, are also central themes in this research. None of the aforementioned studies of maternal information-seeking explored examples of mothers creating sites of information exchange for themselves and each other, as is the case for the migrant maternal online communities in this research. Few attend to the cultural specificities of motherhood, in fact, most make no reference at all to the ethnicity, nationality, or migrant status of the research participants. Nor do they attend to the ways in which mothers’ information and relational experiences may differ according to the ways in which their social locations intersect with those experiences and with each other. Taking an intersectional approach, this research seeks to address these lacunae in the studies of maternal information-seeking.
2.2.2 Motherhood, work and home

The complex and often fraught relationship between motherhood and work is a key theme in studies of contemporary motherhood. For example, scholarship that addresses the impact of motherhood on women’s professional careers (Chesterman & Ross-Smith 2010; Christopher 2012; Hays 1996) intersects with research examining the impact of migration on women’s careers (C. Ho 2006; Manohar & Busse-Cárdenas 2011; Moon 2003; Ziaian 2000). Themes common to both literatures include the impact of gender and work ideologies, personal and family economic needs, modes of motherhood, and institutional support for care work. In this thesis, I draw on these intersecting literatures to understand motherhood and migration as life events with the potential to rupture or severely alter women’s relationship to paid employment. Placing these literatures into conversation with digital migration scholarship helps to temper arguments that migration in the digital age is characterised by “liquid migration” (Engbersen & Snel 2013), continuous connection and portable networks of belonging (Diminescu 2008), and therefore no longer constitutes an experience of rupture.

Alongside the challenges of combining motherhood and paid employment, the lack of recognition of mothers’ social and reproductive labour is a longstanding concern of feminist scholars. Feminist motherhood scholars have deployed terms like “maternal practice” and “motherwork” to emphasise the value and intention of the unpaid work performed by mothers. In this thesis, I have drawn on Marxist feminist analyses of digital labour (Arcy 2016; Jarrett 2016), Black feminist concepts of “community mothering” (Collins 2000a; A. E. Edwards 2000; E. Lawson 2000) and feminist migration scholars’ analysis of gendered carework and community-building (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Manohar 2013a, 2013b), to explore the intention and value of migrant mothers’ labour in the digital space. The importance of gendered social and reproductive labour is often overlooked in migration literature and Australian migration statistics relying on binary categories of labour migrants (characterised as productive and desirable) and family migrants (characterised as economically unproductive and less desirable). As the 2012 Family Migration Literature Review makes clear, family members are an integral part of the skilled migration stream, partners who enter under the family stream also work, as do children as they reach adulthood, and ‘workers’ also play an important role in family life (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2012). While the import and export of women’s reproductive labour through global migration processes has been well documented (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003), the unpaid work of mothers in
sustaining and settling their families, and building communities, during migration has received less attention.

The perceived dichotomy between work and motherhood reflects a broader dichotomy in which mothers are assigned to a private sphere of home and family, in contrast to men who are associated with a public sphere which includes the world of work (Rose 1993). Research has indicated that even as women increasingly enter the workplace, they remain overwhelmingly responsible for the home and family, even when domestic work is outsourced (Moras 2017). Accordingly, men are often framed “as secondary parents whose primary responsibilities remain in the public sphere” (Wall & Arnold 2007, p. 523). Women who attempt to minimise the impact of motherhood in the workplace have been described as engaging in “macho maternity” (Chesterman & Ross-Smith 2010, p. 38). Bell and Ribbens have argued that this binary perspective has led to an under-theorisation of the social contacts and interactions of mothers that cut across private spaces (private homes) and public spaces such as community groups, schools, shops, playgroups, streets, and shops (1994). Scholars of mothers’ use of online communities and social media have noted its potential to disrupt gendered public/private binaries, by connecting women to each other while they remain physically in their respective homes (Gheytanchi 2015; Valtchanov et al. 2015). Johnson’s description of online and offline mothers’ groups as “intimate mothering publics” is helpful in understanding the role of the internet in “mak[ing] space for womanly matters to be made public” while maintaining the assumption that parenting is predominantly a “womanly matter” (2015, p. 11). These notions of public and private, gendered spaces and discourses, visibility and connection, are explored throughout this thesis, drawing on research about gendered experiences of parenting (Fox 2009; T. Miller 2011), employment (Crittenden 2001; Florian 2018), support-seeking (Plantin & Daneback 2009), technology and social media usage (Lohan 2000; Ouellette & Wilson 2011; Portwood-Stacer 2014), and friendship and sociality (Bachmann 2014), as well as feminist geographers’ work on gender and space (Massey 1994) to understand the context in which migrant maternal communities have been created, and to make sense of the participants’ experiences of migration, motherhood and online technologies.

2.2.3 Motherhood as transition

Notions of change and adjustment are central to this thesis. In relation to the changes associated with motherhood, I have drawn on literature addressing what is usually referred to as the
“transition to motherhood” (Crouch & Manderson 1993; Darvill et al. 2010; Nelson 2003; Rogan et al. 1997), although Lupton eschews the term, arguing that transition implies “an inexorable process that reaches a certain point and then stops” (Lupton 2000, p. 53). Similar criticisms have been made of “maternal role attainment” theory (Rubin 1967), with Mercer arguing that it fails to encompass the “continuing growth of the mother identity” beyond the initial phase of early motherhood (Mercer 2004, p. 231). As this research brings together the experiences of new and more experienced mothers, I have been struck by the relative scarcity of scholarship addressing motherhood as a process and practice of change and adjustment beyond the initial “intensive” transition. As Mercer suggests, other transitions such as becoming the mother of a school-aged child or adolescent, may also require adaptation and new knowledge and skills (2004, p. 231). In the context of this research, migration constitutes such a transition in the lives of migrant mothers, requiring not just the usual migrant adaptation and knowledge, but also adjustment, information and support specific to the post-migration maternal role.

Qualitative research indicates that “becoming a mother” is experienced as a significant life change commonly involving shifts in self-identity, intimate partner relationships and social infrastructures. In addition, the new responsibility of caring for a baby requires the rapid acquisition of new knowledge and skills (Brunton et al. 2011; Fox 2009; Kokanović & Michaels 2018; Lupton 2000; Rogan et al. 1997). Failure to acquire this new knowledge, or the absence of social support during this period of intense change, may leave new mothers feeling unable to cope, inadequate or isolated (Fox 2009, pp. 227-233; Rogan et al. 1997). Research with migrant mothers suggests that these shifts and needs are enhanced in a migrant context (Barclay & Kent 1998; Barnett et al. 1999; Benza & Liamputtong 2014; Meiyappen & Lohfeld 2013). In heterosexual partnerships, parents report “divergent parental responsibilities” (Lupton 2000, p. 58) with men spending more time in paid employment away from home, and women responsible for “the minute-to-minute intimate attentiveness that the care of a newborn entails” (Williams Veazey 2018), even when the parents intended to share responsibilities more evenly (Fox 2009; T. Miller 2011). This thesis is grounded in an understanding, drawn from this parenting scholarship, that the responsibilities of parenthood create new needs for knowledge and support, and that these responsibilities and concomitant needs are differentiated by gender.

This research analyses some of the ways contemporary migrant mothers in Australia respond to the challenges of mothering away from ‘home.’ While a large body of scholarship addresses the
challenges of motherhood, a much smaller set of research addresses institutional responses to these challenges, such as the state-supported mothers’ groups and community-based playgroups created in the latter half of the twentieth century to address this need for maternal knowledge and social support (Barnes et al. 2003; Keam et al. 2018; J. S. Lawson & Callaghan 1991; Playgroup Australia 2013; D. Scott et al. 2001; Strange et al. 2017). Similarly, a wealth of research suggests that mothers value the experientially-derived knowledge of other mothers alongside professionally-derived information from doctors and midwives (K. E. Davis 2015; Johnson 2015; Loudon et al. 2016; Montesi & Álvarez Bornstein 2017); and the social support of other new mothers, alongside support from existing networks of friends and family (Arnold 2011; Scott et al. 2001). Studies of mothers’ use of online communities and social media suggest that this desire for the knowledge and support of other mothers is a key driver of mothers’ use of such online maternal networks (Madge & O’Connor 2006; Valtchanov et al. 2015), although the preponderance of studies using content analysis rather than interviews means that analysis of mothers’ motivations in this area is relatively scarce. Furthermore, little research exists about the process of creating and sustaining such maternal support networks. The importance of relationships and knowledge exchange between mothers is a central theme in this thesis. Extending this theme to focus on the experiences of migrant mothers, to the challenges of mothering ‘away from home,’ this research also analyses the types of knowledge and relationships migrant mothers seek to support them in their ongoing process of change and adjustment, and the structures and practices they put in place to make that possible.

2.2.4 Digital motherhood

Reflecting the emphasis on the “transition to motherhood,” much research of maternal online communities and social media has focused on how mothers utilise the affordances of such sites to support their transition to motherhood (Gattoni 2013). Studies have investigated how contemporary parents are using social media and online communities to access maternal and child health information (Chae & Quick 2014; K. E. Davis 2015; Lupton 2016b; Plantin & Daneback 2009); to build social relationships to address maternal isolation (K. E. Davis 2015; Dunham et al. 1998; Parry et al. 2013; Tomfohrde & Reinke 2016); to support maternal practices such as breastfeeding (Bridges 2016; Cowie et al. 2011; Newby et al. 2015); and to assist in forming and performing maternal identities (K. E. Davis 2015; Gibson & Hanson 2013; J. Kim et al. 2015; Wang 2016). See Section 4.3 for more context on mothers’ groups and playgroups.
Recent research in maternal public health has investigated the potential of social media-based interventions to support new mothers and influence maternal behaviours, for example, promoting breastfeeding (Asiodu et al. 2015) or physical activity (Kernot et al. 2013). Social media sites afford mothers the possibility of addressing the challenges of new motherhood but also require mothers to navigate issues of online privacy for themselves and their children (Chalklen & Anderson 2017; K. E. Davis 2015).

Drawing on the notion that motherhood, particularly new motherhood, is a time of potential emotional distress, researchers have attempted to ascertain whether social media usage may have a protective or negative impact on mothers’ psychological wellbeing (J. Kim et al. 2015; McDaniel et al. 2012), or may help identify mothers who require mental health support (Kaufmann et al. 2016). Research on mothers’ online communities highlights the emotional impact of online maternal networks, for example, increased confidence (Gibson & Hanson 2013), and the various ways in which maternal communities are used for emotional, informational, social and practical support (Capitulo 2004; Hartwig 2016; Hether et al. 2016; Johnson 2015; Ley 2011; Nolan et al. 2015; Pennington 2014). Drentea & Moren-Cross (2005) use a social capital framework to encompass the impact of “emotional support, information-giving, and community protection” on mothers of young children accessing virtual communities. Few studies examine the issue from the perspective of those who create and maintain online communities for mothers. In this thesis, I draw on literature that investigates the association of online maternal networks and emotional support, and extend it by analysing the practices that create and maintain these sites of emotional support.

Bringing the theme of the regulation of motherhood into the online sphere, many feminist researchers in this area explore the extent to which technological developments challenge or perpetuate conventional, unequal, and gendered parenting roles (Arnold 2011; Drentea & Moren-Cross 2005; Jensen 2013; Johnson 2014; Madge & O'Connor 2006). Most agree that while the affordances of online networks may offer the potential for challenging normative ideals of good motherhood (Mackenzie 2017; Pedersen & Lupton 2018; Valtchanov et al. 2015), as products of those same socially-constructed norms, they also reflect, reinforce and intensify normative gender relations and norms of motherhood. For example, although feminist geographer Robyn Longhurst found that digital communication technologies “stretch motherhood” in a spatial sense, enabling communication between mothers outside family and friendship circles, she concludes that
gendered parenting roles have remained largely untouched by these new maternal practices (2013, p. 133). Similarly, Johnson argues that digital devices and social media have helped mothers by providing access to information and support, but in the context of intensive mothering ideologies, these new technologies also lead to an increase in mothers’ workload by requiring them display their competence as a good mother through their use of such technologies (2014, p. 346).

2.3 Migration

This project focuses on “emplaced” belongings, sociality and identities (Conlon 2011; Conradson & Latham 2005c; Robertson 2016), as well as the importance of locality, and affective settlement practices, all of which occur against a backdrop of disruptive migration. This focus contrasts with contemporary theories of migration and mobility that tend to emphasise cross-border continuities and connections, human movement as the norm, and complex movements of people, capital, goods, and ideas (Basch et al. 1994; Castles et al. 2014; Sheller & Urry 2006). Amit (2012) argues that these perspectives have led to a “denial of rupture” in migration research. Similarly, Burrell (2017) asserts the “recalcitrance of distance” in experiences of migration, arguing that a focus on the time-space compression of late modernity has tended to overlook the emotional and physical salience of distance. In contrast, this thesis focuses on the multi-layered, and gendered, settlement practices of migrants as they seek to rebuild their social infrastructure and form new attachments of belonging following the disruption of migration. Local attachments are entwined in attachments to distant places and people; connections are created and maintained because, and in spite of, rupture and disconnection.

2.3.1 Migration and motherhood

Literature exploring contemporary patterns of migration to Australia tends to focus on labour migrants, students, or refugees and asylum seekers. Families have either been ignored, relegated to footnotes, or conceptualised as an appendage to labour migration (Hoang et al. 2009). Despite the relative paucity of literature on family migration to Australia, migration to Australia has historically been based on the permanent settlement of migrant families, in contrast to ‘guestworker’ programmes in other parts of the world that focus on individual temporary migration, and this has continued even through the Australian turn towards increased temporary
migration pathways. Recent scholarship has taken greater account of temporary mobilities, “staggered trajectories”, and the way these “multi-stage migrations” (Wright et al. 2016, p. 4) intersect both with work pathways and family formation (Robertson 2014; Westcott & Robertson 2017). Nevertheless, scholarship addressing these intersections of work, migration policies, gender, age, and family formation remain marginal compared to research focusing on the political economy of migration.

Despite an increase in studies in the field of gender and migration since the 1970s, feminist migration scholars have expressed frustration that gendered frameworks have not been integrated into mainstream contemporary migration studies (Donato et al. 2017; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2012). Donato et al state that in 2017, “the gender content of migration scholarship in sociology remains, at best, frozen and stalled,” noting that the hopes expressed in earlier papers (e.g. Donato et al. 2006) had not been realised. Hondagneu-Sotelo ascribes the persistent lack of gender content in mainstream sociology to an “androcentric blindness to feminist issues and gender” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2012, p. 180). In spite of these concerns of marginalisation or ghettoization, feminist migration scholars acknowledge the careful, wide-ranging and intersectional scholarship in this area. A recent special issue on gender and migration featured studies that demonstrate the “power of gender ideology – and how it is embedded in families, institutions, politics or immigration policy – to influence migration dynamics” (Donato et al. 2017, p. 1082). The power of gender ideology to influence migration dynamics (as well as its influence on parenting dynamics and online interactions) is a central organising theme of this thesis.

Reflecting the tendency of researchers to focus on the “transition to motherhood” noted earlier, scholarship on migrant mothers in Australia has largely explored the experiences of migrant mothers of pregnancy, birth and the immediate postnatal period, mostly from a public health or nursing perspective (Bandyopadhyay et al. 2010; Barclay & Kent 1998; Benza & Liamputtong 2014; Carolan & Cassar 2010; Chu 2005; Hennegan et al. 2015; Hennegan et al. 2014; Hoang et al. 2009; Hoban & Liamputtong 2012; Ngum Chi Watts et al. 2015; Renzaho & Oldroyd 2014; Small et al. 2003; Yelland et al. 2015). Studies highlight the failure of maternity services to meet the specific needs of migrant mothers, due to a lack of cultural competence, language barriers or racism. They also note that migration often removes women from their usual sources of information and support, which may lead them to feel disempowered when confronted with unfamiliar healthcare systems and cultural expectation, and socially isolated at a time when they desperately need
support (DeSouza 2005). DeSouza does note, however, that migration may also be experienced as liberating, enabling women to ignore what they view as “old wives’ tales” and seek out alternative sources of information and care. Nevertheless, Benza & Liamputtong’s 2014 metasynthesis of 15 studies relating to migrant mothers’ experiences found that isolation and lack of support in the postpartum period was both common and detrimental to the mental health of the mother (p. 2). A smaller body of research looks at migrant mothers’ experiences in Australia beyond the early months of parenthood. This research highlights the ongoing impact of raising children without social support (Liamputtong 2006; Ward 2004), the difficulty of raising children who are influenced by Australian cultural norms which diverge from the mothers’ own values (Liamputtong 2006; McMichael & Manderson 2004; Ziaian 2000), financial constraints, and barriers to supporting children’s education and accessing healthcare (Silva & Dawson 2004). Many of the studies refer to the ongoing experience of social isolation and related issues of emotional distress, low self-esteem, or depression.

Drawing on scholarship exploring the manifold challenges of migrant motherhood and deploying an approach that casts mothers “as active, knowledgeable strategizing agents, able to plan and learn new ways of acting and possibly change their sociospatial context to better fit their needs” (England 1996, p. 113), this thesis centres the strategies women have used to respond to the challenges presented by their experiences of motherhood in migration. Many studies on the challenges facing migrant mothers conclude with a recommendation for increased social support, but researchers rarely make concrete suggestions for the form this increased support might take, or how this might be achieved. For example, Benza & Liamputtong argue that “social support networks are needed for migrant women in the absence of extended family to minimise stress and risk of postnatal depression” (2014, p. 8). Ziaian concludes her doctoral study of the psychological well-being of Persian women migrants to Australia, with a call for “immigration policy […] to encourage the formation of ethnic support groups and organizations, as their presence can help and welcome new immigrants in order to give them orientation, emotional support and ease the pain of the migration process” (2000, p. 284). In a relatively rare example of community support driven by research, a 2002 study identifying loneliness and isolation as major contributors to the poor mental health of female Brazilian migrants in Melbourne care (Silva & Dawson 2004), led to the establishment of a Brazilian association to support Brazilian and Lusophone migrants and residents in Australia (ABRISA n.d.).
Research on migrant mothers has often focused on the most vulnerable populations, such as refugees and asylum seekers, young mothers, or migrant mothers in rural areas. One meta-ethnographic study into migrant mothers’ experiences of breastfeeding, for example, only included studies of migrant women “born in low or middle income countries, who had migrated permanently to a high income host country” (Schmied et al. 2012, p. 3). While a focus on the most marginalised can be justified in the interests of addressing the most egregious inequalities, it risks leaving unexamined the experiences of the majority of contemporary migrant mothers in Australia. In the broader domain of migration research, scholars have followed Conradson and Latham’s 2005 call for research into “middling migrants,” whose experiences had been neglected by the focus on elite and marginalised migration (Conradson & Latham 2005c), but as yet, the middling transnationalism research agenda has largely neglected the experiences of middling migrant mothers. Most studies of migrant mothers from a specific migrant background, focus on migrants from Africa, South-East Asia and the Middle East. There is little contemporary research that examines the experiences of women who have migrated to Australia from South America, Europe or India. This project addresses some of these gaps.

Australian migration policies affect maternal discourses and practices, yet to date this has received relatively little research attention. Family migration has traditionally been seen as “non-economic” and “equated with residential permanency” (M. Boyd 1989, p. 650). However, Westcott and Robertson’s research with migrant parents on temporary visas in Australia found that even temporary migration had the potential to provide short-term financial support and longer term opportunities for their family (2017, p. 88). Despite the legal ability to migrate with their family, some choose to migrate alone, awaiting a future permanent status before bringing their children and/or partner to join them (Westcott & Robertson 2017, pp. 89-90). Conditions attached to temporary visas can both force women into full-time work or into full-time childcare, by stipulating work patterns or refusing access to subsidised childcare. These policies, and the broader structural context, including high cost of living, lack of family support, lack of affordable childcare or paid domestic labour, and gender ideologies, affect decisions around migration like whether to stay or return, and whether to bring children with them. A report by the Victoria Human Rights Commission in 2012 found the imposition of fees for the children of some temporary migrants to attend public schools led some parents to send their children back home, to return home themselves, migrate elsewhere, face financial hardship or decide against migrating (Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2012). A simplistic narrative focusing
on increased skilled migration, with no reference to the families they bring with them (or leave behind), or the multiple and often complex pathways to settlement, cannot account for the diversity of experiences of migrants in Australia.

2.3.2 Migration online

The intersection of technology and belonging is a key site of investigation in this thesis, as it explores the production and implications of belongings, boundaries, identities and imaginaries in online communities. Migrants’ access to internet-enabled technologies and information is unequally distributed according to social, economic, legal, political, demographic, and geographic factors. Studies suggest that marginalised migrants, for example refugees in rural and remote areas of Australia (Alam & Imran 2015), may be excluded from accessing the technologies that their more privileged counterparts find so useful for managing migration and settlement processes (Komito & Bates 2011). Researchers working with marginalised migrants worry that that lack of access to information-related technologies may exacerbate such migrants’ exclusion from mainstream society (Alam & Imran 2015), while some researchers working with more privileged migrants express concerns that these “proficient digital migrants, combining multiple technologies to maintain contact with friends and relations at home” might be creating “virtual ghettos” for themselves in the new country (Komito & Bates 2012, p. 107). These contrasting concerns suggest the complex ways in which digital technologies relate to migrant belonging and not-belonging, in terms of attachments to place(s) and connections to people.

There are four key clusters of digital migration research relating to those themes of belonging and connection. Firstly, research exploring migrants’ use of internet technologies to maintain connections to people back home, particularly friends and family (Diminescu 2008; L. Green & Kabir 2012; Kang 2012; Madianou 2012; Ryan et al. 2015; Wilding 2006) but also wider networks of ‘weak ties’ which can be maintained by “low-level participation” via social networking sites like Facebook (Komito 2011, p. 1083). Diminescu (2008) argues that the old figure of the “uprooted migrant” who experiences migration as a series of “ruptures” must give way to the new figure of the “connected migrant” who can maintain their relationships in a “culture of bonds” even as they move about. However, empirical studies with specific groups of migrants tend to find that, although new forms of technology do enable them to feel more closely connected to their family and friends, that connectivity has limits (Fortunati et al. 2012; Madianou 2012, p. 290; Ryan et al. ...
2015, p. 211; Wilding 2006, p. 134). The second cluster of research looks at internet-enabled attachments to place or an idea of place, in the creation of virtual homelands or “e-diasporas” (Diminescu 2012, p. 452) (see also Bernal 2014, p. 173; Ignacio 2004; Keles 2015). The scholarship in this area goes beyond explanations of the internet as a practical mode of communicating across distance, focusing on its symbolic significance. As Bernal notes,

> Cyberspace does more than simply shrink distances; it serves diasporas as a space that is ambiguously located, easily accessed, and in some sense equidistant from all locations on the globe. It is at once neither here nor there (neither located in the new country nor in the homeland), and yet also both here and there simultaneously. The internet, thus, disrupts the homeland/diaspora dichotomy (2014, p. 173).

The idea that online technologies can trouble common binary categories echoes a similar debate in digital motherhood scholarship about its potential to disrupt gendered public/private binaries. Diaspora sites may even constitute a kind of “virtual homeland” for people denied a nation-state of their own, as Keles argues in his study of the Kurdish diaspora (Keles 2015). This work on digital diasporas highlights the ways in which digital spaces can reflect and reproduce imaginaries of belonging. The Facebook groups in this study could be seen as part of broader “e-diasporas” (Diminescu 2012), operating in an “enclaved” diasporic mode (Dufoix & Rodarmor 2008, pp. 62-63) to create locally emplaced diasporic spaces. By investigating the ways in which such localised diaspora spaces are meaningful to their members, creating locally emplaced belongings through interactions with fellow migrants, the thesis responds to criticisms of internet diasporas as facilitating meaninglessly instantaneous belonging, and potentially increasing divisions between migrants and settled locals (Ong 2003, pp. 82-99). Ong also criticises the concept of internet diasporas for producing a false impression of homogenous migrant populations, with similar imaginaries and aspirations (p. 87). This thesis investigates how such homogeneity might be produced in online spaces, and why working towards a “narrative of sameness” (Seligman, 2012, p. 190) as the basis for the group may be productive in facilitating migrant settlement and belongings.

Migrants are both producers and consumers of “digital migration knowledge” (Borkert et al. 2018, p. 8). Studies suggest that use of the internet has become integral to migrant decision- during
migration, and information-seeking and community-building after arrival. Studies of refugees’ media use suggest “the digital infrastructure is as important as the physical infrastructures of roads, railways, sea crossings” (Gillespie et al. 2016, p. 2). In producing and sharing information on digital platforms for other migrants, they become “digital agents of change” (Borkert et al. 2018, p. 8). In its analysis of information-seeking after migrants’ arrival in their destination country, this thesis has drawn on three core concepts from the information studies field: “everyday life information-seeking” (Savolainen 1995), “information grounds theory” (Fisher et al. 2004; Pettigrew 1999) and “information foraging” (P. Pirolli 2007; Peter Pirolli 2009; Peter Pirolli & Card 1999). In their everyday lives as mothers and migrants, women use a variety of platforms to find the information they need, choosing the most appropriate source for their needs. Migration research using information grounds theory has tended to focus on offline contexts such as public libraries (Branyon 2017; Fisher et al. 2004; Khoir et al. 2017; Khoir et al. 2015b). Other than Branyon’s 2017 study of migrant mothers’ use of U.S. public libraries, which found libraries to be spaces where mothers found information and friends, observed local cultural norms, and bonded with their child, few other studies examine gender as a variable, or explore the specific information needs of migrant mothers. Extending information grounds theory to cover online as well as offline spaces, Khoir, Du & Koronios (2015a) categorised the information grounds used by Asian immigrants in South Australia into information-centred, place-centred, and people-centred. Facebook groups and forums were categorised as information-centred, while (offline) parents’ groups were classified as people-centred. Their analysis, which also separated “internet” from “interpersonal” as information sources, contrasts with the approach of this thesis, which draws on Pirolli’s concept of “social information foraging” (2009) and considers online information-seeking as a social and interpersonal activity.

Few of the migrant information studies mention gender or motherhood. Few of the maternal information studies attend to the cultural specificities of motherhood and many make no reference at all to the ethnicity, nationality, or migrant status of the research participants, providing no analysis of the impact of these intersecting experiences. Both areas of scholarship focus almost entirely on the ‘end users’ of the information grounds, paying little attention to the labour of creating and maintaining those spaces. I have found no studies of mothers or migrants that focus on the creation of ‘peer-led’ information grounds for themselves and each other.
Receiving appropriate information may have a deep emotional impact. Yet information and emotion are often considered independently, following a binary logic that separates thinking from feeling. One of the reasons for drawing on information grounds theory is its emphasis on the “physical, social, affective, and cognitive” benefits of obtaining the needed information (Fisher & Naumer 2006, p. 99). Access to the right form of information is, arguably, a necessary precursor to the familiarity which, according to Hage (1997), is a fundamental affective building block in the construction of a migrant’s sense of feeling ‘at home.’ In addition, research suggests that positive emotions may facilitate information sharing, while negative emotions may inhibit information seeking (Savolainen 2015, p. 1204). That is, the affective environment affects whether, and how much, information is shared, and information sharing also has an affective impact on the people involved (Fisher & Landry 2007). In the next section of this literature review, I discuss research that focuses on the intersections between migration and emotion.

2.3.3 The emotions of migration and settlement

An emotional lens provides the capacity to examine the complexities of migration, which is both a psychic and social experience for individuals and collectives. The field of migration and emotion research has been described as “emergent” and a useful counterbalance to the “dominance of economic and political analyses of migration” (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015). Research in this field relates both to the emotions of the “migrant condition” (guilt, nostalgia, hope, relief) and emotional politics of migration (fear, compassion, trust). Research around migration and emotion tends to draw on scholarship that views emotions as embodied, social, and relational (S. Ahmed 2004; Burkitt 2014; Sharp 2009), a tendency I have adopted in this thesis. As Burkitt argues, emotions are defined by the “social meanings we give to perceptual experiences and the context in which they arise” (2014, p. 7). Following Burkitt, I do not use the terms “affect” or “affective” to mean anything significantly different to the terms “emotion” and “emotional” in this thesis. This research leaves to one side the rich and complex literatures of affect in the fields of psychology, cultural studies and sociology, drawing instead on feminist geographers’ perspectives on emotions as social and relational (Longhurst 2016).

Emotion may drive migration as much as economic rationalism does, and deserves serious scholarly attention (Boccagni & Baldassar 2015, p. 77; Shah 2006). Christou argues that “narratives of migration are emotional stories of complex entanglements of feelings, experiences and
imaginations” (2011, p. 252). This thesis draws on recent scholarship on love and migration (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2013; Groes & Fernandez 2018; Mai & King 2009), friendship and migration (Conradson & Latham 2005b; Robertson 2016; Westcott 2014; Westcott & Vazquez Maggio 2016), and migrant guilt and longing (Baldassar 2008, 2015). The emotion and home-making paradigms encourage attention to gendered experiences of migration, for example around fears of gender-based violence (Christou 2011, p. 252), gendered home-making practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2017, p. 122), or gendered experiences of migrant guilt (Baldassar 2015; Vermot 2015). Migrant guilt has been conceptualised as a gendered response to moral obligations (to return, to send remittances, to care) particularly in relation to family ‘back home’ (Baldassar 2015) and as a “gendered bond” in transnational families (Vermot 2015). Vermot argues that Argentinean women’s migration away from home and family constitutes a guilt-inducing transgression of gender roles that does not apply to men. Baldassar and Vermot both suggest parents blame their daughters more for leaving them, for not returning, and for not fulfilling their role as caregivers. Migrant mothers’ feelings of failure, homesickness, guilt, disconnection and loneliness are explored in Chapter Six, drawing on this gender-sensitive literature of migration and emotion.

One emotional element in migration research that has drawn sustained scholarly attention, and which is a core concept for this thesis, is the theme of belonging. Belonging is a concept operating at multiple levels (Yuval-Davis 2006). Belonging may involve recognisable, formal structures, or “can be a personal, intimate, and private sentiment” (Fenster 2007, p. 253). Belonging is, as Yuval-Davis argues, “multiplex and multilayered, continuous and shifting, dynamic and attached” and “embedded in specific discourses of power, in which gender, class, sexual and racialized social divisions are intermeshed” (2003, p. 142). Belonging may relate to official bodies, to specific places or spaces, to notions of (existing, lost, or imagined) home(s), to specific known groups of people or to an “imagined community.” Starting from an understanding that “one does not simply or ontologically ‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it” and that belonging is an “achievement” of performativity, citation and practice (V. Bell 1999, p. 3), this thesis explores the practices, negotiations and meanings of belonging in the context of migration, motherhood and digital cultures. Although formal and political belongings are salient to this thesis, specifically in relation to migration policy, visas, and citizenship, the focus here is on spatial, experiential and affective belongings. The concept of affective belonging, as outlined by Probyn, emphasises the “longing in belonging” through which “we figure relations of proximity to others and other forms
of sociality” (1996, p. 13). Belonging is thus understood as affective, social, relational and performative.

In this thesis, I propose the term “affective settlement” to refer to practices of creating locally emplaced belonging in a new place following migration. Literature relating to affective settlement addresses migrants’ psycho-social need for belonging, which has been disrupted by migration. It is often considered in conjunction with integration as a marker of successful migration (K. McMillan 2017; Phillimore et al. 2014). Robertson (2016) has examined the importance of friendship for migrant students’ sense of belonging, exploring how friendship networks interact with “spatial imaginaries of belonging.” One essay that has been particularly influential on this thesis is a 1997 essay by Hage, in which he outlines how migrants in Sydney construct a new “feeling of being ‘at home’” based on the “affective building blocks” of familiarity, security, community, and sense of possibility (Hage 1997). These concepts of building new senses of belonging in migration, and core affective units (“building blocks”) of belonging are central to the arguments advanced in this thesis. This area of scholarship accepts that migration disrupts migrants’ sense of individual and collective belonging, as well as their social networks, and that these need to be re-built in the new location so migrants can be ‘at home’ in their new home. There is also an understanding that this affective settlement may take many years, or be a permanently ongoing project: “It takes time to feel at home” (S. Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 9).

Belonging can also be understood as intersectional. That is, an individual’s assemblage of belongings and exclusions is shaped by their intersecting experiences of gender, race, age, class, nationality, sexuality and so on. Yuval-Davis refers to this as “the differential positionings from which belongings are imagined and narrated” (2003, p. 130). Just as communities may be spaces of exclusion and surveillance rather than inclusion and communion, so ‘home’ may be, for some, a place of alienation rather than comfort. Ahmed et al. (2003) emphasise the “spatialized relations of power” that shape migration and belonging, and argue that these processes must be analysed with attention to intersecting inequalities. For example, settlement of one group may involve displacement or desecration of others’ homelands (S. Ahmed et al. 2003, pp. 5-6). These spatialised relations of power also manifest as entitlement to a place or space (Silvey 2004, p. 12). Entitlement to place is central to belonging – entitlement to travel, to enter, remain, inhabit and move about certain spaces and places. Such entitlements are differentially apportioned according
to an individual’s gender, race, class, or migrant status (Fenster 2007). This thesis attends particularly to belongings at the intersections of gender, nationality, migrancy and motherhood.

Recent scholarly investigations of belonging and “place-based emotional attachments” (Christou 2011, p. 249) can be seen, in some senses at least, as circling back to the concerns of late postcolonial diaspora scholarship, which explored notions of home, nostalgia, desire, and multiple belongings, in the context of historical and contemporary migrations (A. Brah 1996). These notions may have been overshadowed by a focus on mobile, transnational and assimilationist paradigms (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2017, p. 115). Wood & Waite, in their editorial for a special issue on ‘Scales of Belonging’ suggest that scholarship on belonging has tended to ignore both the intersectionality of belonging, and “what belonging feels like” (2011, p. 201). Diaspora and postcolonial scholars highlight multiplicities of belonging, complexities of home and diaspora, hybrid identities, heterogeneity, borders, journeys, intersections, and change (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994; Hall 1990). These approaches appear well suited to researching belonging and home-building in heterogeneous internet environments, in which it is possible to produce, display and negotiate multiple attachments of belonging, identities and home. Yuval-Davis provides a useful reminder that, “discussing diasporic politics of belonging should not make us forget that the same people have also developed various forms of belonging – practical, emotional and/or ideological – to the countries where they live, and thus should always be considered within such a multi-layered context” (2011, p. 108). This multiplicity of belonging is at the heart of this thesis, which explores the ways in which migrant mothers draw on and operationalise diasporic, maternal and emplaced senses of belonging, to assist in the construction of new forms of belonging in their migrant locality.

Central to this thesis are notions of belonging as gendered, as highlighted by feminist sociologists and geographers, belonging in relation to formal and social citizenship, collective imaginaries of home and homeland, gendered notions of public and private spaces, and everyday practices like walking, shopping or working (Fenster 2007; Massey 1994; Yuval-Davis 2003). In practical terms, mothers may become “attached” to their local area, through the social contacts they develop through their children, increased time spent in their local area, and sense of belonging to a school “community” (Savage et al. 2005). Women and mothers often constitute a symbolic home for others, “constructed as the embodiments of the homeland” (Yuval-Davis 2003, p. 133) or conjuring up a homely space of safety, warmth and love. Hage describes the shelter of home as “a mother’s
lap [...] a shelter that we use to rest and then spring into action” (1997, p. 103). Home is constructed as “a woman’s place,” with mothers idealised as “the stable, symbolic centre – functioning as an anchor to others” (Massey 1994, p. 180). This symbolic positioning of women as markers of belonging and community can be “deeply constraining, always problematic and sometimes deadly” for women (Gedalof 2003, p. 91). While ‘our’ mothers are the embodiment of home, comfort and belonging, feminist migration scholars have argued that migrant mothers, particularly racialized migrant women, have been positioned in hostile public and political discourse as the epitome of non-belonging. Migrant mothers have been portrayed as “over-fertile” bearers of “foreign children,” over-burdening stretched social services; as passive victims of “backward” patriarchal cultures intrinsically at odds with Western norms of gender equality; “exotic others;” or unscrupulous recipients of social benefits and maternity services to the detriment of the pre-existing population (DeSouza 2004; Erel et al. 2017; Gedalof 2009).

Focusing on how migrant women and mothers construct belonging for themselves, and for their family, positions them as the agents, not the symbols, of belonging. That is not to say that such symbolic constructions are irrelevant. Certainly, the exploration of maternal practices and identities relates directly to the ways in which women’s symbolic role “as guardians of tradition, keepers of home and bearers of language” (Minh-Ha 1994, p. 15) are enacted in contemporary migrant settings. Nevertheless, this thesis also attends to the ways in which women actively navigate and negotiate practices and identities of belonging, individually, interpersonally, as a collectivity of mothers, and in their role as mothers to children.

2.4 Digital sociology

Although there is a longer history of sociological interest in online technologies, the term ‘digital sociology’ only started to gain traction after 2012, with the publication of monographs and edited collections using the term (Daniels et al. 2017; Lupton 2012a; Marres 2017; Orton-Johnson & Prior 2013), a conference (Daniels et al. 2015), postgraduate courses (Lupton 2012a; Marres 2018), academic blogs (Carrigan 2013; Lupton 2012b) and papers reflecting on methodological and ethical concerns specific to digital sociology (Carrigan 2012; Marres & Weltevrede 2013; Roberts et al. 2013) and how this emerging area might fit within the broader sociological discipline (A.
Edwards et al. 2013). Lupton has developed a four-fold typology of digital sociology that includes: research into people’s use of digital technology; the use of digitally-derived data to answer sociological questions; incorporating digital tools into professional practice as a sociologist; and self-reflexive critiques of digitised society, ourselves as digitised subjects and digitised academics (Lupton 2014). Of those four, this thesis engages primarily with research into people’s use of digital technology, and takes a feminist digital sociological perspective (E. Green & Singleton 2013), bringing this approach into conversation with feminist sociological research on migration and motherhood.

In its investigation of the role of migrant maternal Facebook groups in the everyday lives of migrant mothers, this thesis understands the internet as “embedded, embodied, and everyday” (Hine 2015), in contrast to earlier scholarship, which focused on the “virtual” nature of personal connections online (Negroponte 1995, p. 7), allowing users to “escape their own embodied identities and accordingly […] any social inequities and attitudes relating to various forms of embodiment” (Willson 1997/2007). The internet has become “domesticated” leading to a focus on “how people incorporate digital media into their routine practices of relating and with what consequences” (Baym 2015, p. 6). Combining domestication and “social shaping” perspectives, which view the implications of technology as shaped by both material affordances (Hutchby 2001) and “the unexpected and emergent ways that people make use of those affordances” (Baym 2015, p. 51), this research speaks back to some of the more technologically deterministic and dystopian readings of digital technology. For example, assertions that online technologies are leading to a dearth of authentic intimacy (Turkle 2011), creating “negative effects on well-being” (Tromholt 2016) and “diminished mental health” (Shakya & Christakis 2017). There appears to be a popular appetite for such negative findings, with headlines proclaiming that research “proves Facebook is seriously ruining your life” (Beaulieu 2017; Johnson 2017).

Some of the key themes of digital sociology, which have relevance to this research project, include digital embodiment and disembodiment, self-presentation and performance (Athique 2013; Lupton 2016a; Ravenelle 2017), the impact of social media on friendship, families, intimacy, personal networks, geographically proximate and dispersed communities (Baym 2015; Chambers 2013, 2017; Goodspeed 2017; Hertlein 2012; Hobbs et al. 2017) as well broader social issues of privacy and surveillance (Nissenbaum 2011), and digital labour (Jarrett 2016). Digital sociologists have grappled with the challenges and opportunities presented by rapidly changing digital
technologies (K. N. Hampton 2017; Possamai-Inesedy & Nixon 2017; Savage 2017). That sense of change can be seen clearly in the development of research around inequalities and intersectionalities in the digital era, which are central concepts for this thesis. Early “digital liberation” narratives, suggesting that the digital realm may offer an escape from socially structured and embodied inequalities (Athique 2013, p. 172; Willson 1997/2007) gave way to concerns about a “digital divide” in terms of access to the necessary devices and infrastructure, affordability and digital skills (van Dijk 2006). More recently, as cheaper devices, mobile internet infrastructure and the increasing ubiquity of digital technologies have made a straightforward “digital divide” less salient, at least within “internet-leading nations” (Pick & Sarkar 2015), scholarship on digital inequalities has moved in new directions, focusing on “digital inclusion” approach, looking at how people use the internet (Borg & Smith 2018; J. Thomas et al. 2016), and digital intersectionality, examining the “intersecting oppressions experienced in virtual spaces” (Gray 2017, p. 358).

Both the inclusion and intersectionality directions emphasise that a maturing internet increasingly reflects, and may also heighten, social inequalities (van Deursen & van Dijk 2014). Black cyberfeminist scholars have analysed how “social categories and their attendant inequalities become transformed and reconstituted in virtual spaces” (Cottom 2017, p. 217) (see also Gray 2012). Designers and users of online technologies transfer offline social relations and inequalities into the online modality. Online, as offline, those with power and privilege have greater scope to shape structures and interactions according to their perspective. At the same time, those power dynamics may shift or manifest in novel forms in the digital modality. Black cyberfeminists use an intersectional framework to address exclusions, oppressions, and biases in virtual spaces, and to explore the distinctive ways women, specifically Black women, use internet technologies, meeting their needs by innovating and by co-opting mainstream spaces (Richard & Gray 2018). In this thesis I draw together the concerns of Black cyberfeminism with those of digital motherhood and feminist migration scholars, to investigate how migrant mothers’ identities, attachments, and inequalities “become transformed and reconstituted in virtual spaces” (Cottom 2017, p. 217). In so doing, I emphasise the role of migrant mothers as “active creators” of cultural norms (Manohar 2013a, p. 180) and “digital agents of change” (Borkert et al. 2018, p. 8).
2.4.1 Feminist digital sociology: everyday gender online

This thesis explores some of the key themes in contemporary feminist digital sociology, including: how digital technologies are reshaping areas of everyday life such as care work, domestic labour, emotional work, family, friendship, and community (E. Green & Singleton 2013); how gender identities are constituted online (Arvidsson & Foka 2015); and the opportunities and challenges for feminist activism and solidarity (J. M. Keller 2012). In addition, scholars have linked the unpaid or undervalued labour that sustains the digital economy with gendered reproductive labour or feminised skills (de Winter et al. 2017; Jacobson 2017; Jarrett 2016). Contemporary feminist digital sociologists draw on a body of work by feminist scholars of technology and cyberfeminists, which arose in the late 1980s and 1990s (Haraway 1991; Klein & Hawthorne 1999; Wajcman 1991), to analyse the ways in which gender and technology shape each other (Lohan 2000), and to explore the ways in which newly emerging information and internet technologies might liberate or oppress women (Rosser 2005). These concerns also shape this thesis. More recently, Black cyberfeminist sociologists have drawn on critical race theory and intersectional frameworks to analyse the ways race, gender, class and other social locations intersect to constitute particular experiences online (Cottom 2017). I have drawn on this intersectional approach to understand the complex ways in which gender, motherhood, ethnicities, national identities, migrancy and other social locations intersect in the experiences of migrant mothers online.

Contemporary feminist digital sociologists tend to steer a path between utopian and dystopian conclusions about the potential impact on gender equality and women’s lives. As Rosser (2005) notes, feminist digital scholars’ concerns are shaped by their attachment to specific feminist approaches, such as liberal, socialist, postcolonial or intersectional feminism. Those concerns are also shaped by their attachments to particular academic disciplines. Feminist digital sociologists emphasise the importance of viewing digital technologies as part of everyday lived experience, rather than as media texts to be read “for evidence of hegemonic masculinity, neoliberalism” (Ferreday 2013, pp. 55-56). In line with this sociological approach, this thesis takes an “embedded” approach to digital research (Hine 2015), in contrast to a “pure netnographic” approach (Kozinets et al. 2014). That is, it starts from an understanding of online activities as contextually specific (D. Miller 2013) and interwoven into the fabric of peoples’ lives in which both online and offline interactions are integral. Rather than selecting a particular part of ‘the internet’ as an ethnographic field site and observing what takes place there, this research takes a holistic view of
the participants’ lives as migrant mothers in Australia, questions the separation of online and offline, and in so doing, resists the “impulse towards dualism” that has tended to structure research in this area into binary categories of “virtual/real and transformation/continuity” (Orton-Johnson & Prior 2013, p. 2). This approach resonates with Green & Singleton’s call to “view the digital as a significant lens through which sociologists can continue to analyse the localised nature of everyday life, including gendered behaviours and contexts” (2013, p. 36). By placing its investigation of migrant mothers’ use of the affordances of Facebook groups in a broader context of gendered social relations, migrant belongings, contemporary motherhood and digital labour, this research speaks to broad as well as specific sociological concerns.

2.4.2  **Online communities: belonging, mobility and connection**

Communities are at the heart of this thesis: local communities; national, ethnic and linguistic communities; online communities; diasporic communities; communities of mothers; and communities of migrants. A concept with its own “social life” (Bamyeh 2007, p. 155), community can be “difficult to observe empirically” (Fernback 1999, p. 204). A community may be based around place, attachment, interest, values or practice (Anderson 1983/2006; Bamyeh 2007; Brint 2001; Wenger 1998). It may be consciously chosen, or the result of circumstances. Rather than an arrangement imposed on people, in this thesis, community is understood as dynamically co-constructed, and given meaning by its members. Community is “a phenomenon of culture [...] meaningfully constructed by people through their symbolic prowess and resources” (Cohen 1985, p. 39). Drawing on this concept of community, the analysis of the migrant mothers’ online communities in this thesis is driven by Cohen’s question: “What does it appear to mean to its members?” This thesis emphasises multiplicities of attachments to a “diversity of communities” based on multiple subject positions (Mouffe 1993, p. 20) and on shifting and meaningful “fluid solidarities” (Bamyeh 2007, p. 161). The focus is on meaning over form, constant change over stability and static social structures. These concepts of community allow for multiple belongings, identities and attachments, and are well suited to studies of online communities, where people can interact meaningfully in multiple communities without leaving their chair, or even without switching windows on their computer screen.

Online communities make visible the process of creating and maintaining a community. Their archives reveal their origins, activities and development. Their membership criteria, guidelines for
behaviour, and moderators make explicit the rules of engagement and boundaries of inclusion. The role of the ‘community manager’ highlights the labour of nurturing and growing the community, steering the direction, encouraging discussions and maintaining the normative order. Much of the labour remains invisible to the end users, including the labour of the miners working in unsafe conditions to extract minerals for computer and phone hardware, the exploited workers assembling components in detrimental working conditions, and those disposing of the “e-waste” (Maxwell & Miller 2012; Pérez-Belis et al. 2015; Sandoval 2015). Conflict between members, and processes of surveillance, common in offline as well as online communities, may be more visible in digital spaces, making it more difficult to conceive of online communities as spaces of warmth, safety and security. As nineteenth-century social philosophers like Tönnies and Durkheim worried about the impact of industrialisation on community, so late twentieth-century writers worried about the ‘crisis’ of intimacy in the digital age (Turkle 2011). Taking a fluid, constructionist approach to community encourages a focus on finding new forms of community, rather than mourning the loss of old ones. It emphasises the process of community rather than the structures, and a sense of “belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group” (D. W. McMillan & Chavis 1986, p. 9) that can be found in multiple sites and formulations.

The complex relationship of the local and global is central to this study of locally emplaced communities, which exist both online and offline, and are based on both local and transnational attachments. The relationship of the local to the global is contested in the online community literature. The rise of terms like “glocalisation” (Roudometof 2015) and “translocalism” (Appadurai 1995; Sinatti 2006) suggests a growing awareness of the enduring salience of the local in the era of global connectivity, and an understanding of global and local as mutually constitutive rather than definitionally opposed. This contrasts with suggestions that “global connectivity de-emphasises the importance of locality for community” (Wellman & Gulia 1999/1999). In 1995, Negroponte predicted that “we will socialise in digital neighbourhoods in which physical space will be irrelevant and time will play a different role” (p. 7), but contemporary digital theorists tend to view online communities as “interwoven” in everyday life, “not juxtaposed with everything else” (Baym 2015, p. 111). While online communities can and do transcend physical space and time, enabling people to interact synchronously or asynchronously whilst physically many miles apart, the affordances of digital technologies are also used in ways which are deeply grounded in notions of physical space and localities. In 2003, Hampton and Wellman investigated a “wired suburb” near Toronto, and found localised internet use “transforms and enhances neighboring” (2003, p. 277).
Today, an Australian suburb-based online network, Nabo, aims to overcome “social isolation, loneliness and a lack of connection” by “marrying technology with community to help build relationships between neighbours across Australia” (Nabo 2018). Bingham-Hall and Law suggest hyperlocal blogs and twitter networks have a “symbolic value as a performative representation of local public life,” creating an “intangible sense of community” (2015, pp. 15-16). They draw on the concept of “storytelling neighborhood” which suggests local communication (“stories about ‘us’ in this geographical space”) is more important for the creation of a local imaginary than for instrumental information exchange (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001). Scholars of locative social media assert that “location-aware technologies and practices” (Wilken & Goggin 2014, p. 4) – games, apps, maps, social networks, art and activism – have re-asserted the salience of “place and placiality” (Thielman 2010) in the online sphere.

Place and placiality are integral to understandings of migration and diaspora spaces online. Online communities can transcend physical space and borders, while simultaneously reinforcing spatialised belongings and identities. As Bernal argues in her 2014 study of Eritrean diaspora websites, the “spatial illusion” of creating a metaphorical “online space” where people can visit and interact, has both a “deterritorialising” and “reterritorialising” force. People communicating across borders may make geographical location seem less relevant, but it also masks the impact of dispersal and re-centres the place of origin as an organising concept (p. 32). In Greschke’s 2012 study of an online diaspora site used by Paraguayans at home and overseas, she describes the interactions surrounding a fatal fire in Paraguay, explaining how people moved between communications on the online forum, instant message, phone, and face-to-face, to search for missing relatives and comment on events. Greschke describes the “togetherness” engendered by the site as “based on the complex interplay of mediated and copresent forms of communication, as well as on physical and virtual mobility.” She argues, “forms of presence and togetherness are generated that are not necessarily tied to the body. Nevertheless, physical presence certainly does not become obsolete in this process” (p. 23). Place, locality, and embodied identities not only remain salient in online diaspora spaces, they drive the creation of, and people’s participation in, such sites.

This “complex interplay of mediated and copresent forms of communication” (Greschke 2012, p. 23) applies to migrants’ use of social media sites grounded in proximate physical localities as well as those formed around diasporic dispersal. Komito and Bates characterise the Ireland-based
Polish and Filipino migrants in their study as “proficient digital migrants, combining multiple technologies to maintain contact with friends and relations at home, while creating ‘virtual ghettos’ for themselves in urban areas in Ireland” (2012, p. 107). In their view, migrants are using the affordances of social media to curate “separate lives” in their place of residence, rather than integrating with local communities (Komito & Bates 2009, p. 243). Included in these “virtual ghettos” are people ‘back home,’ migrants they encounter in their proximate locality and migrants in other parts of Ireland. In her study of Korean migrants in New York, Lingel (2011) suggests that the Korean website used by participants as a key information source about their new city could be considered a new form of “ethnic enclave,” one that does not require migrants to live near each other. Unlike Komito and Bates, who suggest segregation and transience will result from migrants’ creation of “virtual ghettos,” Lingel suggests that the “(online) ethnic enclave” in her study facilitated integration through information provision. These debates about ‘enclaves’ and ‘ghettoes’ echo broader societal concerns about societal fragmentation, whether expressed in concerns about “community cohesion” (Cantle 2001) or “parallel lives” (Phillips 2006) or more recent worries about online ideological segregation or “echo chambers” (Del Vicario et al. 2016; Dubois & Blank 2018; Flaxman et al. 2016). In this thesis, I position the migrant maternal online communities as embedded both in their local communities and in a heterogeneous Facebook environment, facilitating the effective settlement of themselves and their families, and weaving webs of connection between themselves and other mothers. They are restorative spaces, (re)building rather than fragmenting social and community infrastructures.

2.5 Conclusion

This review of literature situates this thesis at the intersection of the scholarly literatures on motherhood, migration, and digital sociology. As well as highlighting key themes within those fields, such as the regulation of motherhood, affective settlement, emplaced belongings, connection and disruption, the review also draws attention to scholarship in the borderlands of these fields: migrant motherhood, digital motherhood, and migration online. I have also highlighted emergent areas of research, such as feminist digital sociology, Black cyberfeminism, and the study of the emotions of migration. In so doing, I have explored how all these areas of scholarship have dealt with the concepts that drive this research, including community, belonging, information, emotion, and gendered and intersectional understandings of social experience. The review has highlighted the limitations of current research in these areas, and the resulting need
for this research. For example, a lack of research centring the experiences of migrant mothers in Australia beyond the postnatal period, or investigating their use of digital technology.

In the next chapter, I outline the conceptual framework that has shaped this research, describe the research design and implementation, and consider the methodological implications of my position as a migrant, mother and researcher.
Chapter 3  Methodology

3.1  Introduction

This is a qualitative sociological research project exploring the lived experiences of women who are migrants to Australia, mothers, and users of online groups created by and for migrant mothers. The thesis brings together three elements: an examination of the phenomenon of migrant maternal online groups, an exploration of the experiences of migrant mothers using the groups and the meanings they make of their use, and an exposition of how the phenomenon and experiences speak to the broader social context of contemporary migrant motherhood and an “embedded, embodied, and everyday” internet (Hine 2015).

As a feminist digital sociological project, it embraces Green and Singleton’s proposition that “feminist sociologists have an ethical and political obligation to reveal the gendered narratives of technology in everyday life” (E. Green & Singleton 2013, p. 47). As such, it works within intersectional, feminist, and social constructionist conceptual frameworks. The data were predominantly generated through semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 41\(^3\) migrant mothers in Sydney and Melbourne in 2016. The interviews were preceded by a preliminary research phase involving a mapping exercise to determine the parameters of the phenomenon, and an online survey to generate a broader contextual understanding of the phenomenon and points of departure for interview themes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and then analysed using an inductive thematic approach, based on the method outlined by Braun & Clarke (Braun & Clarke 2006; V. Clarke & Braun 2016).

The first part of this chapter introduces the conceptual framework for this thesis, which has been constructed out of four key components: feminism, matricentric feminism, intersectionality, and social constructionism. The second section examines these frameworks in practice, outlining how they have guided the choices and interpretations in

\(^3\) The data from one additional interview were excluded from analysis because the participant managed a group that was not on Facebook, but I would like to acknowledge her contribution to the research project.
this project. The third section details the research design and methods. In the final section, I situate myself in the research, reflecting on my position as a migrant, mother, researcher and online community manager, and discuss the strategic, performative, contextual nature of ‘shared social locations’ in qualitative research.

3.2 Key components of the conceptual framework

3.2.1 Feminist epistemologies, ontologies, and research

Feminist epistemologies, ontologies and research principles have driven this project and are suffused through its design, data generation, analysis and presentation. The use of ‘epistemologies’ denotes that feminist theories of knowledge and being are “internally heterogeneous” (Alcoff & Potter 1993, p. 3). Feminist projects are not just those focusing on “women” but those “informed by or consistent with feminism” (Alcoff & Potter 1993, p. 4). This thesis has drawn most heavily on feminist standpoint theories, which understand knowledge and knowers to be socially situated, in contrast to traditional Western positivist notions of universal and abstract knowledge and knowledge-seeking (Harding 2004; Narayan 2004). Standpoint theories understand all knowledge to be partial and produced out of specific social and political contexts (Haraway 1988). Achieving the aim of better knowledge means expanding the diversity of standpoints given epistemic credibility and acknowledging the epistemic resources and deficits offered by each standpoint. While some standpoint theorists privilege knowledge generated from oppressed standpoints (Harding 2004; Hartsock 1983), others emphasise that every standpoint generates valuable, if partial and socially situated insights. Placing those diversely generated knowledges in dialogue with each other can illuminate tacit assumptions, omissions, distortions and common ground, generating more complete knowledge, empathetic understanding, or political solidarity (Haraway 1991; Hawkesworth 2006; Hill Collins 1994; Longino 1999). This latter version of standpoint knowledge-building has driven this project, which has sought to bring into dialogue the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds and scholarship from diverse fields of social research.
Feminist epistemologies hold that “values, politics and knowledge are intrinsically connected” (Alcoff & Potter 1993, p. 3). In conceiving this project, I have been influenced by Mohanty’s “feminist solidarity model,” which highlights both connections and disconnections between women across the world, exploring the “complexities, singularities, and interconnections between communities of women such that power, privilege, agency, and dissent can be made visible and engaged with” (Mohanty 2003a, p. 523). In this project, which focuses on communities of women in Australia, created by and for women who have moved there from various locations across the world, I have tried to balance the elements of complexity, singularity, and interconnection. To do this, I have placed the “micropolitics of everyday life” (Mohanty 2003a, p. 509) in the broader contexts of social, economic and political processes.

3.2.2 Matricentric feminist research

This thesis draws heavily on matricentric feminist principles, as outlined in Andrea O’Reilly’s 2016 text Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism and Practice. Matricentric feminism shares with standpoint feminism a similar experience-centred sensibility. It is framed by social constructionist principles, understanding motherhood to be socially and historically constructed and contingent. A matricentric feminist approach does not seek to reduce the complexity of women’s lives and identities into a single and simplified category of ‘mother,’ but rather recognises that motherhood is a central organising element of the lives of women who are mothers, that motherhood is a significant factor in women’s continuing inequality, and that motherhood has been underexplored in both feminist and wider social research (A. O'Reilly 2016). Drawing on matricentric feminist theories, on the experiences of the maternal research participants, and on my position as a feminist mother and researcher, this thesis presents insights from a matricentric feminist standpoint.

Matricentric feminism positions mothering as “more as a practice than an identity” (A. O'Reilly 2016, p. 4), following Ruddick’s argument that mothering is an intentional social practice that involves both rationality and emotion (Ruddick 1980). This emphasis on maternal practices has guided the focus of this project. Although the thesis attends to how mothers perceive themselves and are perceived by others, particularly in the sense of
creating belongings and positionalities around their migrant and maternal identities, the focus is on what mothers do, think and feel. A focus on maternal practices, or “motherwork” (Hill Collins 1994) has a number of advantages. Collins has used “motherwork” to “soften” dichotomies between “private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective” (1994, p. 47). The terms ‘practice’ and ‘work’ thus embed mothering in its social and political context and emphasise the intentionality and labour involved. They honour the work performed by mothers, and admit the possibility that those activities could be undertaken by people other than those with the identity ‘mother.’ For a scholar of migrant motherhood, the ability to analyse women’s experiences through the lens of maternal practices facilitates an analysis of how those experiences and practices change across time and place. Distinguishing between identity and practice also clarifies that mothers may sustain a “selfhood outside of and beyond motherhood” (A. O’Reilly 2016, p. 135). In this thesis, I have tried to balance a matrifocal perspective, that is, a focus on mothers and mothering, with an attention to the participants’ lives beyond their maternal goals. For example, the thesis explores women’s experiences of friendship and homesickness, shaped by motherhood but not determined by it.

3.2.3 Intersectional research

This thesis is framed by an understanding that “people’s lives and the organisation of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other” (Collins & Bilge 2016, p. 2). As well as attending to the analytic complexity that results from this understanding of experience as shaped by unstable, fluid and socially constructed categories and processes (Walby et al. 2012), this thesis has been guided by the six “core ideas of intersectionality” proffered by Collins and Bilge: inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice (2016, p. 25).

Developed by feminists of colour and critical race theorists, intersectionality has an integral place within a longer feminist history of theorising about how race, class, and gender influence each other (for example, Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1983; A. Y. Davis 1983; hooks 1981; Minh-Ha 1989; Mohanty 1988, 2003b; Spelman 1988; The Combahee River Collective
1977/2014), and also constitutes a critique of mainstream feminism for its privileging of the experiences of white women, and erasure of black women’s experiences and the structuring power of race (Bilge 2013, p. 413; Crenshaw 1989). Similarly, intersectionality both works within the logic of standpoint theory, in its centring of situated knowledge, marginalised experiences, and power, and presents a challenge to it, by undermining the possibility of a unified category of woman from which to construct an epistemological standpoint. Intersectional frameworks have also posed a challenge to the kind of sociological research that treats race, class and gender as independent variables (A. Y. Clarke & McCall 2013), or that studies the margins while leaving uninterrogated “the unmarked categories where power and privilege cluster” (Choo & Ferree 2010, p. 147).

3.2.4 Social constructionist research

A social constructionist approach contends that “the world we live in and our place in it are not simply and evidently ‘there’ for participants. Rather, participants actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements” (Koro-Ljungberg 2008, p. 4). Therefore, this study examines “how participants construct meanings and actions” and its data “reflect the researcher’s and the research participants’ mutual constructions,” resulting in “an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (Charmaz 2002, pp. 677-678). This thesis takes constructionism, as Holstein & Gubrium suggest, as a “broad framework” to examine “the everyday methods, rules, and strategies by which reality is put together” (2008, p. 6) by and for the migrant mothers in this study.

In terms of interviews and data analysis, a social constructionist approach emphasises that interviews are interactional events in which all participants construct knowledge together. As such, interview narratives are “situated, constructed reports, not actual representations of facts or ‘true’ experiences” (Koro-Ljungberg 2008, p. 431) and those reports will always be partial representations of reality (p. 434). Furthermore, interviews are part of a knowledge production process which is itself socially constructed and which produces particular expectations and norms.
A social constructionist approach is fundamental to feminist research, in that no feminist “would accept that extant gender arrangements are either natural or unchangeable” (Marshall 2008, p. 688). Beyond this, there are some key areas of commonality and resonance between the four abovementioned conceptual frameworks. They all share a critical orientation towards dominant accounts of the world, questioning the processes by which they have come to dominate our understanding, attending to previously under-examined experiences and phenomena, and striving for social change and social justice. Furthermore, they share a relational orientation, an understanding that “each individual is in basic ways constituted by networks of relationships of which they are a part” (Nedelsky 2011, p. 19) and that this includes the relationship between the researcher and the research participants. Finally, they share a reflexive orientation, a commitment to reflexivity and “methodological self-consciousness” (Charmaz 2017, p. 35) as key elements of a sound process of knowledge production. These three orientations – critical, relational, reflexive – have fundamentally shaped this thesis.

3.3 The conceptual framework in practice

As a feminist researcher, I take seriously questions of representation, reflexivity and researcher-researched relations, and this project demonstrates my “commitment to studying the ‘lived experiences’ of gender and its intersectionalities, resulting in theory that is built from these lived experiences, [...] in addition to a commitment to doing research responsibly and doing research that will be beneficial for women” (Pillow & Mayo 2012, p. 193). While I acknowledge the importance of quantitative feminist research in identifying “patterns and processes” of gender inequality (J. Scott 2010, p. 234) my priority – exploring and presenting the lived experiences of migrant mothers – led this project down the more well-trodden feminist path of qualitative interview data generation. In the context of digital sociology, this decision was made against an established norm of content analysis or participant observation for researching online phenomena.

A commitment to ethical research practices is fundamental to research conducted from a feminist standpoint epistemology, which demands close attention to issues around
representation, reflexivity and power. Feminist researchers often draw on “an ethic of care and relationships” to highlight that ethical decision-making takes place in the context of concrete relationships between people and may be complex and dynamic, meaning that a reliance on abstract principles may not suffice (Preissle & Han 2012). Intersectional research ethics emphasise the complexity of these dynamics and remind feminist researchers in particular that female solidarity or “sisterhood” (Oakley 1981/1988) may not be sufficient basis for ethical research relations (Phoenix 1994, p. 50). Preissle and Han (2012) note that feminist ethics may guide a project’s purpose, its design and data generation process, and the representation of its data and participants. The following paragraphs address each element in turn.

Firstly, in terms of a feminist ethics of research purpose, this thesis draws attention to understudied areas of women’s experience and seeks to broaden understandings of migrant mothers’ experience. In a context in which mothering and motherwork are undervalued as practices that have relevance beyond the private sphere of hearth and home, this research embeds maternal practices in their cultural, social, geographic and historical contexts. Against a background where migrant mothers are sidelined as ‘dependents’ or demonised as existential threats to racialised nation-states, this research draws attention to the intentional, relational, digital and community work undertaken by migrant mothers. And in a context in which theorising about motherhood has drawn only lightly on migrant mothers’ experiences, and theorising about migration has sidelined experiences of mothers, this research builds its theorising around experiences of migrant mothers.

Secondly, I sought to engage the women I interviewed in the research process in a way that both acknowledged their participation in the research and their myriad other priorities. For this reason, I suggested single interviews at a venue of the participants’ choice, as opposed to longer or more involved data generation techniques. We arranged interviews to fit around our children’s nap times, school drop-offs and moods. We engaged in a dialogic interview process, in which I shared my own experiences of migration and motherhood where appropriate, openly discussed the research process, responded to their questions, and shared spontaneous interpretations for their feedback. Beyond the interview, I
remained open to ongoing engagement, offering to send transcripts for participants to check and as a stimulus for further thoughts. Although about half requested their transcript, none responded to its receipt. A few women did email me with further thoughts after the interview, and most were vocally supportive of the project and enthusiastic to read its findings, but the lack of post-interview engagement suggested the research was less central to their daily lives than it has been for mine.

Building rapport to establish an interview space where we could trust each other to engage with good faith, and discuss personal experiences that often delved into intimate or emotional territory, was an element of the research process I considered carefully. While Duncombe & Jessop suggest that building rapport with interviewees is akin to Hochschildian ‘emotion work’ or “faking friendship” for the purpose of eliciting ‘better’ data (Duncombe & Jessop 2012), and thus questionable from a feminist and ethical perspective, I contend that building rapport is a key part of demonstrating an ethic of care in the interview process. Curating a pleasant interview experience, encouraging a sense of human connection, ensuring participants feel heard and valued, enabling opportunities for reciprocal questioning and researcher-disclosures, are not merely means of inducing people to make “intimate emotional disclosures” (Duncombe & Jessop 2012, p. 116). In some contexts, building rapport may be more ethically problematic, or less accessible to the researcher, but in this project, where the researcher and the participants were able to draw on key elements of common ground, building rapport was both necessary and relatively unproblematic. As that common ground included topics such as motherhood, families, migration to Australia, and use of social media, which were both key organising elements of the research and familiar topics for small talk among mothers meeting for the first time, they facilitated the first steps on the “continuum of communion” between the researcher and participants (Driessen & Jansen 2013, p. 253).

As Cuomo & Massaro (2014) note, boundaries in qualitative research are not solely hurdles to be overcome. In research situations involving rapport based on common lived experience, “actively instituting boundaries” and unsettling the insider status may be both an ethically and analytically sound choice (p. 103). In many interviews, it was necessary to
interrupt the flow of small talk to perform the framing tasks of the interview, such as confirming consent for recording and explaining the process. Although this temporarily disrupted the natural flow of conversation, bringing the interpersonal and research boundaries back into focus, it served as a useful reminder of the participants’ rights and choices, and the researcher’s responsibilities within an ethical research framework. Introducing “the imagination of an outside world” through boundary-making practices may encourage participants to add useful explanatory layers to their narrative (Cuomo & Massaro 2014, p. 102). As I had temporarily joined some of the groups for recruitment purposes, I reassured participants content posted in the group would not be used in the research. This confirmed the boundaries of the study and reasserted the integrity of the online group, which my presence had potentially breached. At the same time, I was careful to inform the administrators of the precariousness of their anonymity due to the public listing of administrators’ names in Facebook groups. The extent to which we can control the construction, deconstruction, or permeability of boundaries between the research world and the online/offline everyday world is illusory. Yet the process of thinking through boundaries is important and, where possible, should be part of the dialogue with participants.

Finally, in terms of an ethics of representation, I have considered two elements – interpretation and presentation of findings. The researcher is “a central active ingredient of the research process” (R. Edwards & Mauthner 2012, p. 15) from start to finish. There is no neutral process of interpretation and therefore responsible research must include “strong reflexivity” (Harding 1992), identifying the researcher’s positionality and documenting methodological processes and choices, reflecting on how these have been affected by theoretical perspectives or personal biography. Considering the interview data as partial and interactively generated narratives, in the interpretative process, I have sought to draw those narratives into conversation with theoretical discussions around motherhood, migration, gender, sociability, and community. In choosing pseudonymous representation and verbatim quotes lightly edited for readability and confidentiality, I acknowledge these representational decisions “about how to take the words out of their participants’ mouths

4 For example, omitting some disfluencies such as “um” “er” and repeated words, and omitting real names.
and reproduce them elsewhere” (Pickering & Kara 2017, p. 306) as choices made by the researcher by considering “competing ethical goods” (Josselson 2007).

Intersectionality has shaped this thesis as an ontological basis for approaching the experiences of the research participants, and as a “heuristic tool” (Crenshaw 2012, p. 231) to focus analytic attention on how “multiple axes of differentiation” (Avtar Brah & Phoenix 2004, p. 76), power, and inequality operate in the specific context of this research site; a reminder to keep the complexity of intersecting positions and experiences in the foreground (Supik et al. 2012, p. 183). This has been particularly important in managing the diversity of the research sample, in terms of their national, cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Utilising relational intersectionality’s “both/and frame”, which focuses on interconnections rather than binary divisions (Collins & Bilge 2016, p. 27) facilitated analysis that took account of different ways that, for example, gender, race, nationality, migration, class and motherhood, together shaped the specific experiences of the research participants. For example, the analysis attends to the ways in which migrant mothers participate in both mainstream and marginal maternal practices in the migrant maternal online communities.

### 3.4 Research design

The data generation for this project was designed around three steps, each of which built on the preceding one, scoping the field and themes before diving into in-depth interviews. The first two steps, a mapping exercise to identify online groups by and for migrant mothers in Australia, and an online survey to gather and assess potential themes and issues, together formed a foundational research stage. Although the results of these two exercises have not been analysed as key sources of data, they were nevertheless important stages in the research process, surveying the landscape inhabited by these groups and their members.

#### 3.4.1 Mapping the field

The first step was a desk-based online scoping exercise, intended to provide a sense of the scale and shape of online groups and forums specifically aimed at migrant mothers in Australia. This was necessary because no data existed to answer these fundamental
research questions, on which the project would be built. I knew such groups existed, as I had
joined one for British mothers in my local area of Sydney, and subsequently become aware
of others. I initially searched a range of platforms, including Facebook, MeetUp, Yahoo
groups, Babycenter, smaller parent-specific sites like mothersgroupie and Playdate Australia
(both no longer operational), and migrant-specific sites like Internations.org,
BritishExpats.com and ExpatWoman.com. I determined that the widest range of active,
searchable, groups existed on Facebook, and focused the mapping exercise there.⁵

Methodological challenges mean it is difficult to be certain about the complete scope of the
phenomenon. Comprehensive searches of these Facebook groups are hindered by the range
of languages used and the multiple terms used for ‘mother’ in all languages. Many groups
use their home language in the group title or description, such as ‘Polskie Mamy w Sydney’
and אמא-פורג-אמותה לתינוקותベースר, although some do use English. The groups vary in their
geographical focus: some cover a whole city, region or state, some focus on a specific
suburb or sub-regional area. Some groups use the English term for the geographical
location, others use their home language. Using Google Translate to translate various
combinations of terms for ‘mother’ and geographical locations, and then using the
translations to search on Facebook yielded a good range of results. In addition, I looked out
for references to relevant groups in the many Facebook groups of which I am a member,
and followed links to related groups. Together, these methods identified over 80 groups in
Sydney alone, very likely an underestimate.

The Facebook search facility itself is not transparent, and the privacy settings of groups also
hinder verification. For example, ‘secret’ groups do not appear in search listings and the title
and description of ‘closed’ groups may not provide sufficient information to categorise the
group. Facebook is not uniformly popular in all migrant populations, and interviews revealed
that Facebook users often used a combination of platforms, such as Whatsapp and MeetUp
groups. Finally, the dynamic nature of these groups means that the mapping was an attempt
to take a snapshot of a fast-changing landscape. New groups appeared, some grew quickly

⁵ Since the mapping exercise, a number of new apps and networks have appeared, with the aim of putting
mothers in touch with each other, e.g. Mush https://www.letsmush.com and Peanut https://www.peanut-app.io
in membership, others seemed to dwindle or become dormant. For example, when I commenced the mapping in 2015, the group for Indian mothers in Sydney featured in this study did not exist. When I searched again in 2016, I discovered it had been created, and had doubled in size between January (when I first recorded its existence) and June 2016, when its members numbered just over 5000. Since then, the group has grown further and has ‘sister’ groups in Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane, as well as a linked group for Indian fathers in Sydney.

3.4.2 Online survey

As a second foundational research tool, I conducted an online survey with migrant mothers. It was designed not for its empirical data, but to complement the literature review in establishing a basis of knowledge about the topic, highlighting any gaps or assumptions, and as a means of initiating contact with potential research participants. Specifically, the survey aimed to find out what type of online resources migrant mothers used as part of their migration and motherhood experiences, particularly relating to their experiences of mothering away from home. The survey was disseminated widely to migrant mothers online. I approached the administrators of the closed Facebook groups identified during the mapping exercise to ask them to post a link to the survey in their group. Those administrators who responded positively to the request, and were eligible for participation as individuals, were then invited to participate in the next stage of the research, as interviewees. All the interviewed administrators were recruited this way. The survey was also disseminated through Twitter and Facebook networks, and other motherhood and migration related online groups and forums. I wrote a guest blog post about the research, which was posted on a popular blog for expat mothers. The survey had specific clearance from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee and included an informed consent process.

The survey was open for one year and was completed by 426 women. Over half were living in Australia at the time of survey completion, with 9% in the UK and 8% in New Zealand, reflecting the networks of dissemination and English-language context. Over a third of survey respondents had most recently lived in the UK prior to their migration. Nearly three-
quarters had become mothers for the first time while living away from their home country. Over half had joined an online group for mothers specifically from their country of origin, background or cultural group, and of those, 69% had met up with someone face to face whom they had initially made contact with through the online group. 85% accessed the groups via an internet-enabled phone or smartphone. 61% saw posts from the group at least once a day and nearly a third said they saw such posts “multiple times most days.”

The online survey included both closed and open questions (see Appendix F) and was designed to be completed by migrant mothers in any country (although it only existed in an English language version, thus limiting its reach). The significance of the survey lies predominantly in its role as a research development tool, rather than its findings, which are therefore not presented in detail in this thesis. Acknowledging my position as a researcher with some areas of experiential overlap with the research participants (as a migrant and mother in Australia), and some areas of potential difference (for example, country of origin, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), the literature review, mapping exercise and online survey all played a role as methodological tools for widening the frame of the research beyond my experience before plunging into the interpersonal research space of the interviews. The creation, dissemination and analysis of the survey developed my understanding of the field and enhanced the credibility and integrity of the subsequent interview phase. Drafting concise questions that left room for a diversity of experiences made it clear how complex migrant mothers’ stories might be. For example, it required multiple questions to clarify each respondent’s background and migration history, and to clarify their experiences of motherhood in relation to their migration history. Drafting and testing the questions also helped to surface some of my unconscious assumptions, for example, ensuring the wording of questions around pregnancy did not unwittingly exclude lesbian, adoptive or other ‘non-gestational’ mothers. The respondents’ answers also deepened my understanding and shaped my approach to the interviews. For example, the survey asked about respondents’ main reason for migrating, and gave six options, plus the invitation to add information under an “other” category. Over half of the 95 ‘other’ responses gave their spouse as the main reason for moving.\(^6\) This highlighted a common motivation for migration – love and

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\(^6\) This broad category included reasons framed romantically (“to be with the love of my life”), legalistically (“my partner doesn’t have a visa for the UK”), simplistically (“to be with my partner”) and in terms of
marriage – and more broadly the centrality of relational rather than individual motivations. My exclusion of this category of motivation from the survey options indicated my underestimation of its potential significance and a potential gap in my literature review thus far, which I then sought to remedy. To give a second example: over a third of the respondents had become a mother for the first time more than five years after they first migrated. This contrasted with how I had initially approached the research, as I had presumed the study would focus on women who had children shortly after migrating, or who had migrated with very young children. In response to these findings, I broadened my expectations of potential interview participants.

The survey also played an instrumental role in the development of the research. As described above, it was part of a recruitment and communication strategy to identify and approach potential interview participants. Survey respondents were asked to name groups and resources which they had found useful in their experiences of migration and motherhood – specifically in their experience of being a mother away from ‘home’ – and, where appropriate, their answers were included in the mapping exercise and participant recruitment process.

3.4.3 Interviews

Having mapped the field and identified key themes from the survey data, interviews were selected for the final stage of data generation. Interviews were the most appropriate method for this stage, for a range of conceptual, methodological and ethical reasons. The aim of the project was both to provide “good – critical, distinctive and thick – sociological descriptions of emergent digital phenomena” (Beer & Burrows 2007) and also to “explore the textures of social life which result as people combine online and offline experiences in complex, and unpredictable fashion” (Hine 2015, p. 13). Taking a feminist digital sociological stance, as outlined by Ferreday, emphasises that digital technologies, in this case Facebook groups, “are not simply media texts to which we can apply theoretical tools, they are records of (and in themselves constitute) lived experience” (2013, pp. 55-56). As research relationship balance (“Australian husband has been overseas with me for the last 10yrs, time to be close to his family”).

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relationship balance (“Australian husband has been overseas with me for the last 10yrs, time to be close to his family”).
encounters that centre narratives of lived experiences and meaning-making, in-depth qualitative interviews were the most appropriate method of data generation.

During the foundational research stage, I determined that interviews would be ethically preferable to alternative methods such as formal participant observation or content analysis. Previous studies of online groups have taken place with the permission of groups’ administrators or moderators, or have attempted to gauge consent through posting a message in the group and/or gaining consent from people before using their direct quotes (Bromseth 2006; Hine 2015; Sharf 1999). Many have noted resistance from online community members to being used in research (Eysenbach & Till 2001; Hudson & Bruckman 2004; S. A. King 1996). I determined that gaining access to these groups for observation or content analysis would be ethically problematic. The groups are not open to the public. Members must request access, and are screened to ensure they fit membership criteria. Facebook provides three levels of privacy for groups – public, closed and secret – and participants were drawn from groups which operated as closed groups. Thus, while anyone can see the group’s name and description, only group members can see content posted in the group. Drawing on Nissenbaum’s concept of “contextual integrity” (2011), I determined that the norms and structures of the groups indicated a reasonable expectation that members’ posted content would be observed only by members of the group. In addition, my preliminary research and personal experience of similar groups indicated that these groups are used for support on personal and intimate issues. Some women using the groups may be isolated, vulnerable and unable to access alternative support. As such, I considered the risk that my presence might inhibit members from seeking support from the group grave enough to exclude those methods. In making these decisions, I referred to the Association of Internet Researchers’ guidelines for ethical decision-making (Association of Internet Researchers 2012).

During the recruitment process for the survey and interviews, some of the groups’ administrators, in their role as gatekeepers, insisted I join the group to post about the study. After seeking and receiving additional ethical clearance from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, I agreed. In doing so, I clarified that I would only use
this access for recruitment purposes and would not collect or use any data gained from observations. Administrators of other groups were clear that my presence in the group would not be appropriate, so they posted about the study on my behalf. This variation indicates differences in how the administrators perceived their role, in terms of their hands-on management of the group and level of responsibility for the wellbeing of their members; and how they perceived the purpose or tone of the group. Using interview data rather than observation or content analysis enabled the use of direct quotes from the participants without jeopardising their anonymity. Verbatim quotes from online content may be identified using a search function, thereby undermining participants’ anonymity. Moreover, talking to migrant mothers about their experiences, and the meanings they ascribe to those experiences, about their imagined pasts, presents and futures, is central to the purpose of this research.

Data from the interviews provided retrospective justification for these methodological decisions. As well as exploring online and offline interactions, the interviews revealed insights into the participants’ online behaviour that could not have been gained through observation or content analysis. Focusing only on content that is visible privileges the perspective of the person who wrote and posted the content, over the perspective of the many others who read it, whether they responded or not (Sun et al. 2014; Yang et al. 2017). In interviews, participants indicated the impact of reading particular posts, and referred to responses they had intended to post, or had deleted before posting. Interviews captured the significance of the act of reading and observation in online groups, even where this does not result in a response that could be captured through by online observation or content analysis. Interviews enabled participants to discuss the importance of the search function and reading posts for information; the stories behind anonymous posts; and interactions outside the discussion section, such as private messages between members, text messages to friends inspired by a post on the group, or group conversations happening on a different platform, such as Whatsapp.

7 Most administrators will post on a member’s behalf if they want to ask a question while remaining anonymous, which can otherwise be difficult in local community groups and with Facebook’s ‘real name’ policy.
Interviews have their own limitations, of course. People’s memories do not always tally with the evidence of the site – an administrator may estimate that there are five posts per day on the group, when there are only three; a participant may recall receiving dozens of responses to her post when she only received six or seven; participants may impute certain motivations to other members which may not be reliable. Nevertheless, qualitative interviews align well with the epistemological and ontological frameworks of the thesis and the project’s research objectives.

The interviews in this project were conducted in settings chosen by the interviewee, and usually frequented by them as a part of their daily life, such as their workplace, their home or a café in their local area. In some cases, their children were present for some or all of the interview. Occasionally a partner or friend was present at the beginning or end of the interview. Within the formal interview framework of consent procedures and so on, the interviews had a conversational style, encouraging informal talk and reciprocity (Roulston 2008). Although the same topics were covered in each interview, usually in a similar order, the conversations were often wide-ranging and sometimes took surprising tangents. (See Appendix G for the interview questions.)

3.4.3.1 Recruitment and sample

The 41 research participants were all mothers, had moved to Australia from another country, and were members of a Facebook group for migrant mothers in Australia. Fifteen of the participants were the administrators of such a group. The rest were group members without an administrator role. Participants were recruited in Melbourne and Sydney, as similarly constituted east coast metropolitan areas, and the Australian cities with the highest overseas-born populations (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). Nine administrators lived in Melbourne, six in Sydney. The members were mostly located in Sydney (all except three, one of whom had recently moved to Melbourne from Sydney). Participants from 14 Facebook groups participated in interviews. Six groups were based in

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8 One ‘member’ had administrative rights in the group but identified more as a member in terms of her role and responsibility.
Sydney, seven in Melbourne, and one was Australia-wide. The groups self-identified as Brazilian, Desi/South Asian/Indian, German, Malaysian, Persian, Scandinavian, Singaporean, Spanish-speaking, Swedish, and UK/Irish. (See Chapter 4, Figure 1, for a table of groups and participants.)

Recruitment and interviews proceeded in two stages. Phase One focused on administrators, Phase Two on group members. To be eligible for Phase Two interviews, participants had to be members of a group whose administrator had been interviewed for the study. Due to delays in responses from some participants, some administrator interviews took place towards the end of Phase Two. Potential participants (administrators) were identified during the mapping phase and approached during the survey phase. Using Facebook messages, administrators who responded to requests to disseminate the survey were asked to participate in an interview. In many cases, potential participants did not reply, or replied after a long delay (many months), due to Facebook’s prioritisation of messages between people who are connected via ‘Facebook friendship.’ Messages between unconnected people may be ‘hidden’ in secondary inboxes or not delivered at all. I re-sent the message up to three times, if no response had been elicited by the first message, and people who replied to the second or third message often noted they had not received the previous message(s). One potential participant had her privacy settings calibrated to allow messages only from her Facebook friends.

Following the interviews with administrators, I sought permission to recruit members from their groups for Phase Two interviews, by requesting to post in the group. At this point, the administrators acted as ‘gatekeepers’ in enabling or denying access to potential participants in the groups. All administrators agreed to allow me to post, or to share information provided by me. Where I posted myself, I made clear that the post had been

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9 Two of the Melbourne groups had the same administrators but different geographic scopes.

10 In 2018, as I write, I am still receiving notifications to confirm those initial messages have – eventually – been received.

11 Some survey respondents contacted me directly after completing the survey to volunteer to be interviewed. Only those who were members of groups whose administrators agreed to be interviewed were themselves interviewed. As the survey was anonymous, it is impossible to tell how many interview participants completed the survey, although the data suggests that some (but not all) of the interview participants (both administrators and members) also completed the survey.
approved by the group’s administrator, and asked the administrator to comment below my post to vouch for me and the project. As an outsider to the group, I felt it was important that group members felt reassured that their group had not been breached by an unauthorised ‘intruder’ and that as a researcher, I understood the basic ethics of the group and had made respectful contact.

Response rates from group members varied widely and were notably better from groups where I had posted the request myself. It was particularly disappointing to recruit no participants from the Brazilian group (apart from the administrator of the Spanish-speaking group, who was also a member of the Brazilian group), as the interviews with the two Brazilian administrators were particularly rich and indicated an active group that would have been interesting to explore further. In addition, the mapping phase had identified Brazilian groups to be particularly large relative to the size of the Brazilian population in Australia. Groups for Brazilian mothers were the largest or second largest groups identified in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane/Queensland, Perth and Australia. As a relatively recent, and fast-growing, migrant community, I hypothesise that Facebook groups for Brazilian mothers provide a convenient platform for community support in the context of a lack of well-established bricks and mortar community organisations, and this might constitute a fruitful line of enquiry for future research.

It was also harder than anticipated to recruit participants from the large Indian Facebook group. Given its size (5000 members at the time of recruitment, compared to the 430 members of the UK and Irish group and 150 members of the German group) I had assumed it would be relatively straightforward to recruit participants. To compensate for the additional challenges of recruiting participants from groups to which I did not have direct access, I sought approval from the administrators to post in two further Facebook groups aimed at migrant or culturally diverse mothers. Three participants – one German, two Indian – were recruited from these notices, all of whom were also members of Facebook groups included in the study. Two additional participants were introduced to me by women I interviewed. One participant had met me in a playground soon after she had arrived from
India, and when she joined the Facebook group a year later, she volunteered to participate in the study. One German participant volunteered after completing the online survey.

The most enthusiastic response came from the group for British and Irish mothers. I posted a request for participants on a Friday morning, and within an hour had two responses. By Monday morning, I had six interviews scheduled and four expressions of interest. By comparison, it took over a month to recruit the first Indian participant and three months to complete the six interviews. Reflecting on the reason for the difference in responses, I offer three possible explanations. As a British mother in Sydney myself, the parameters of the project may be shaped by specific interests or perspectives that relate to elements of my personal history that resonate with members of that group. As I noted in all calls for participants that I was a migrant mother from London, perhaps a closer identification with me encouraged them to volunteer, whether out of camaraderie or increased trust. Although I offered translators to participants in groups where the dominant language was not English, the simplicity of speaking to a researcher in a language of fluency without an intermediary is likely to be less daunting. In the end, all interviews were conducted in English, without translators.

Participants were therefore recruited via a variety of purposive sampling techniques, which selected potential participants because of their knowledge and experience of a particular phenomenon, in this case, a combination of motherhood, migrancy, and membership of specific migrant maternal Facebook groups. In contrast to probabilistic or randomised sampling techniques, purposive sampling aims to achieve depth of understanding rather than minimise bias or ensure generalisability (Palinkas et al 2013, p. 2). This method has captured the experiences of a more diverse sample than many other studies of migrant mothers, which often focus on a single national background or employment status. Recruiting through self-organised groups that contain this diversity has resulted in a sample that includes women who migrated recently and over a decade ago; those who became mothers overseas and those who became mothers in Australia; women who are full-time working professionals, ‘stay at home’ mothers (E. Boyd & Letherby 2011), on maternity

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12 I had not previously been a member of this particular group so personal connections were not a factor.
leave, and part-time, freelance and self-employed women; those who migrated for work, love, education and adventure; those with teenaged children and those with newborns and preschool-aged children. I have also explored the experiences of women from a range of national backgrounds. While making for a complex sample, this diversity brings together the experiences of women often analysed separately, or not at all, thus offering an alternative to the “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2003) that characterises most sociological studies of migrant mothers.

3.4.3.2 The interviews

The interviews took place between February 2016 and January 2017. They were qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to aid anonymity. 35 interviews were conducted face-to-face, six were conducted by video call and one by email (at the participant’s insistence). Acknowledging the complex arrangements in the participants’ lives, I allowed them to choose the location of the interview, suggesting their home, work or convenient public place as possible options.

For 15 of the face-to-face and four of the video interviews, at least one of the participant’s children was present for part or all of the interview. In the case of the video interviews, the children were in the background or adjacent rooms but usually popped in to say “hi” during the interview. Many of the children started to require more of their mother’s attention as the interview went on, particularly after the first 45 minutes or so. Their children’s presence did not appear to inhibit the women’s conversation in terms of subject matter or openness, but the children’s interjections did interrupt the flow of conversation, and I was aware of the need to complete the interviews in a timely manner to not over-tax the child’s patience.

If, as Baraitser suggests, “interruption forms the ground of maternal experience against

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13 I had hoped to conduct all the interviews face-to-face, although I had considered that some flexibility might be required due to the complex lives of the prospective participants. After one Melbourne-based participant, with a complicated work schedule and two children, was forced to cancel our interview at short notice, we arranged to speak over video call instead. As a result, I determined that although there were some technical limitations of interviewing that way (occasional disturbances in the sound quality, for example), overall the interview had unfolded in a similar way to the face-to-face interviews. I therefore became open to video calls as an option, in situations where face-to-face interviews proved to be difficult for either participant or interviewer.
which all other maternal experiences are understood” (2009a, p. 63) these interruptions to
an interview between mothers, about motherhood, can be understood as richly evocative of
lived experiences of mothering, “bringing her back ‘again and again’ into the realm of the
immediate, the present, the here-and-now of the child or infant’s demand” (p. 59).

On two occasions a participant’s husband was present for part of the interview, and unlike
their children’s presence, his presence did appear to inhibit the frankness of the
conversation. In one case, the participant’s husband answered some of the early questions,
such as their reason for moving to Australia, and the usual follow-up question – “and how
did you feel about that?” – was evidently difficult for her to answer in her husband’s
presence, as they had moved due to his homesickness for Australia. He eventually did take
their child into a different room, which enabled the interview to proceed in a more relaxed
and open fashion. As participants’ migration decisions often involved complicated and
difficult negotiations between spouses, the partner’s presence was a potentially inhibiting
factor in the interview.

As noted, one interview was conducted via email, at the insistence of the participant as a
means to manage her emotional response to what she predicted would be difficult topics
for her to discuss. Despite my counter-suggestion that a face-to-face interview might take
less time and effort on her part, she insisted, and ethically, I felt she had the right to manage
a potentially distressing situation in this way. In any case I felt sure she would have declined
to be interviewed otherwise. I suggested breaking the email interview into a few sections,
so she could tackle a few questions at a time. This ran the risk of an incomplete interview,
by introducing additional points at which she might cease to reply, but I judged it might
make the interview easier for her to handle, both emotionally and practically. In addition,
the exchange of emails provided more opportunities for me to respond to her answers and
seek clarification or elaboration, increasing the interactivity and richness of the data.

Methodologically, this email interview presents both a limitation of the data and a poignant
richness. On the one hand, her responses were generally briefer than in the other
interviews, although the overall word count was similar to two of the transcribed
interviews, and they lacked the non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, body language, pauses and so on. We were not able to develop any real rapport akin to that developed through the face-to-face and video interviews. To counter this, I started each email with brief reflections on her previous answers, including, where relevant, how my own experiences resonated with hers, then some follow-up questions and an overview of the topics to be covered in the upcoming section of the interview. The limitations of Rebecca’s interview, particularly in terms of the richness of the data, and rapport developed during the interview, contrast with the numerous, lengthy and open interviews with the British and Irish members of the group she runs.

On the other hand, the fact that the subject matter raised such turbulent emotions for her is an important observation in itself. At the end of the interview, she noted:

“I definitely wouldn’t have made it through a face-to-face with you talking about some of this stuff so I’m glad I decided to do it via email! I hope you don’t feel that’s been too impersonal and I hope that my answers are still of benefit to your research. It wasn’t too painful doing it via email as I could pick my moments when to answer the heavier questions that bring up a lot of emotions!”

In this case, a face-to-face interview might not have happened, might have skirted around some of the “heavier questions,” or might have caused the participant considerable distress. Rebecca’s story is one not often explored in research about contemporary migration to Australia: the reluctant migrant. Rebecca had met her Australian husband when she was in Sydney on a student visa. After three years, they moved to London together, where they spent eight years and started a family. In her words, “life at home in London was perfect.” When their child was two, her husband lost his job and unable to find another one, returned to Sydney against Rebecca’s wishes, leaving Rebecca and their child in London. When he found a job in Sydney, she felt she was presented with a stark choice: divorce or migration. At the time of interview, she had been in Sydney for three years and still suffered an intense homesickness that affected her daily life and future plans (for example, having a second
I think it was valuable to incorporate her experiences into the research and I am grateful for the methodological agility that facilitated it.

3.4.3.3 Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen as the most appropriate analytical method for this project, being well suited to qualitative data, encouraging an organic and iterative approach to data analysis, and taking account of the active role of the researcher in the analysis process (Braun & Clarke 2006; V. Clarke & Braun 2016). Analysis was primarily inductive – driven by the data although unavoidably influenced by epistemological and biographical factors as discussed above – and semantic, starting from the content of the data as narrated by participants and then exploring the significance of patterns, broader meanings and implications, and placing those interpretations and data in conversation with extant literature (Braun & Clarke 2006, pp. 83-84). All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by me, and the transcripts were uploaded to NVIVO for analysis. Transcription took place during the year-long interview phase, and reflective memos from this time combine field notes recorded in response to the interview encounters with preliminary analytic notes in response to the transcription process.

Analysis of the interview data involved multiple cycles of coding. The first coding cycle involved “Structural Coding” (Saldaña 2013, pp. 84-87), which coded sections of the interview according to their relationship to the main interview topics, to facilitate thematic analysis in subsequent cycles. Re-reading transcripts alongside the Structural Coding process brought renewed familiarisation with the data. For example, structurally coding the administrators’ interviews helped to reveal clusters of discussions around the following questions:

- What do (these) migrant mothers say they want or need to support them in navigating their way through migration and mothering? (Evidence: how and why they set up and run the groups.)
- What is the role of administrators in shaping and maintaining the groups for other people?
• Why (or why not) mother-specific groups?

Analytic memos (Saldaña 2013, pp. 43-50) written during the interview, transcription and structural coding stages began to identify patterns of similarity, difference, frequency and intensity, as well as clusters of thematic meaning and relationships (Hatch 2002, p. 155). The next cycle of coding used the insights gained from this preliminary analysis, combined with the earlier insights generated by the online survey, to sensitise the next reading of the transcripts. Codes were generated during this sensitised reading, and organised into folders on NVIVO. Some folders contained codes relating to the research questions above, generated from the structural coding, while others organised codes into themes such as ‘belonging,’ ‘maternal practices,’ ‘recognition,’ and ‘friendship.’ Analytic memos, mind maps, and writing snippets explored these themes and questions in more detail, going back to the data for salient (linked or divergent) examples, to the literature for salient concepts or related studies, and to self-reflection for my responses to the developing interpretations. This recursive analytical writing process, moving between data, writing, reflexivity, and literature (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 86), was integral to the generation of interpretations which are presented in this thesis.

3.5 Migrant, mother, researcher, community manager: situating myself in the research

In this section, I reflect on the experience of researching migrant mothers in Australia, as a migrant mother to Australia myself. During this reflexive process, I have drawn on articles by Manohar (2013c), Doucet (1998), Christou (2011) and Ryan (2008), which reflect on their experiences of researching migration and/or motherhood. Manohar’s conceptualisation of the experience of shared social locations in research as a dynamic process of strategic presentation, a contextual, performative and sometimes tenuous process, more than a static status based on common background or experience, was particularly influential. Doucet’s writing highlighted the impact of simultaneously mothering and researching on the analysis phase of research, while Ryan’s article brought into focus the emotions of conducting migration research as a migrant researcher and the potential for interviews to
become “emotional encounters” which may be uneasy for both researcher and participant (2008, pp. 309-310). While Christou focuses on her emotional responses to participants’ “rage and xenophobic outbursts” and “derogatory remarks” about other groups, which conflict with her self-perception as “an ethical but also politically motivated researcher” (2011, p. 253), Ryan discusses how the experiences of migration and motherhood that she shares with her participants may have influenced her engagement during the interviews and their analysis.

In this research, all participants, including me, shared experiences of migration and motherhood. Most were, like me, middle-class, well-educated and married to men, and had migrated to Australia for multifactorial reasons including work, study, love and lifestyle. No participant was more than ten years older or younger than me. We were all ‘fluent in Facebook’ with easy access to digital technology. As an administrator of Facebook groups myself, although not the specific type of group explored in this research, I shared with the administrator-participants an understanding of the tools and tasks involved. In other areas, however, we were less able to draw on common ground. Ethnicity, nationality, length of time since migration, age of children, mother tongue, and current place of residence, were among the points of difference which constituted different experiences of, and perspectives on, the topics of research. As a researcher, I experienced the vulnerability of transparency that resulted from heavily overlapping social locations. For example, I felt that the British women could infer information from my accent and other non-verbal cues about my class and geographical origins in a way that most other interviewees could not. Although I invited this sense of commonality by discussing my own experiences and background, and as discussed above (3.4.3.1) this may have facilitated access to potential participants, this transparency was unexpectedly uncomfortable. Perhaps it was uncomfortable for the participants as well.

I consciously deployed our shared maternal status to curate the interview as a non-hierarchical encounter. In arranging the interviews, I explained that I too had young children and understood the logistics of nap times and school-runs that made scheduling difficult, encouraging them to choose a time and location that would suit their needs. As
arrangements also had to suit my own, often similar, needs, for example, to be back in time to pick up children from preschool, those logistical negotiations constituted a performance that highlighted our shared maternal locations. In addition, as a student with young children, I inhabited a kind of liminal social status, side-stepping some of the potential sensitivities around mothers working outside the home or staying at home with children (Douglas & Michaels 2004). On one notable occasion, this strategic performance of shared motherhood failed. Despite my efforts, it became clear during an interview with one of the Indian participants, that she had not recognised me as a fellow mother, but only as a white, presumably Australian, researcher. Late in the interview, in response to one of my comments about my children, she expressed surprise and visibly relaxed. Our conversation became more friendly and less stilted.

In her article, Manohar (2013c) discusses how some interview topics precipitated a refusal by her interview participants of the shared social location she had taken for granted. When discussing motherhood, marriage and domestic issues, her participants emphasised that she, as a single, childless woman, could not share their perspective. Some participants positioned her as a daughter or younger relative, and in response, she positioned herself as a “learner/researcher” rather than a “peer” when discussing these issues. Like Manohar, I found that the sense of shared social location shifted when discussing certain topics. In the interview with Susie, we established many areas of shared experience, such as growing up in certain areas of London, mothering two children as Londoners living in Sydney, and our shared Jewish heritage. When she raised her worries about her children growing up in a different country to where she had been raised, I shared my experiences of being raised by a migrant mother, and Susie then positioned me in a daughterly role. She thanked me for sharing my experiences and then noted, “It’s like I’m looking at [my daughter] in – however old you are ....” Although only six years older than me, at this point, Susie identified more with my mother than with me. I deployed my dual location as both a migrant mother and daughter of a migrant mother to bring relevant experiences to the interview and enable an exploration of issues from multiple perspectives. In this way, our shared social locations were contextual and dynamic.
In an interview with one of the British migrants with Indian heritage, I noted these shifting
dynamics, and the positioning of me as an “insider” at some points and “outsider” at others.
When Kavita spoke about her hectic London lifestyle, we positioned ourselves as fellow
middle-class Londoners, and when we talked about Skype or ageing parents, we were fellow
migrants with family responsibilities overseas. When she greeted me at her door wearing
her dressing gown, requesting a couple of minutes to get dressed before starting the
interview and laughing “you know what it’s like,” we were fellow mothers of small children.
But during discussions of Indian traditions around pregnancy and birth, the importance of
passing on Indian culture to her daughter, or gender and family dynamics she attributed to
her ethnicity, Kavita positioned me as an outsider. She felt the need to explain things to me
because I did not share the knowledge she possessed as a mother with Indian heritage. As a
fellow Londoner of a similar age, she did expect me to be familiar with some elements of
Indian culture, such as festivals and foods, whereas the participants who had migrated from
India assumed I had no such familiarity. Awareness of our shared social locations facilitated
an understanding of where those locations might intersect differently and create a different
assemblage of understanding and experience.

The diversity of the participants, and the intersectional framework of the research, meant
that a straightforward understanding of myself as either “insider” or “outsider” was
impossible to maintain (Dwyer & Buckle 2009). The mapping exercise and online surveys
were methodological tools for widening the frame of the research beyond my own
experience before plunging into the interpersonal research space of the interviews. During
the recruitment, interview and analysis phases, I reflected in audio and written memos on
how my own experiences and social locations may have intersected or contrasted with the
participants’, how this may have affected our interactions, and my intuitive or emotional
response to the participants’ narratives. Field notes also recorded perceived changes in
‘emotional pitch’ during individual interviews, when discussing specific topics or recalling
particular events appeared to increase the emotional intensity of the interview. In reviewing
memos from the transcription phase, I found a particularly striking note, in which I had
described feeling “teary” and “homesick” while reading transcripts, “like I want to pick up
my babies and take them to see where we all come from.” I also noted that this was highly
unusual for me, and unrelated to any specific trigger outside the research process. This
echoes Ryan’s experience of interviews with fellow migrant mothers as “emotional encounters” which could be overwhelming, unexpected and uneasy for both researcher and participant (2008, pp. 309-310).

As Doucet argues, reflecting on how her experience of mothering affected her analysis of interview data, “the ways in which we ‘see’ and ‘hear’ the individuals whom we interview will make a difference to how we construct theory from their words, experiences, and lives” (Doucet 1998). Although grounded in the data, as indeed was Doucet’s analysis, this project has undoubtedly been shaped by both my personal biography and a feminist thematics that tends to highlight themes of agency, resistance, inequality, freedom and power, and to trouble gendered binaries.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the key components of the thesis’s conceptual framework: feminism, matricentric feminism, intersectionality, and social constructionism. Having explained how these components shaped the thesis in practice, I then outlined the key stages and decisions of the data generation and analysis processes. Finally, I have provided an account of my place in the research, emphasising the complexities of shared social locations and the emotional aspects of interview research. This chapter concludes the preliminary part of the thesis, which has outlined the relevant literature, concepts, and historical and contemporary contexts for the research. The remaining chapters present the findings and analysis from the research, starting with an explanation of the parameters and origins of migrant maternal Facebook groups, in the context of the salient motherhood, migration, and technological chronologies.
Chapter 4  Migrant maternal online communities

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the phenomenon and context of the migrant maternal Facebook groups at the heart of this study. The first two sections (4.2, 4.3) outline the defining parameters of the groups, before placing them in the broader context and history of parents’ groups in Australia. The next two sections (4.4, 4.5) explain the origins of the Facebook groups, placing their establishment in the context of the salient motherhood, migration, and technological chronologies. The third pair of sections (4.6, 4.7) introduce the research participants, focusing first on all the mothers, and then drawing attention to the administrators of the groups. Finally, sections 4.8 and 4.9 detail the key activities undertaken under the auspices of the groups, focusing primarily on the various forms of information exchange. These sections discuss how migrant mothers use information exchange as both a social strategy and as part of an ongoing negotiated process of settlement. As the purpose of this chapter is to provide the foundations for the more in-depth analysis of the following chapters, analytical descriptions are interspersed with narrative vignettes. The vignettes are drawn directly from the same research data as the analytical descriptions but are presented in a more narrative style, utilising more evocative language and incorporating researcher interpretation.

This chapter draws on four main conceptual areas to frame the descriptions of the groups. Firstly, concepts of identity and boundaries are used to explore how the parameters of the groups are shaped by their creators. This discussion is extended by introducing notions of privacy, publicness and visibility in social networks and online groups. The concept of choice in migration is brought to bear on discussions of the participants’ migration experiences, in particular, how “middling migrants” (Conradson & Latham 2005c; Luthra & Platt 2016) with a degree of economic self-determination may feel constrained by gendered family dynamics. Finally, information grounds theory (Fisher & Naumer 2006; Pettigrew 1999) and “social information foraging” (Peter Pirolli 2009) are used to conceptualise the social,
informational and affective interchanges that occur under the auspices of the migrant maternal online communities.
Figure 1: Overview of the migrant maternal online communities included in the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of origin referent</th>
<th>Place of residence referent$^{15}$</th>
<th>No of members (at time of administrator interviewed)</th>
<th>Administrators interviewed</th>
<th>Members interviewed</th>
<th>Year of group creation</th>
<th>Intentionally women-only$^{16}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK &amp; Irish</td>
<td>Sydney suburbs</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Kavita, Susie, Gemma, Lisa, Grainne, Diya, Siobhan, Celine, Michelle, Aoife</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Sydney suburbs</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Katja, Heike, Stefanie, Annika, Daniela, Petra, Katrin</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{14}$ Groups listed in order of number of participants interviewed.

$^{15}$ ‘Sydney / Melbourne suburbs’ means the group covered a specific sub-metropolitan area of the city. ‘Sydney / Melbourne city’ means the group covered the whole metropolitan area, rather than specific suburbs.

$^{16}$ This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

$^{17}$ Kavita was a member of both the UK/Irish and Indian mothers’ groups.
Desi is a term used to refer to South Asian people (most commonly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but not exclusively). It can be used to refer to a South Asian diasporic identity (H. Kim 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>City/Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Other Group Members</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Access?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Sydney city</td>
<td>4800+</td>
<td>Aditi</td>
<td>Archana, Pooja, Sunita, Jyoti, Simran, Kavita</td>
<td>Dec 2015</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desi (South Asian)</td>
<td>Melbourne city / Melbourne suburbs (2 groups)</td>
<td>500 / 1000+</td>
<td>Priya, Nisha</td>
<td>Usha, Archana</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>Melbourne city</td>
<td>1000+</td>
<td>Kate, Ana</td>
<td>Maria⁵⁹</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysian</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Sheila, Winnie</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Sydney suburbs</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Lina</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Melbourne city</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Tanja</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Sydney suburbs</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>Yasmin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵⁹ Maria was interviewed as the administrator of the Spanish-speaking mothers’ group but also discussed her experience of being a member of the Brazilian mothers’ group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Spanish-speaking</strong></th>
<th>Melbourne city</th>
<th>245</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Swedish</strong></td>
<td>Sydney city</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>Jenni</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singaporean</strong></td>
<td>Melbourne city</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2008/9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scandinavian</strong></td>
<td>Melbourne suburbs</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sabina</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Creating online communities for migrant mothers

As outlined in Chapter Three (Methodology), the first phase of research for this thesis involved a mapping exercise to identify existing online groups for migrant mothers in Australia. Participants from 14 groups participated in the interview phase: six Sydney-based groups, seven Melbourne-based groups, and one Australia-wide group. The smallest group had 21 online members at the time of the interview, and the largest had nearly 5000. The longest running group had been created in 2008/9, while the most recently formed was established in December 2015 and quickly grew to become the largest group in the study. In terms of geographic origin, the groups in the interview phase had roots in Europe, Asia, and South America. The mapping exercise identified only a few groups from outside these regions, notably from South Africa, New Zealand, and North America, and none proceeded to participate in interviews. Figure 1 presents an overview of the groups involved in the interview phase, from which the data for analysis is predominantly drawn. The rest of this section analyses the defining parameters of the groups.

4.2.1 Setting the parameters and purpose

The group’s names reflected their creators’ expectations of the intended membership and purpose of the group. They all included the following identifiers:

- **Origin** referent (country, region, linguistic group)\(^{21}\)
- **Role** referent (mother, parent or family)
- **Residence** referent (sub-metropolitan area, city, country).

Reflecting the groups’ origins as self-organised, grassroots entities, created by individual or small groups of migrant mothers, they differed in the precise combination of identifiers, and other features such as size and criteria for admission. The preliminary mapping of migrant mothers’ groups proceeded from an assumption that key concepts such as ‘migrant,’ ‘mother,’ and ‘national identity’ would operate as straightforward categories in this context, yet the study found these

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\(^{20}\) Two of the Melbourne-based groups were created and run by the same administrators; one for the whole of Melbourne and one for the sub-metropolitan area of Melbourne where they lived.

\(^{21}\) In one case, the language used for the group’s name acted as an implied place of origin referent. So, the group name, written in Swedish, referred to “Sydney Mothers.”
terms to be unstable and contested. Celine, who migrated from England via New Zealand, and gave birth to both her children in New Zealand, noted, “I’ve never been a British mum. I’ve been a Kiwi mum, despite sounding like I’m English.” Accordingly, Celine had initially been more interested in joining a group for New Zealand mothers in Sydney, citing greater relevance to her maternal experience. After using both groups, Celine found a closer identification with the British mothers, in terms of class, education as displayed in online posts, and the suburbs they lived in.

Kavita, a British migrant with Indian heritage, joined groups for British and Indian mothers in Sydney. Maria, the Colombian administrator of a Spanish-speaking group, also joined a Brazilian mothers’ group and found it to be more useful to her than the group she ran.

Although national identity was a primary means of identifying intended group members, choices and negotiations around naming practices worked to produce particular migrant maternal identities. One Swedish administrator drew on regionally-based historical, linguistic and contemporary commonalities to explain her decision to create a group for Scandinavian, rather than Swedish, mothers. The Spanish-speaking group used language rather than national identity as their origin referent, and included members from both Europe and South America. Administrators of a British and an Indian group responded to requests from members to expand the nomenclature to include Irish and South Asian-identifying mothers respectively, to enable friends, who they understood as having similar needs and experiences, to join the groups. In these ways, creating and joining the groups provided an opportunity for migrant mothers to claim, negotiate and re-shape individual and collective identities. Through these negotiations, the women construct common-sense understandings of identity, re-working ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983/2006) by deploying pragmatic and emotional understandings of national and regional identities, shared histories and language.

The role referent, referring to members’ roles as mothers, parents, or family members, was also contested. Two groups were open to men and women, and used the role referent “parents” (Swedish) or “families” (German). All others used a word pertaining to “mother” in the group name. Six groups included only mothers, and enforced this policy. Three said they would welcome fathers into the group, despite being named as a mothers’ group. The remaining two groups were strictly for women only, and retained a focus on mothering, but were open to

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22 UK/Irish; German (Sydney); Malaysian; Persian; Desi; Singaporean.
23 Swedish Sydney suburbs; Spanish-speaking; Scandinavian Melbourne.
(female) nannies, for example, or any woman with an interest in joining.24 One group from the mapping exercise justified their use of the term “mum” as a more effective search term, noting in their public information: “It’s called Irish Mums because that’s what most people would search for but we recognise that lots of dads do the primary care.”25 No groups exclusively for migrant fathers were identified at this stage. Following the completion of data collection, however, a Facebook group for Indian fathers in Sydney was created. The group appears to be modelled on the Indian mothers’ group in this study, citing the mothers’ group in their public description and guidelines.

None of the groups from the interview phase used the term ‘migrant’ in their nomenclature, and although most were aimed at people who had moved from one country to another, some also included the children of migrants, spouses of migrants, and those with an affiliation for the ‘origin referent’ via heritage or affection. The residence referent was also contested, with some administrators noting a tension between creating a sense of locally-based belonging by insisting members currently reside in the specified area, and providing a useful service for prospective migrants. Chapter Five explores this tension in more detail. Here I wish merely to point to the significance of the naming practices, and some of the identifications, contestations and tensions involved.

4.2.2 Privacy and disclosure in closed Facebook groups

All groups in the interview data, and most in the mapping exercise, operated as ‘closed groups’ within the Facebook platform. Closed groups require each member’s request to join the group be approved by a group administrator. The administrators are either the creator of the group or a member who has been given the role by another administrator. As well as approving and declining membership requests, the administrators also have the power to edit and delete posts, set rules (usually styled as guidelines) for the group, remove and ‘mute’ members, change the group’s name, close or archive the group, and so on. If they wish, they can insist an administrator approves every new post before appearing on the group. Two administrators interviewed for this research used this pre-approval setting (Tanja and Yasmin). Chapter Five extends this discussion of the role of the administrators in creating and curating the groups. The ‘closed group’ setting also

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24 Indian Sydney; Brazilian. In practice, many of the mothers’ groups included women providing services such as childcare, cleaning, and tutoring. Some of them would also be mothers, of course.
25 Text last checked and correct at 7/2/2016
affects the visibility and privacy of the group. Facebook has three group settings: public, closed, and secret. The content of a public group can be viewed by any Facebook user, whereas the content of a closed group can only be viewed by current members of that group. Secret groups do not appear in Facebook search results, and new members can only join, or see information about the group, if invited by a current member. Any Facebook user can see a closed group’s name and description, and its list of members, but only members can view the comments, images and files posted in the group.

Research on Facebook predominantly focuses on its social networking functionality, revolving around a personal profile and linked network of ‘friends’ (for example, d. boyd 2010; Chambers 2017). Less commonly researched are the other features of the “Facebook toolkit” (Smock et al. 2011), such as the Groups tool, which enables users to interact with people beyond their ‘friend’ network, in bounded spaces in the Facebook environment. Facebook’s emphasis on using ‘real names’ and privacy settings to manage disclosure and protection of personal information, means that the migrant maternal groups in this study function differently from the web-based forums on which much previous online mothering research has been based, where content is often publicly visible, with members using pseudonyms (usernames) to maintain some degree of privacy (for example, Jensen 2013; Madge & O’Connor 2006; Pedersen & Lupton 2018). The Groups functionality is one way to manage the “context collapse” noted by many social media researchers (J. L. Davis & Jurgenson 2014; Ellison et al. 2011; Marwick & boyd 2011), in which a person’s otherwise segmented social network – family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances – “converge into a single mass” (J. L. Davis & Jurgenson 2014, p. 478) and complicate an individual’s ability to manage self-presentation and “identity performance” (p. 477). Ellison et al. (2011) contend that the central issue with context collapse is users’ desire to balance privacy concerns with opportunities to gain social capital through self-disclosure. They examine three strategies for managing this: friending behaviours, privacy settings, and disclosures. They do not explore the use of the Groups functionality to balance these needs.

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26 Secret groups would therefore not have appeared in the search phase of this research.
27 One exception is education research, where there is a growing body of scholarship looking at students’ use of Facebook groups as learning environments (for example, Carmichael & MacEachen 2017; Sheeran & Cummings 2018). In migration research, a recent thesis explored the use of (public) Facebook groups by Italian migrants in Australia (C. Davis 2017).
Groups enable users to segment their networks and seek specific resources and relationships (social capital) from specific audiences. For example, I might seek professional networking and career opportunities from the ‘Australian Community Managers’ Facebook group, and maternal advice and friendship from the ‘Inner West Mums’ Facebook group, thus reducing the “context collision” (J. L. Davis & Jurgenson 2014) that might result from an attempt to obtain the same social capital by drawing people into my unsegmented network of ‘Facebook friends.’ In examples drawn from this research, a woman struggling with homesickness can discuss this in a closed group without that discussion being visible to her mother or work colleagues; and a woman who feels her husband is unsupportive of her aspiration to teach their child German, can discuss this in a closed group without it being visible to her husband or his family. Conversely, women in the groups can draw on each other for support and information without the personal disclosures involved in becoming ‘Facebook friends’ (Chambers 2013, p. 47). Using groups in this way is a “privacy-protective strategy” deployed by mothers to facilitate “access to the benefits of open discussion while mitigating the risk of revealing too much information to inappropriate audiences” (Chalklen & Anderson 2017, p. 2).

4.3 **Context: mothers’ groups in Australia**

The online migrant maternal groups are part of an established landscape of mothers’ groups in Australia, both online and offline. Nurse-run groups and baby clinics were established in Australia in the early twentieth century, to educate new mothers and thereby reduce infant mortality rates (Barnes et al. 2003, pp. 14-15). In the 1970s, mothers’ groups shifted from a didactic education and surveillance model to a more socially-oriented service focusing on providing information and facilitating social interaction to support mothers in their new role (Barnes et al. 2003, p. 15; J. S. Lawson & Callaghan 1991, p. 64). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, approximately 65-75% of new parents in Victoria attended a first-time parents’ group (Hanna et al. 2002, p. 210; D. Scott et al. 2001, p. 23). Despite a shift in 1997 to the gender-neutral term “parents’ groups,” these nurse-led groups are still commonly referred to as “mothers’ groups,” and although statistics are not routinely disaggregated by gender, it is believed that more mothers than fathers attend (Hanna et al. 2002, p. 210). In a 2001 study of first-time parents’ groups in two municipal areas in Victoria, no fathers were found on the list of attendees during the twelve-month period, compared to the 314 mothers listed (D. Scott et al. 2001, p. 24). Nurses in the study revealed
divergent opinions on fathers’ involvement in the groups, with some strongly opposed, some strongly in favour and others undecided (p. 26).

In NSW and Victoria, Maternal and Child Health Services commonly facilitate five to eight group sessions for new parents. Information about how to join these parents’ groups is usually provided by a nurse during a postnatal home visit. Many parents continue to self-organise groups for months or years afterwards, creating “self-sustaining supportive social networks” (Scott et al., 2001, p. 24; Callaghan & Lawson, 1991, p.65). Callaghan and Lawson’s study of Sydney-based mothers’ groups found participants valued both the “mothercraft” and “companionship” aspects of the programme (1991, p.65). A decade later, Scott et al.’s Melbourne-based study echoed this finding. Their participants also appreciated the longer-term opportunities to share experiences of motherhood, receive peer support, and opportunities for their children to socialise (2001, p. 28).

In 2014, Strange et al. found that, in addition to learning about parenting and forging friendships, participation in mothers’ groups increased participants’ sense of connection to their local community (2014b). Many parents also attend groups organised under the auspices of Playgroup Australia, a non-profit body with member organisations in the states and territories. Playgroup Australia dates the start of these community groups to the early 1970s, the same period when state-run groups began to shift from surveillance to support (Playgroup Australia 2013). These groups, supported by government funding and small parental contributions, are primarily run by parents and other volunteers, although some specialised groups are facilitated by support workers (Gregory et al. 2016, p. 7; Playgroup Victoria 2015). Playgroups usually meet weekly and focus on providing opportunities for “unstructured learning through play” for children aged 0-5 years, and facilitating “a lasting, mutually supportive community” (Playgroup NSW 2015). Around one-third of children in Australia attend a playgroup before starting school (Gregory et al. 2016, p. 15).

Playgroup NSW has more than 800 affiliated playgroups, attended by over 20,000 children every week. Both Playgroup NSW and Playgroup Queensland trace their organisation’s origins to the decision by a group of local mothers to set up a group to meet their “need to connect, engage, and share in the early stages of motherhood” (Playgroup Queensland 2016).

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28 These groups are usually provided on a universal basis, sometimes alongside specific groups or parenting programmes targeted at parents with additional needs, or whose children may be more “at risk” (NSW Health 2010).
Local support for migrant mothers in Australia

Playgroups are used by state and community groups to support the settlement of newly arrived migrants. Both Playgroup Australia and government Early Childhood Services provide specific support targeted at migrant mothers, and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Not-for-profit organisations, such as Settlement Services International and Save the Children, and religious groups, organise playgroups for new migrants, sometimes in conjunction with Playgroup Australia affiliates (Jesuit Refugee Service Australia 2015; Playgroup NSW 2017; Settlement Services International 2017). Community groups, like the Mums 4 Refugees collective, coordinate volunteers to help run playgroups for newly arrived migrants (Canterbury City Community Centre 2017). Research suggests such playgroups help migrants to overcome social isolation and adjust to Australian parenting cultures and laws, and support children's social and physical development (Child Family Community Australia 2016; Warr et al. 2013). Playgroups also provide “a soft entry point to the service system” (VICSEG New Futures 2014, p. 2), encouraging migrants to access other support services such as language classes. The peer-led mothers’ groups in this study, some of which have initiated playgroups as part of their activities, are not typically included in research about services for migrant mothers and children because they are not affiliated with institutions of state or civil society.

Playgroups targeted at migrant families help to overcome some of the barriers migrants face in accessing generic groups. Research suggests that fluency in English is associated with better rates of attendance at mothers’ groups and playgroups (Gregory et al. 2016, p. 21; D. Scott et al. 2001, p. 26). In addition, Warr et al (2013) point to barriers such as prioritising meeting essential needs, like housing and food, lack of access to transport, feelings of physical insecurity, distrust of services and government intervention coupled with an unfamiliarity with the playgroup concept, and gender roles where women might need to seek permission from their husband to attend. The same research highlights the importance of the playgroup facilitators, themselves migrants, in encouraging families to attend, setting the affective atmosphere of the group, modelling unfamiliar parenting techniques and providing trusted information (p. 45-6). Their role involves many hours of unpaid practical and emotional work, providing practical assistance, facilitating social connections, “managing inter-personal tensions that erupted in playgroups from time to time” (p. 46) and playing a bridging role between the migrants and state services. This finding resonates with the findings of this study around the significant role of the administrators, which is explored in Chapter Five.
4.3.2 Online mothers’ groups

A significant body of research since the late 1990s has explored mothers’ experiences of using online mothering communities (for example, Arnold 2011; Drentea & Moren-Cross 2005; Drentea & Moren-Cross 2011; Dunham et al. 1998; Gibson & Hanson 2013; Jensen 2013; J. Kim et al. 2015; Ley 2011; Madge & O’Connor 2004, 2005, 2006; Parry et al. 2013), although little has been conducted in the Australian context (K. E. Davis 2015; Johnson 2015; Nolan et al. 2015). Echoing the research cited above concerning offline mothers’ groups, studies of online mothers’ groups tend to emphasise their importance for information, social interaction and maternal role development. In contrast to the historical aim of offline mothers’ groups – to inculcate norms of maternal practice – some studies of online mothers’ groups note their potential to act as sites of resistance to gendered, unequal, and intensive parenting norms (Arnold 2011; Drentea & Moren-Cross 2005; Jensen 2013; Johnson 2015; Madge & O’Connor 2006). Existing research into online mothers’ communities has tended to focus on web-based forum platforms, often attached to a parenting website such as BabyCenter. This reflects the dominance of such platforms in the 1990s and 2000s, and the later development of Facebook Groups as a platform for mothering communities.

Facebook groups for mothers in Australia have grown in popularity in the past six years. In Sydney, a Facebook group for mothers in the ‘North Shore’ area, established in 2012, had over 27,000 members by the beginning of 2018. A similar group for mothers in Sydney’s Inner West, created in 2013, had over 20,000 members at the start of 2018. The Facebook groups for migrant mothers in this study were mostly established around the same time as these generic mothers’ groups, and some were directly inspired by them. Many of the research participants were members of multiple online mothers’ groups and networks, across Facebook, forums, and other platforms, and many had also attended a local, nurse-led mothers’ group. The migrant maternal Facebook groups form part of a landscape of online and offline mothering communities, and the mothers’ use of groups across the various modes and platforms informs their expectations and usage of these specific groups.

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29 BabyCenter has ten country-specific sites, plus a Spanish-language version of its US site.
4.4 Origins of the groups: chronology

The groups in the study were all created between 2009 and 2015, mostly between 2012 and 2014. This period coincides with the introduction of a re-designed Groups tool on Facebook in October 2010. Although groups had existed on Facebook before, the re-designed functionality was explicitly designed “to make sharing and communication with small groups of people easier” (Hicks 2010). In 2017, Facebook announced new tools for group administrators, noting the centrality of groups to Facebook’s corporate mission (Jin 2017). The company estimates more than 100 million people worldwide are members of “meaningful groups” – “groups that quickly become the most important part of someone’s experience on Facebook” – and have publicly stated their aim to increase that number to one billion (Jin 2017).³⁰ Between 2010 and 2017, therefore, the use of Facebook for creating and participating in groups became a much more common activity, alongside the interaction centred on users’ individual profiles and friendship networks. The development of the migrant maternal groups in this study should be considered in this context. Few of the participants embarked on both their migration and motherhood journeys accompanied by these Facebook groups. In many cases, their migration and/or transition to motherhood preceded the existence of (or their knowledge of) the groups.

Of the thirteen women who created groups, three did so in the first two years of arriving in Australia³¹ and about half started their group within five years of arrival. Priya, Nicole, and Yasmin created their groups 13, 15, and 26 years respectively after their migration to Australia. Viewed in relation to their motherhood journey, three women started groups shortly after their first child’s birth,³² six around the time of their second child’s birth,³³ and one between the birth of her first and second children.³⁴ Of the remaining three, two migrated with older children and set up a group soon after their arrival, and Jenni was asked by the Swedish Church to set up the Swedish parents’ group before she became a mother. Therefore, most groups were set up either soon after the administrator’s arrival in Australia, or in the years around the birth of their children, or both. They were all created when Facebook groups functionality was being developed and promoted as

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³⁰ In May 2018, Facebook announced a grant funding programme “to celebrate and support the amazing contributions made by Facebook Groups in Australia to local communities.” Details are yet to be confirmed, but the announcement suggests grants may be used “to facilitate in-person meet ups, one-off community events or resources to directly benefit Facebook Group members” (Facebook 2018).
³¹ Sherry (prior to migration), Karen (in first year after migration), Rebecca (in second year).
³² Eva, Sabina, and Yasmin.
³³ Aditi, Ana, Nicole, Nisha, Priya, and Sherry.
³⁴ Kate.
a central plank of their corporate strategy. That some women chose to create groups many years after migration suggests that the condition of being a mother away from ‘home’ may remain a salient source of identity beyond an initial settlement period, and that migrant mothers may desire contact with others with a similar experience or identity even many years after migration. Indeed, the significant life change involved in the transition to motherhood may inspire a renewed interest in such connections. One explanation for the association between group creation and the birth of a second child could be that state-supported mothers’ groups are often restricted to first-time mothers (or parents) (Strange et al. 2014b, p. 2841). Those who have experienced the support of a mothers’ group, finding themselves excluded from the state-run provision, might consider setting up a version of their own.

4.4.1 Vignette 1: A “noticeboard” for Swedish mothers in Sydney becomes a springboard for friendship

At the end of 2012, a group of Swedish mothers with new babies in Sydney’s eastern suburbs wanted to spend time together. The group initially formed through individual connections (“I knew two Swedes, and they knew someone, and they knew someone, so I think we were six people” – Eva) and met weekly in their local park. The mothers exchanged social chat (in Swedish) and discussed life as new mothers living far from home. In so doing, they hoped to expose their children to the Swedish language and other Swedish children. Lina joined the group soon after her arrival in Sydney in 2013, having met group members changing their babies in the facilities in IKEA. To facilitate the coordination of those meetings, Eva set up the Facebook group “as a noticeboard.” The group’s online presence enabled new people to join, beyond the existing social networks of the founding members. After about a year, the members met up less frequently, as some returned to work, and the women developed friendships that went beyond the grounds of the group. Some of them have chosen to send their children to the same preschool, to maintain the connections made through the group. The online platform has enabled the group to continue, despite the lack of in-person meet-ups. At the time of the interview, the online group was mostly used for co-ordinating Swedish celebrations, providing information to new migrants, and buying and selling Swedish items, such as books, clothes or furniture. “I guess it’s a sentimental, emotional thing, just to have a bit of Sweden with you,” Eva explains, “And it’s easier to sell to other Swedes, obviously.”
4.5 Origins of the groups: precedents

The availability, popularity, convenience, and ease of use of Facebook groups coincided with these participants’ need for support and connection. Historical and contemporary precedents for maternally-focused support groups, and the increasing use of online social networks by migrants, also shaped the conditions in which these groups were created. Nisha’s decision to create the groups for South Asian mothers in Melbourne, was influenced by a wealth of contemporary and historical precedents. Nisha grew up in an Indian army family and recalled the importance of the support networks formed by the wives and mothers during the men’s absence. When she had her first child in the United States, she joined a network of Indian mother bloggers and drew on them for support, particularly in the absence of her own mother, who had died before Nisha had children. One of those bloggers met Nisha in Melbourne, shortly after she moved there, providing a point of social continuity during the upheaval of migration. She used an Indian online parenting site with a section for Indian mothers overseas, and used MeetUp.com to find other Indian parents in her U.S. city. For Nisha, the potential of female-focused networks was well-established, and in Melbourne in 2014, she chose a Facebook group as the platform on which to launch the one she needed. Locally-based Facebook groups for mothers in Australia were gaining popularity at that time. Aditi, Yasmin, Rebecca, and Sabina were all inspired by their local mothers’ Facebook groups in Sydney and Melbourne to set up groups to meet their specific needs as migrant mothers. Yasmin was also inspired by her local state-run mothers’ group, and hoped to replicate the experience of her “Australian mothers’ group” but with local Persian mothers. Face-to-face mothers’ groups were also a key mechanism by which participants learned of existence of the online groups.

4.5.1 Vignette 2: Indian mothers in Sydney: From events committee to culturally sensitive support community

In 2014, a member of a generic Sydney mothers’ Facebook group proposed a playgroup for mothers of Indian heritage. In response to claims by some group members that this constituted “reverse racism,” others organised a ‘Bollywood night’ to reaffirm their commitment to cultural diversity, bring people together, and raise money for a women’s health charity (Nicastri 2014; Walther 2014). To assist in organising future events, the event’s organising committee suggested setting up a local Indian mothers’ Facebook group. The group was set up in October 2015 and quickly grew to 80 members. The administrators decided to open the group to Indian mothers in
the whole of Sydney, not just in the original group of suburbs: “We thought, we are such a minority in Sydney, why do we want to create further divisions [...]?” Administrators encouraged members to add their friends, and offered small incentives such as prize draws. The group grew to 1000 members in a few months. Two years later, the group has over 16,000 members, by far the largest group in this study. From its origins as an events committee, the group has developed into a “culturally sensitive” support community for Indian mothers in Sydney. Aditi, the administrator interviewed for this study, is proud of having created “a portal for Indian women” where they can talk, get “culturally sensitive advice” and meet each other. “People have made friends, made friends for their kids; they can meet like-minded people, you know, just a sense of belonging.”

4.6 Introducing the participants

The 41 research participants were all mothers, ranging in age from 30 to 49. Four had teenaged children, but most had younger children. Excluding the teenagers and babies in utero, the average age of participants’ children was four years old at the time of interview. 37 women had arrived in Australia since 2000, 19 of whom had arrived since 2010. So, the average participant had one or two young children and had arrived seven to ten years prior to the interviews. All the participants in this research were women who had given birth to their children, and had been responsible for their care since their birth and during pregnancy. Most lived in nuclear family arrangements with their children and partner, although some participants had experience of living in extended family settings (with parents, parents-in-law, or other relatives) either in their country of origin or in Australia. Thus, the research participants conformed to the narrowest, most normative understandings of the term ‘mother.’ 27 women had become mothers for the first time in Australia, while eight had given birth to all their children in their country of origin. Two had their first child in their home country and a second child in Australia, two had birthed all their child/ren in a third country (neither Australia nor their home country), and two had their first child in a third country, and a subsequent child in Australia.

Participants mostly came from India (9), Germany (9), and the United Kingdom (8), with smaller numbers from Sweden (4), Malaysia (3), Ireland (3), Brazil (2), Iran (1), Colombia (1) and Singapore (1). The participants were drawn from populations with diverse relationships to Australia’s

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35 The following discussion relates to all participants, both administrators and members.
36 Sherry temporarily returned home to Malaysia to give birth to her first child, during their time living in Europe.
migration history. While migrants from Britain and Ireland have had a large presence in Australia since its colonisation, and remain the largest group of overseas-born people, migrants from India and Malaysia arrived in large numbers only after the end of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s. The Indian-born population has almost tripled since 2006, now numbering around 455,388 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017b). Brazil represents a relatively small source of migrants to Australia, but sits alongside India, Pakistan and Nepal as one of the fastest-growing migrant populations in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017c). Brazilian and Colombian migrants to Australia in the twenty-first century have been predominantly skilled migrants and students, in contrast to Latin American migrants in the mid-late 20th century who arrived mostly under political refugee and family reunion programmes (Del Río 2014, pp. 168-176).

All the women were, or had been, in long-term partnerships (mostly marriages) with men. Two-thirds of the participants were in a relationship with another migrant, and three-quarters of these (n=20) had migrated to Australia together. The remaining third were in relationships with Australian men, and half of them had met overseas and subsequently migrated to Australia. These permutations of relationship, migration, and motherhood were unevenly distributed. For example, five out of the eight participants from the Sydney-based German group had Australian partners, and four of those five were living in the specific area of Sydney where their partner had grown up. This meant that they mostly had access to some element of family support, and to their partner’s friendship network, and proximity to knowledge about Australian systems. On the other hand, they sometimes felt isolated from their own culture, and solely responsible for teaching their child to speak German and facilitating relationships with their German relatives. In addition, most of them felt they had little choice but to remain in Australia, with no prospect of returning ‘home’ due to their husband’s reluctance to live and work in a non-Anglophone country. All participants from this group, whether in relationships to Australian or German men, had become mothers after they migrated.

By contrast, all the Indian-born participants from the Sydney-based Indian group were married to Indian men. 37 Three had migrated with their Indian husbands, two had migrated on spousal visas to join husbands who had already settled in Australia, and one had migrated as a secondary applicant on her husband’s work visa but had remained in India for her pregnancy and the birth of

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37 The British-Indian member (also a member of the UK/Irish group) was married to a British-Indian man she had met in Australia.
their child, due to their ineligibility for public healthcare on his visa. In these migrant/migrant couples, the women had less access to ongoing, co-present family support, although most experienced extended visits from parents and/or parents-in-law, especially around the time of the birth of their children. Most women also made extended visits to India with their young child/ren. As a family, they had less information and knowledge about Australian health and education systems, and initially had little access to friendship networks beyond work colleagues. On the other hand, they tended to be less anxious about passing down their home language, values and culture, as this could be achieved within the home environment. These patterns in family formation are broadly reflected in the national census data. While 55% of Swedish and 46% of German migrants with a spouse or partner are in relationships with Australian-born partners, the figures are 4% for partnered Indian migrants, 7% for Iranian migrants, and 25% for Brazilian migrants (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017a).

Broadly the participants could be described as “middling migrants” (Conradson & Latham 2005c; Luthra & Platt 2016; Robertson & Runganaikaloo 2014). Mothers have largely been overlooked in the middling transnationalism literature, due to its focus on youth, mobility, labour market frameworks and individualistic motivations. Key studies in this area focus on students, working holidaymakers, and young professionals seeking “overseas experience” (Conradson & Latham 2005a) or hoping to “build a global career” (E. L.-E. Ho 2011), perhaps before returning home to start a family (Conradson & Latham 2005b). The dominant labour market framework in middling migration research, which reflects contemporary managed migration systems’ emphasis on strategic skills, occupations in demand, and education with a labour market value, renders invisible the social and reproductive labour predominantly performed by mothers. I suggest a relational and gender-sensitive approach might better encompass the experiences of ‘middling migrant mothers.’ Taking this approach, I identified seven key factors which identify these mothers as ‘middling’:

1. Occupation (their current or previous occupation, and/or that of their partner).

2. Access to mobile computing devices (smartphones, tablets and laptops) and internet connection, enabling “virtual intimacy” in a transnational family (Wilding 2006).

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38 Again, Kavita, the British-Indian migrant, is an exception. She was very conscious of needing outside support to enable her to pass down an Indian cultural identity to her daughter successfully.

39 All figures in this paragraph are rounded for clarity.
3. Access to travel and ability to make extended visits, enabling transnational, mobile, co-present family support.

4. Orientation to paid domestic help, seeing themselves as more likely to employ domestic staff than be employed as domestic workers.

5. Motivation and circumstances surrounding their migration, including love, family formation and gendered sense of obligation.

6. Access to a personal network of professional expertise (transnational knowledge network) on which they could draw, especially pregnancy and early motherhood.

7. Access to digitally assisted migrant maternal communities (locally emplaced knowledge networks).

In establishing these ‘middling’ characteristics, I have taken a relational approach, taking into account the participants, their partners, and their immediate family networks. For example, almost all participants had, or had previously had, professional careers, but at the time of interview, many described themselves as ‘stay at home mothers’ or were on maternity leave, working part-time or casually, or were self-employed. Taking into account their experience and aspirations, as well as their partner’s occupation offers greater insight into their status. Almost all participants had family members with access to internet-enabled devices that facilitated frequent communication via video call and instant message. Most said they communicated with friends or family on a daily or weekly basis, mainly using Facetime, WhatsApp, Facebook. Many noted this frequency had increased since their children were born. Siobhan’s parents, having previously avoided communicating with her via Skype or Facetime, immediately purchased an iPad when they heard she was pregnant so they could watch “the bump” on Facetime, and now Facetime every day with their six-month-old grandchild. Similarly, almost all participants had family members with the means and ability to travel to visit them in Australia, and in some cases to stay for many months. Where this was not the case, for example where parents were sick, disabled, or financially unable to travel, this was often a cause of sadness. Many women who gave birth in Australia made extended visits home, during pregnancy or the first year of their child’s life. Combined with visits from family around the same time, this meant that some participants spent most of their first year of motherhood in the company of a family member besides their partner. Usually these family visits and visits home were designed to provide respite to the new mothers,
to help with domestic tasks and provide emotional support in the early days and months of motherhood. Sometimes grandmothers returned later to provide childcare to support their daughters’ return to employment. This kind of mobile, co-present support, explored in research on “transnational grandparenting” (Nedelcu 2017) contrasts with most scholarship on new migrant mothers, which tends to emphasise their isolation from family and other support networks.

Participants’ relationship to paid domestic help provides insights into their ‘middling’ status. Women from Brazil, Singapore, Malaysia and India, for whom access to paid domestic help was commonplace before migration tended to struggle with the daily domestic tasks and individualised responsibility for family and domestic matters that followed migration to Australia. Ana noted that “in Brazil, everyone has a maid,” while in Melbourne this was both beyond her means and less socially acceptable. These were not elite migrants who could travel with domestic staff or employ full-time staff in Australia. Neither were they part of a global care chain, migrating to provide domestic labour to Australian families. Motherhood heightened the sense of comparison between the support they would have experienced ‘back home’ from paid domestic staff, with the increased domestic tasks and lack of support that accompanied new motherhood in Australia. Even when parents visited to support their daughters during early motherhood, some struggled to provide the domestic help their daughters desired. Archana described the “friction” that resulted from her parents’ inability to help, due to their age and lack of experience of carrying out household cleaning, combined with expectations of cleanliness that she could not meet in the absence of daily paid domestic help. In this area, therefore, as with access to technology, ease of travel, and access to professional expertise, the participants’ middling status was a relational rather than an individual characteristic.

Migrants’ reasons for pursuing a life in another country may also be an indicator of their ‘middling’ status. Education, work, love and lifestyle sit in the middle of a migration motivation spectrum, with “survival migration” (Betts 2013) at one end, and “frequent-flying, fast-lane, global elites” (Smith & Favell 2006, p. 2) at the other. Participants’ reasons for migrating were often multifactorial, combining factors such as work opportunities, difficult economic or environmental conditions at home, love, and lifestyle. Many participants had experienced multi-stage migration journeys, with changing motivations. For example, Sheila, who originally migrated from Malaysia for secondary and tertiary education, later returned to pursue a relationship with her partner. Grainne had intended a short stay as part of a worldwide ‘gap year’ travel experience, but a
tempting job offer for her husband coinciding with the deteriorating economic situation in Ireland following the 2007/8 global financial crisis, meant they had been in Sydney for nearly a decade. A third of participants cited their relationship with their partner as a primary motivation, and a further third cited their partner’s work opportunities as their main reason for moving. The next most common reason (n=7) involved lifestyle choices, desire for travel and new experiences. Three cited work opportunities for themselves and their partner, and two participants had moved mainly for their own work. Participants engaged in multi-layered decision-making. For example, Indian women who had initially cited their husband’s work as their reason for migrating, went on to discuss other factors such as the pollution in their home country, or their desire for a better “work-life balance” through part-time or less stressful employment opportunities not available back home.

This sense of choice and self-determination could be considered definitional of middling or more privileged migrants, particularly in the context of an individualised society in which “life is what you make it” (Beck-Gernsheim 1998, p. 141). However, this is rendered less certain by the gender dynamics described by some participants. The centrality of the couple relationship in many women’s migration motivations, and the prioritisation of their partner’s work and emotional well-being, suggests a gendered unevenness in this area. Although many had willingly migrated to Australia to settle with their partner, or to take the opportunity provided by their husband’s offer of work abroad, a minority of participants felt their migration choices were heavily constrained by their husbands’ actions or preferences. One woman’s husband unilaterally decided to migrate to look for work in Australia (his country of origin), leaving her behind with their young child. Faced with the choice of following him, or marital and family breakdown, she chose migration but remained deeply unhappy. Another woman had migrated reluctantly for her husband’s “dream job,” regretted doing so, but felt powerless to convince him even to move to an area of Sydney where she would be happier, let alone to return home. Women who had migrated to Australia with a homesick Australian partner explained that he would not do the same for them, leaving them to manage their homesickness with no hope of a permanent return. Most of these women were themselves educated, skilled professionals, in situations more complex than the stereotypical male migrant with “trailing wife” model. Yet it was clear that many women did not

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40 Reasons included: to get married, to settle with partner, fell in love, partner wanted to return to Australia. Not included: partner’s work opportunities.
feel they had equal decision-making power with regards to migration decisions (Hiller & McCaig 2007).

The final two elements on the list are ways that middling migrant mothers are able to address their intense need for knowledge to assist them in finding their way as new mothers, or as mothers in a new place. As well as accruing new skills and knowledge, migrant mothers also need to assess competing knowledge claims to navigate their way between the knowledge and frameworks they are presented with in their new home, and those acquired through their upbringing, including their own experiences of being mothered and witnessing mothering. Chapter Seven addresses this in more detail. The ability to draw on a transnational knowledge network comprising friends and family with experience as doctors, nurses, midwives, physiotherapists and so on, supported this complex navigation. Diya recalled sending WhatsApp messages to her aunt and uncle, a nurse and doctor respectively, to ask their advice. This combination of professional knowledge and personal connection appeared to engender a sense of trust in the advice offered, providing reassurance to mothers facing significant life transitions in a new environment. However, these personal transnational knowledge networks often cannot provide information about that new environment or the cultural and institutional discourses that structure the experiences of motherhood in that new context. I suggest that part of the motivation for creating and joining locally emplaced migrant maternal online communities is to provide and share that locally emplaced transnational migrant maternal knowledge.

4.6.1 Vignette 3: Simran

Simran arrived in Sydney six months before our interview. She migrated from India with her baby, joining her husband who had been working in Sydney for a year. She was three months pregnant when he was offered the opportunity in Sydney, and they decided she would remain in India until after the child was born, because their visa did not give them access to affordable healthcare for the pregnancy and birth. In India, she lived, somewhat reluctantly, with her husband’s parents and sister, who shared responsibility for domestic tasks and baby care. She also had access to paid domestic help. Simran’s parents lived with them in Sydney for the first five months. Since they left, Simran has found the transition to sole responsibility for all domestic tasks and childcare very tiring.
Simran feels lonely. She spends most of her time alone with her toddler, while her husband is at work. Recently, she met another Indian mother in the local shopping centre, who told her about the Facebook group for Indian mothers in Sydney, and a local Indian mothers’ WhatsApp group. Simran joined both groups and now meets up with other Indian mothers during the day with their children, and sometimes in the evenings without children. She has been to dance classes and the cinema with them. She says the groups give her a chance to connect as a woman, and not just as a mother. She also has access to information about community events and festivals, and she can watch (and participate in) online conversations. Simran wishes she had found the group earlier.

Bringing up a baby has been the hardest thing she has ever done, she says, harder than her MBA or anything in her working life. She looks forward to her daughter attending childcare so she can return to paid employment.

4.7 Introducing the administrators

Unlike many studies of online communities and information grounds, this study attends to the experiences of their creators and managers, not just their members. In the context of a site like Facebook, where it is relatively simple for users to create groups, non-specialist individuals can easily become ‘accidental community managers,’ responsible for, in Facebook’s words, “groups that quickly become the most important part of someone’s experience on Facebook” (Jin 2017).

This section briefly introduces the administrators, while the role of the administrators is examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

The women who ran the migrant maternal online communities were all aged between 34 and 45 at time of the interview, with children ranging in age from infants to teenagers. On average, they had become mothers for the first time at the age of 31, slightly older than the national average of 28.9 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). They all had one or two children, except for Nicole who had three. The fifteen administrators came from India (3), Sweden (3), Germany (2), Brazil (2), the United Kingdom (1), Malaysia (1), Colombia (1), Iran (1) and Singapore (1). On average, the administrators had lived in Australia for longer than the members interviewed (10 years, compared to seven years).

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41 Although born in Central America, Sabina identified most strongly with Sweden, the country where she was raised.
Administrators cited both self-oriented and community-oriented reasons for creating the groups. That is, they were motivated by what they could obtain, and what they could provide for others. Social factors predominated in both sets of reasons. Self-oriented social reasons included a desire for connection or friendship, a place to chat and share experiences. Secondary self-oriented reasons included a need for a support network, information, and connection to their culture. Community-oriented reasons revolved around creating a means for other people to chat, make connections, find help and information. Only one administrator, Sherry, cited purely self-oriented informational goals as her motivation. Overall, social interaction appeared to be the primary aim of creating the groups, with information-sharing a secondary aim, alongside support and cultural connection. This suggests the groups fit comfortably within an information grounds framework, in which information exchange is a by-product of social interaction in a space.

Karen Pettigrew (now Fisher)’s “information grounds” scholarship theorises information exchange as a by-product of social interaction in particular spaces, such as health clinics, playgrounds and workplaces. People gather at these information grounds “for a primary, instrumental purpose other than information sharing” and benefit from the information they obtain “along physical, social, affective, and cognitive dimensions” (Fisher & Naumer 2006, p. 99). Information grounds research highlights how the varied types of interactions and individuals in a specific space combine to create a rich context for information-sharing. With its emphasis on information gathering as a by-product of interactions in everyday space, it is particularly useful for exploring “everyday life information-seeking” (Savolainen 1995). This thesis draws on the concept of “information grounds” as a way of conceptualising the migrant maternal groups as spaces that combine information exchange, emotions, sociality, spatiality and belonging.

Studies of migrants and mothers suggest both have significant information needs and are, to varying extents, navigating unfamiliar territory. They indicate that migrants and mothers use a wide range of information grounds, that they value both social and informational interactions, and that these interactions support their settlement in a new place or new maternal role. As Khoir et al. note, “Information grounds are the places where immigrants meet, share with other people and get involved in social interactions. These are crucial activities during their settlement that deserve to be further explored” (2015a, p. 2). Recurrent themes in the maternal literature include the centrality of information sourced from other mothers, and the relations of sociality, support, judgement or co-constructed maternal identity that are imbricated in an exchange of information.
that takes place within the “bewilderingly overdetermined discursive territory” of contemporary motherhood (Quiney 2007, p. 36).

4.7.1 Vignette 4: Ana

Ana met her Australian husband in Brazil and came to settle with him in his hometown of Melbourne in 2006. Fearing hostility towards her as a migrant, Ana felt nervous about moving to Australia, leaving behind her family, job, and culture in Brazil. Before migrating, she found a group for Brazilians in Melbourne on the social network Orkut and posted on there. The day after she arrived, six or seven people from the group came to greet her, and they became friends. A few years later, when some of them became pregnant around the same time, they decided to create the Facebook group for Brazilian mothers in Melbourne. Now 35, Ana has two young children and runs her own retail company. Having previously focused on assimilating into Australian culture, Ana feels the group has allowed her to reconnect with her Brazilian “roots” and incorporate elements of Brazilian culture into her family life. Five years after starting the group, Ana thinks she would feel “lost” and “unsupported” without the connections and advice provided through it. Ana takes a serious approach to her role as admin of the mothers’ group, spending 10-15 hours a week on tasks relating to it. She finds it demanding but satisfying, describing herself as a “proud mum” of the group when she reflects on the support mothers receive from each other.

4.8 Information exchange as settlement strategy

This section briefly describes the main activities performed in the groups before focusing on activities involving the pursuit and provision of information. Activity levels in the groups varied, with some groups seeing many more interactions than others. In some groups, the interactions predominantly took place offline. For example, the Brazilian mothers’ group was very active online, with questions posted and answered several times a day, and administrators took an interventionist approach to ensuring the group ran smoothly. By contrast, the Persian mothers’ group saw few online interactions, with most of the meaningful activity occurring during the playgroup organised by the group’s administrator. In some cases, the activities and focus had shifted over the lifetime of the group. For example, the group for Swedish mothers in Sydney started primarily with offline meet-ups, but as the founders’ children got older, and many mothers returned to work, the group’s focus shifted more to online communication.
Broadly speaking, the main activities reported by participants were:

- Seeking and offering information
- Seeking and offering emotional and practical support
- Building social connections and friendships
- Organising offline events and meet-ups
- Buying and selling (mostly second-hand) goods
- Renting property and finding accommodation for visitors

This categorisation draws on the answers provided by administrators and group members during the interviews. It reflects, therefore, the relative importance placed on the various activities by the participants, and the frequency with which they were reported. It is not drawn from a content analysis of posts on the group. Not all activities occurring under the auspices of the group would be available for content analysis. Activities occurring at offline events may not be referred to online. In addition, interviews revealed that reading, searching and private messages between group members were all common activities leaving little or no trace in the semi-public space of the online discussion section.

Participants described five main ways in which information was sought and provided on the group. Firstly, members can write a post in the ‘discussion’ area of the group, requesting information. This post is visible to all members, who can choose whether to respond, either by writing a comment underneath the post or by contacting the poster by private message. Secondly, members can use the search function to look for previous posts on a similar topic. This requires only the passive involvement of other members – they need to leave their post and comments undeleted so they are available to be searched – and is invisible to other members. Thirdly, members might seek information from each other during their offline meet-ups. Fourthly, members may use the tactic described by Winnie, a Malaysian mother who had settled in Queensland before moving to Melbourne. Rather than posting on the group, or searching previous posts, Winnie chose specific members she felt “comfortable” to approach, requested to become ‘Facebook friends’ with them, and then asked them questions in a one-to-one online conversation.
Finally, some participants described providing unsolicited information by posting links to articles on topics they considered of interest to their fellow group members.

Most commonly, the information sought and provided revolved around setting up family life in a new country. For example, finding schools, childcare, and doctors, buying cars, finding accommodation, navigating welfare and health systems, and so on. Mothers also sought information on where to purchase specific products they were used to buying in their country of origin, most commonly, food and ingredients. Many questions revolved around visits home: advice on flying long distances with young children, airline recommendations, accommodation or activity ideas for the trip. Two members of a Swedish mothers’ group, each flying alone with two children, arranged to fly at the same time for mutual support. Participants sought information about local children’s activities, where to go to celebrate cultural festivals, advice on passports, birth registrations and citizenship issues, international money transfers, recipes and remedies specific to their country of origin, advice on managing postnatal depression and other mental health issues.

For some participants, the online mothers’ group was their primary source of information. Simran explained, “So, anything related to myself, or for my baby. So, if I do not know, then I would ask.” The types of questions sometimes reflected differences between Australia and members’ countries of origin. For example, many Swedish migrant parents are surprised by the difference in childcare systems, particularly the level of fees, so this elicits frequent questions in the Swedish groups. In the Indian, Singaporean and Malaysian groups, questions about education are common, as mothers attempt to navigate different systems, and conflicting educational philosophies and techniques. Karen, the administrator of the group for Singaporean mothers in Melbourne, recalled discussions on the relative lack of homework in Australian schools, and noted that members bought school workbooks on visits to Singapore and sold them to other members of the group.

In proposing information exchange as a settlement activity, I conceptualise settlement as ongoing negotiation, rather than a short-lived transition or assimilation. Simran, a relatively new migrant with a young baby, had little access to local information before joining the Indian mothers’ group, and used the group to gain a sense of familiarity with local facilities and norms as part of an initial settlement process. By contrast, Karen’s experience, which is based on observations of Singaporean migrants with older children, many of whom have lived in Australia for years,
suggests migrant mothers may continue to seek information from each other as they navigate unfamiliar systems such as education. Aditi imagined consulting her Indian mothers’ group as her children reach school age in a few years:

“I’m quite interested in how mums with older kids perceive education. And I think when my time comes, it will be handy. Like private schooling, public schooling, there are quite strong opinions on there, so I think when my time comes, it will be interesting for how I perceive things. Things like whether to hold off your child or don’t hold off.42 With Australians, it’s very common to hold off, whereas in India, it comes, you find it hard, it’s difficult to accept that you’re holding off your child for this reason.”

Aditi’s comments suggest that mothers’ need for information may be intimately bound up with the phases of their children’s life. Rather than fading according to time since arrival, migrant mothers’ information needs may attain renewed salience as their children move through milestones, such as vaccinations, starting school, or adolescence. For migrant mothers, this pursuit of information is part of an active negotiation that considers local customs alongside the norms of their country of origin. Those norms are not consigned to the past, rather, they form an active part of discussions with family and friends, and with fellow members of these online groups.

4.8.1 Vignette 5: Information-seeking in the Brazilian mothers’ group

The Brazilian mothers’ group sees frequent online discussions. New and prospective migrants seek advice from more settled members about which suburb to move to, how the health and education systems work, and how to find a good school or doctor, ask for recommendations of Brazilian doctors, dentists, nannies, cleaners, masseuses, manicurists, and other service providers. Mothers commonly ask questions relating to children’s food and sleep. Discussions around bullying or illnesses elicit heartfelt responses. Members share recipes and meal ideas. During the Zika virus outbreak,43 members discussed the safety of travelling to Brazil. So much information has been shared in the group that the administrators have compiled some of it into files stored in the group, and some has even been collated in a pamphlet that is now distributed to new migrants by the

42 Aditi is referring to the choice some parents have in NSW about their child’s school starting age.
43 In South America in 2015, there was an outbreak of the Zika virus. Infection in pregnant women may cause severe birth defects (Department of Health 2018).
local Brazilian consulate. One of the administrators, Ana, shares articles with the group about parenting, particularly children’s sleep and behaviour issues, and information about migration, such as how she has supported her mother to migrate to Australia.

4.9 Information exchange as social strategy

Information grounds theory’s attention to spatiality and sociality provides a useful foil to theories of online information behaviours that focus on the pursuit of information as the primary goal, such as Pirolli’s “social information foraging” theory (2009). Social information foraging theory explains strategies for effective information-seeking by collectives, and by individuals using their social networks to find information. Pirolli suggests that having access to multiple clusters of information is advantageous in enabling people to make connections between bits of information held in different places, and thus create new knowledge. His focus remains individualistic, acknowledging the benefits of group membership for providing “actual or potential resources that can be utilized or mobilized to achieve individual goals” (p. 606). Participants in the groups mentioned occasions when they had approached the group in this way, as a potential source of specific types of information. For example, when Aoife was preparing to move from Singapore, she joined the group for the “shared tacit knowledge” they contained, seeking answers to questions like, “How do I set up GP registration? What vaccinations do I have to have? What stuff should I buy when I’m home in Europe for Christmas that you can’t get here?”

For Pirolli, the social is a means to an individualistic end. Unlike information grounds theory, social information foraging does not address the two-way interaction between sociality and information. When Counts and Fisher applied information grounds theory to an online mobile social networking app, they adjusted Fisher’s taxonomy to reflect the more central role of information-sharing online. Information-sharing was found to facilitate social interaction, as well as operating the other way around (Counts & Fisher 2010). As Pelaprat and Brown also argue:

Posting a question or responding to a question on a forum is not an isolated social action where the goal is simply having your question answered. It is, rather, a first move of [sic] in a series of turn-taking exchanges that form social bonds of diverse kinds (2012, para. 39).
Thus, information exchange can be both a means of seeking sociality and a by-product of social interaction. The relative importance of information or sociality for an individual may change over time, in relation to life course and length of involvement in the information ground. To illustrate this, the following analysis attends in turn to the administrators’ motivations for creating their group; the members’ motivations for joining; and the activities performed and observed by the group members.

As discussed above, a desire for social interaction drove most administrators’ decision to create their group, with information exchange an important secondary reason. Members’ reasons for joining the groups fell into four categories: social, informational, cultural and other (business, curiosity, transactional). Again, social reasons dominated, with most hoping to find friendship or a support network, to arrange to meet up, and to ‘connect’ with people. Information-seeking was a primary motivator for a minority of participants, predominantly information needed to effect successful family settlement (health, housing, education and childcare) and cultural maintenance (information about festivals and procuring culturally specific food, clothes, or services). Two participants, Aoife and Jyoti, emphasised that they joined only for information-seeking, dismissing the social and affective practices they observed others undertaking. Aoife noted, “I’m certainly not a group member who necessarily wants to meet any of these people face to face or – I don’t take that kind of support from them. I use them [for] information-seeking, opinion-seeking ....” For Jyoti, the Indian mothers’ group is useful for finding information about “Indian things” but she does not consider them to be her “counsel” or “go-to people” for support.

For many other participants, however, sociality was their primary motivator for joining. A few hoped sociality might bring the opportunity to learn from other mothers. Simran, a recent migrant from India, cited socialising as her primary motivator but recognised the informational by-products of that socialising: “Every time I meet them, I learn something new. [...] They make you more familiar with the space.” Knowledge acquisition through social interaction helps Simran feel “more familiar” with her local environment, an important step in feeling ‘at home’ after migration (Hage 1997).

While social practices dominated the motivations for creating and joining groups, an analysis of reported uses of the group found that information-centred practices were more commonly mentioned. Participants reported using the groups to ask and respond to questions, to exchange
advice, to learn from each other, and to find information and services. This information-seeking related to both emotional topics, such as how to manage loneliness, homesickness, family relationships, and instrumental information about systems, products and services. Social practices such as finding friends, socialising, arranging to meet up, chatting, were mentioned but were less prominent than the informational aspects. Cultural and community factors comprised a third theme. Included in this were responses around feeling closer to home through their participation in the group, accessing cultural or linguistic opportunities for themselves or their children, arranging or discussing festivals, accessing a sense of community. Other uses of the group included buying, selling or borrowing goods (usually books, toys, and clothing) and discussing news and current affairs.

The participants’ aspirations for social interaction suggest the information sharing practices they describe are part of a social strategy. As Pelaprat and Brown suggest, an initial post is an “invitation to dialogue” as much as it is a request for help, and a response to a question is also a response “to the call to recognise and be recognised” (2012, para. 36). Participants gain practical information through these exchanges and obtain the social interaction they seek. Together, these interactions affect participants’ sense of community, belonging and identity.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the ways in which the participants, as administrators and members of the Facebook groups, come together and understand their roles in the communities as they form. Creating and joining the migrant maternal groups provides an opportunity for migrant mothers to claim, negotiate and re-shape individual and collective identities. In a re-working of Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” (1983/2006), these middling migrant mothers deploy common-sense and emotional understandings of their national, maternal, and migrant identities, in search of the locally emplaced information and social connections they need to navigate their lives as migrant mothers in Australia. As part of that process, migrant mothers use the affordances of closed Facebook groups to gain access to relevant information while maintaining a sense of control over disclosures of personal information. The next chapter deepens this analysis, focusing on the role of the administrators in creating and curating the groups as interactive spaces in which migrant mothers can find what they need to feel ‘at home.’
Chapter 5  Creating and curating online communities: digital labour and ‘meta maternal practices’

5.1  Introduction

In the previous chapter, Ana remarked that she felt like a “proud mum” when she thought about the work she had done to set up and foster her Brazilian mothers’ group. This chapter focuses on the role of the administrators in creating and curating the groups as interactive spaces in which migrant mothers can find what they need to feel ‘at home.’ Many studies of online communities and information grounds focus only on the experiences of end users, but it is important to recognise “the very real labour of building and sustaining virtual communities” (D. Bell 2007, p. 255). In the participative internet era (Fuchs 2014, p. 44), at one time commonly referred to as “Web 2.0” (T. O’Reilly 2005; T. O’Reilly & Batelle 2009), non-specialist individuals may find themselves in the position of ‘accidental community managers’ of the groups they create. In the organisational space, businesses and non-profit agencies appoint professional community managers “to build and maintain brand loyalty by cultivating a dedicated community through social media, live social events, and strategic communication with consumers” (de Winter et al. 2017, p. 37). Individual Facebook users, having made use of the user-friendly functionality to create a group, may find themselves in a similar, if unpaid and differently motivated, role. I use the term ‘accidental community manager’ to distinguish it from the role of professional community manager, but, as this chapter will demonstrate, there is much that is intentional in their practices. This chapter attends to the experiences and practices of these accidental community managers, recognises the importance of their labour for creating and maintaining grassroots online communities, and analyses the impact of their choices on the communities they manage, the members of those communities, and themselves.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the boundary work undertaken by the administrators to create and maintain the migrant maternal communities. While Fisher and Naumer (2006) focus on information grounds where people with specialist knowledge
interact with information-seekers, the migrant maternal online communities in this study are created and managed by administrators whose status, experience and needs match those of the other participants. This means that their boundary-defining practices constitute acts of self-definition, as well as community-building. Moving from the peripheries to the centre, the second section focuses on the administrators’ curation practices, which create spaces of trust, similarity and sociality. Together, the administrators’ boundary work and curation construct a “narrative of sameness” (Seligman 2012, p. 190) and a community norm of compassion among mothers, providing a shortcut to “in-group trust” (Weigert 2012, p. 178) that increases the groups’ efficacy as vehicles for information-exchange, sociality and belonging. The final section considers what kind of labour the administrators are engaged in. Bringing together concepts from feminist digital media scholarship, feminist migration scholarship, and Black feminist motherhood scholarship, this section considers alternative ways to conceptualise the administrators’ role and labour: are they engaged in information agriculture, maternal leadership, digital housewifery (Jarrett 2016) or digital community mothering?

Feminist scholars of technology have argued that online community management, both paid and unpaid, should be understood in relation to gendered emotional, affective, relational, and reproductive labour (de Winter et al. 2017; Jacobson 2017; Jarrett 2016; Portwood-Stacer 2014). De Winter et al. (2017) suggest that community management is a “feminized profession” due to the centrality of “communication, care, and emotional labor” to the role (p. 40). Successful community management relies on empathetic and nurturing behaviours, which are often naturalised as feminine qualities, and thus, De Winter et al. contend, undervalued and rendered invisible (p. 42). At the same time, Jacobson argues, the analytic and technical skills which are equally necessary for successful community management, are de-emphasised because – as masculine or neutrally-coded skills – they do not fit the narrative that community management is naturally more suited to women (2017, p. 112). Drawing on a Marxist feminist analysis, Jarrett (2016) suggests that the value of digital consumer labour has been rendered analytically invisible in the same way as women’s social reproductive labour. While Jarrett argues that all consumers are creating commercial value by their presence and interactions online, the aim of this chapter is to make visible the labour of managing online information grounds in the form of Facebook groups.
In analysing the ‘meta maternal’ practices used by the administrators to construct and maintain these migrant maternal information grounds, this chapter makes visible the unpaid, gendered labour involved in this form of community-building. Manohar has described community building among Tamil migrants to the United States as a “fundamentally gendered settlement activity” (2013b, p. 25), drawing on Hondagneu-Sotelo’s earlier representation of migrant Mexican women as “community builders” who “consolidate” family settlement (1994, p. 174). The administrators’ meta maternal practices define and shape their communities, and makes manifest the gendered assumptions that naturalise this community-building as the task of migrant mothers.

5.2 Boundary work: belonging, relevance and trust

All administrators engaged in practices of boundary creation and maintenance. A community’s boundaries are a public statement of what it signifies, its limits, and how it differentiates itself from other communities. The boundary is “the mask presented by the community to the outside world; it is the community’s public face” (Cohen 1985, p. 71). Membership boundaries work to create a sense of belonging, by making clear “there are people who belong and people who do not” (D. W. McMillan & Chavis 1986, p. 9). A community’s boundary is meaningful to those who are admitted, and to those who are denied entry. This section explores the administrators’ boundary practices, and what this boundary work means for the kinds of belonging engendered in the groups.

Administrators’ first act of boundary setting, and the first boundary encountered by prospective members, is the nomenclature and description of the group. Group names communicate who is included in the group:

[Mothers/parents] from [country/region/linguistic group] living in [country, city, area].

The group’s name is the “community’s public face” (Cohen 1985) and indicates to potential members their likely inclusion or exclusion. As noted in Chapter Four, some administrators adjusted the criteria for membership at the request of their early members. For the smaller
groups, the name and approval process were all the boundary work required to restrict membership to the intended people. Few people requested admittance who did not meet the membership criteria. As Nicole noted, “if a guy would look online, if it says, ‘German mums,’ he probably wouldn’t want to join, because he thinks it’s German mums.” Larger, or more active groups, involved more active boundary maintenance.

Creating community through boundary work involves keeping some people out while inviting others in. Administrators tended to focus on controlling the boundaries at the point of granting access to the group. When deciding whether to accept a potential member, administrators looked at the following evidence: the person’s name (for example, for clues to their gender and/or ethnicity) and Facebook profile (for example, for visible information to suggest motherhood, place of residence, place of origin, or for clues they might be a fake profile or ‘spammer’). Some undertook further searches on Google or LinkedIn. If questions remained, administrators sent a private message to elicit more information or waited for the applicant to send a message with the necessary information. Some preferred to approve applicants who had been invited to join by members. Some administrators had also removed people from the group, usually for transgressing behaviour rules or posting content deemed irrelevant or inappropriate. Most administrators also referred to efforts to attract new members, by asking members to invite their friends, posting in other online groups for mothers or migrants, or approaching people individually. One group ran a prize draw to encourage members to invite their connections to join. Sabina posted about her group in another local online mothers’ group and approached mothers online who had “a Swedish-sounding name.” In this way, the administrators sought to construct a community of the ‘right’ people: people who shared key roles, attachments and experiences.

Research participants demonstrated multiple attachments of belonging. While one Facebook group need not carry the weight of all those attachments, careful curation by the administrators draws together people who share some key, emotionally resonant, attachments. As a result, the groups act as sites of intersection between key attachments of

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44 More recently, most administrators have gained access to Facebook functionality that allows them to set questions for all potential members to answer as part of the approval process. At the time of interviewing, however, none of the administrators had access to this functionality.
belonging and may play a significant role in the creation of contingent transnational maternal identities. The following sections, 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, explore two key axes of boundary maintenance and belonging: gender and geography. Discussions relating to whether fathers, or non-mothers, should be admitted, drew on notions of gendered parenting, gendered sociality, gendered information-seeking, and gendered behaviours online. Discussions relating to where members should be located, and national/ethnic/linguistic identity, highlighted the tension between creating a locally-based sense of belonging and providing a diasporic community resource for prospective migrants.

5.2.1 Gendered boundaries: constructing mothers as good digital citizens

Gender was a principal axis along which administrators judged potential members’ right to access the group. As indicated in Chapter Four (4.2.1), the groups varied as to how strictly or intentionally they enforced their maternal exclusivity. The salience of gender extended beyond its intersection with parenthood, with members and administrators drawing on notions of gendered sociality, support-seeking, social media usage, as well as gendered parenting, to justify the exclusion of men from these spaces. Personal experience, combined with ideological and policy frameworks, created a context in which mothers-only groups appeared either commonsensical or actively beneficial. Those in favour of mixed groups drew on equal parenting ideologies, which seemed to run counter to the lived experiences of most participants.

Most commonly, administrators of groups restricting membership to mothers, or to women, referred to the gendered reality of parenting in contemporary Australia and/or in their cultural community specifically. They argued that fathers would not be interested in joining a group based around a parenting role, would not need a parenting-focused group, would not contribute the same understanding of parenting issues, or would not be available to meet due to being at work. Mothers, on the other hand, due to their shared experiences of new motherhood, would need support and would be well-placed to offer support to other mothers. Yasmin, the administrator of the Persian mothers’ group, encapsulated some of these arguments:
“It’s always mums, to be honest, it’s like, no matter how we look at it, in whatever culture, it’s mainly the mum that looks after the child. Even if the father is hands-on, the mother is the one mainly involved. And the father cannot understand the mother like other mothers can. So I think it’s important to have that sisterly connection.”

Members’ answers echoed the administrators’ views. Susie echoed Yasmin’s sense of maternal connection:

“It’s like women together, we’ve been through childbirth together, we’ve been through the pain, we’ve been postnatal, we’re all like-minded...”

Simran’s response was typical of the views of the Indian participants:

“Fathers? Actually, I don’t think fathers have much queries. They just go to the office and come back. [...] Mother spends most of the time with baby. I don’t know that dads have many questions.”

Daniela suggested that the maternal exclusivity of the online group reflected the predominance of mothers in the playgroups she attended, noting “that’s often what you just see in real life.” The issues raised in the group don’t demand a women-only environment, she said, “here, I have the feeling it’s just how it happened.” For these women, there was little sense of parenting as a “joint project” (Fox 2009, p. 141), and the maternal focus of the group merely reflected their lived experience of parenting.

Drawing on similarly pragmatic arguments, Eva, Sabina and Ana explained their groups had developed out of their personal relationships with other women experiencing new migrant motherhood, and this shaped the groups’ parameters: “It’s just how it started,” Eva stated. Those early maternal relationships were forged by common experiences of childbirth, and gendered experiences of early parenthood which are both reflected in and reinforced by norms, policies and legislation. As outlined in Chapter Four, parenting, and parents’ support groups, have long been considered gendered activities in Australia and even today, groups run by councils for first-time parents are colloquially called “mothers’ groups.” While the primary carer of a newborn or adopted child in Australia is entitled to 18 weeks’ leave paid
at the national minimum wage, the “dad or partner” is entitled to two weeks’ paid leave. Australian parental leave legislation refers to “primary carers (mainly birth mothers)” and lists among the aims of the legislation, to “encourage women to continue to participate in the workforce,” to “increase the time that fathers and partners take off work around the time of birth or adoption” and to “allow fathers and partners to take a greater share of caring responsibilities” (“Paid parental leave act” 2010). These legislative aims reflect a status quo in which new fathers’ time is more commonly spent at work than caring for their new child, while the opposite is true for new mothers. This helps to explain why, when women in this study formed groups from their personal contacts of people grappling with intensive needs of a newborn, those other people were mothers.

A minority of participants acknowledged the importance of fathers receiving support. Only Celine, who had previously been a member of a local parents’ Facebook group in New Zealand, mentioned that fathers might have something to contribute to such groups: “it was quite nice to have some of the male input.” Two administrators spoke strongly in support of involving fathers in their group. For Jenni, the decision to run a group for Swedish parents was clearly linked to her gender ideology:

“I don’t want to bring my babies up in a world where it’s like that. I want, I try to be very conscious about trying to be equal, trying to be ... dads are just as much parents as mums.”

For Tanja, the idea of a mothers’ group seemed ridiculous:

“What are you doing then if the dad is home? He’s not allowed to join the group? Hey, in which times do we live?! No! [laughs] No!”

Both Jenni and Tanja drew on a progressive ideal of equal parenting, which ran counter to the experiences of most participants. Responses from participants in mixed groups indicated that even when fathers joined them, it was in smaller numbers, and interactions tended to be initiated by mothers. For Jenni and Tanja, their boundary work constructs spaces in which equal parenting is possible. Their curated spaces allow for minority modes of
parenting in the present, and for an imagined future in which equal parenting is commonplace.

Administrators also drew on notions of gendered sociality to explain the maintenance of a gendered boundary. Yasmin stated that “the mother is the one that forms the social connections for the house, is the one that keeps friendships going,” reasoning that this role made the group more appropriate for women. Many women asserted their husbands’ lack of interest in social media. For example, Archana explained:

“I tried inviting my husband to one or two groups, and he’s like ‘oh, just keep me out.’ He’s not even part of any WhatsApp groups of our families, so he’s someone who doesn’t want to be in all that. But I don’t mind because I regularly go and tell him things.”

The active refusal by some of the spouses to participate in what may be viewed as a feminised use of online technology echoes Lohan’s finding that men may differentiate their use of technology from women’s usage, as a means of reinforcing gendered dichotomies and hierarchies (2000, p. 906). Archana’s husband’s refusal to participate in online social networks reinforced her role as the social facilitator for the family, echoing Yasmin’s assertion that the mother “forms the social connections for the house.”

Women noted their tendency to socialise with other women, more than with men, and their comfort with female-oriented groups. Lina noted “it’s just easier to talk to women,” while Celine remarked that the groups worked for her as she tended to develop good relationships with women, and Jyoti commented, “I think women tend to bond more with each other than we do with men.” By contrast, administrators suggested, men would not want or need to join such groups, because men do not seek social interaction or social support that way. Some women contended that their partner would not seek support in an online group, preferring to ask friends face to face, use online searches, ask their partner, or not reach out at all. “Guys generally don’t ask for help, do they?” Katrin stated, while women “tend to reach out more, and talk more about stuff” (Priya), are “open to posting things that are personal or emotional” (Diya), and “share a lot more than guys do.”
(Gemma). Trust online has been connected to self-disclosure and empathy (Feng et al. 2004; Henderson & Gilding 2004), so women’s characterisation of men as unlikely to empathise or make “personal or emotional” disclosures, may compound their view of men as less trustworthy in these online spaces.

The women draw on stereotypes that position women as social, co-operative, talkative, emotional and willing to expose their vulnerability to obtain help. By contrast, these discussions position men as lacking the “urge” (Petra), willingness or desire to engage in this kind of “social information foraging” or to make social connections for their family. These findings support Portwood-Stacer’s contention that “the labor of online social networking” is an extension of women’s “caring and relational labor involved in holding communities together”:

Facebook mirrors the offline social world, in which women plan the get-togethers, send the birthday and holiday greetings, transmit the family gossip, and just generally stay present in everyone else’s lives. (2014, n.p.)

Ouellette and Wilson suggest this represents a digital “‘second shift’ of affective and domestic labour” (2011, p. 559). Archana’s husband’s refusal to join their families’ WhatsApp groups supports Portwood-Stacer’s observation that while men may abstain from this labour without sanction, they continue to benefit from their partner’s labour. Women’s capacity to withdraw from social media, to refuse to participate in this form of caring and relational labour, may be limited by the need to maintain “the standards of affective support they and their families expect” (Portwood-Stacer 2014, n.p.). In the context of migration, women use social media to engage in caring and relational labour at a distance, for example nurturing relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren, to effect their family’s emplacement and affective settlement in their new home, and to build a community for themselves and their family. This is the gendered emotional and relational labour of migration.

Beyond pragmatic arguments around contemporary gendered parenting, sociality and support-seeking, some participants argued that women-only environments provide specific
benefits to their members. Participants suggested women-only groups were more conducive to discussion of certain topics, and to honest and sympathetic discussions. Women could better discuss relationships, sex, postnatal depression, or feminism, administrators suggested, without men’s presence. Members agreed that a space away from men facilitated discussion of topics such as relationships, breastfeeding, intimate physical health issues, issues with in-laws, depression, domestic abuse and pregnancy. Manohar describes this exchange of gendered information in women-centred networks as creating “gendered social capital” (Manohar 2013b, p. 36). A male gaze was imagined as judgemental not sympathetic, engendering a sense of discomfort or surveillance, not support. Gemma suggested women would self-censor in the presence of men, for fear of being judged “neurotic females.” In addition to a sense of discomfort in discussing certain taboo or intimate topics in a mixed-gender setting, some women supported a women-only group because it provided a space to which their husband (and other people’s husbands) did not have access. This gave them an outlet for complaints about their husbands, without fear of their post being read by the husband in question, or his friends. In most cases, women described a desire to “vent” (Jyoti) or “bitch” (Archana), implying a need for a cathartic outpouring to a sympathetic audience. Kavita and Aditi mentioned the potential of the groups to support women in abusive relationships, noting that this would be more difficult in a mixed group.

The desire for women-only discussions invoked a sense of increased trust and safety due to the exclusion of men. “I really want to keep this like a safe space for mums,” Nisha explained. Some women’s comments implied a general mistrust of men’s behaviour online. Nisha noted that, while no fathers had yet requested to join her group, they had had requests from “single guys.” Her fellow admin, Priya, described these men as “random creeps.” Their experiences of predatory male behaviour online, coupled with assumptions about gendered parenting roles, left women suspicious of men’s motivations for accessing female-identified online groups: “What’s this man doing here? Is he actually a dad [...] or does he have some other motive?” (Diya). While single women asking to join might be viewed as a fellow “nurturer” or “aunty” (Aditi), or potential childcare provider, single men were assumed to have nefarious intentions. Some women referred to the name of the group, suggesting that transgressing the boundary set by the nomenclature would itself be
grounds for suspicion. For example, Diya explained, “if it’s called ‘mums something or other’ then you do think, why is this guy joining?”

Interactions in Facebook groups often occur in a context in which members share very little profile information, in contrast to interactions between ‘Facebook friends’ in which there is an expectation of significant disclosure through photographs and status updates. Members of a group may only be able to see each other’s name, profile photo and limited information such as hometown or other groups they are in. In the absence of any other cues, such as body language or face to face communication, some women assumed that a man in a mothers’ group is “some weirdo trying to connect with you online that you have no idea who they are” (Susie). In a playground or park, Susie explained, a man might still seem out of place attempting to join a group of mothers, but being able to “see them in the flesh” would encourage her to be more “accepting.” This resonates with research into trust, where face-to-face communication has been found to engender greater, swifter, and more resilient levels of trust than audio, video, or text-based communication (Bos et al. 2002).

In conclusion, in the creation, maintenance and justification of their gender-based boundaries, the groups simultaneously reflect and re-produce a gendered experience of parenting, work, sociality, friendship, conversation, online behaviour, and support-seeking. The discussions construct women as good ‘digital citizens’ who willingly engage in “social information foraging” and self-disclosure in online groups to seek and provide support to each other. Men, by contrast, are viewed as bad digital citizens, whose presence could threaten the supportive networks women have constructed for themselves and their families, by reducing levels of trust (due to their assumed judgemental or lascivious gaze, and lack of empathetic self-disclosure), reducing the relevance of content (due to their lack of focus on parenting), and reducing opportunities for developing “gendered social capital” through discussions which, because of gendered social norms and taboos, must be undertaken only between women. At the intersection of parenting, community and digital cultures, women construct themselves as good mothers, good community members, and good digital citizens. In the process of positioning themselves in this way, men are constructed as peripheral to the realms of parenting, emotion, and familial sociality. In
setting and maintaining gender-based boundaries for their groups, the administrators are attempting to create spaces in which members can experience high levels of trust, relevance of content, and empathy based on common experience. At the same time, they have created spaces in which only women can perform this affective and relational labour of migration. Only Tanja and Jenni suggested that admitting men to these spaces might create the possibility of a different future, with responsibilities divided more equally between mothers and fathers.

5.2.2 Geographic boundaries: residence and nationality

Chapter Four (4.2.1) outlined the three identifiers present in all the group names: role, residence and origin. The administrators’ boundary work to maintain the correct ‘role’ (mother, parent, family) focused on the gender/maternal identities discussed above. The other two identifiers, origin and residence, required boundary work on two geographical axes: national (and less commonly ethnic/linguistic) identity, and local residence. Perhaps surprisingly, given that tensions around national and ethnic belonging have been at the heart of some of the most bitter conflicts on the world stage, in these groups, discussions around national and ethnic identity were relatively relaxed and straightforward. By contrast, discussions around the importance, or otherwise, of members being located in the appropriate city or country, revealed a tension at the heart of the groups: should the groups primarily act to create a localised sense of diasporic maternal belonging, or should they also provide a transnational resource for potential migrants? Should the focus be on facilitating settlement, or facilitating mobility? While there has been a strong thread of thinking about social media enabling the transcendence of geographic boundaries (Baym 2015, p. 81), and “ambiguously located” online communities acting as diasporic community spaces (Bernal 2014, p. 173), in these groups, local geography remained strongly salient and determinative.

In terms of national/ethnic identity, the nomenclature of the groups effectively maintained the boundary, such that administrators received few genuine (non-spam) requests from people who did not meet the criteria. In non-Anglophone groups, language created an additional boundary to entry or participation. Administrators used potential members’ names and Facebook profiles to judge whether they appeared to be from the appropriate
country/background. Some administrators permitted (non-migrant, white) Australians to join the group, either because their spouse met the criteria (for example, the Australian partner of a Swedish man) or because they expressed an affinity for the culture of the group. As Ana explained:

“A lot of the mums who are not Brazilians have some kind of Brazilian root, either through their husband or they want to know a bit more of the culture, and we want to give a chance to everyone.”

In the Brazilian and Swedish groups, where women looking for childcare work were admitted as an exception to the mothers-only rule, nationality became a decisive criterion. Parents sought babysitters who spoke their home language. In addition, a shared country of origin appeared to increase parents’ trust, an important consideration when recruiting a carer for one’s child. This “narrative of sameness” (Seligman 2012, p. 190) appeared to increase parents’ “generalised trust” and their specific trust in the babysitter’s approach to childcare.

In contrast to the relatively untroubled narrative around national identity, the issue of members’ place of residence was a source of tension in some groups. Many participants expressed the view that it was important that members lived in the same locality, to facilitate offline encounters, and to ensure content shared in the group remained geographically relevant to its members. Some women talked about the importance of having friends who lived close by, meeting up in convenient locations, or being close enough to exchange books or borrow clothes. Women spoke about their range of movement being limited by difficulties accessing public transport with young children and prams, feeling restricted by children’s sleep routines, activities or school hours. Women therefore sought friendship and information from people nearby. Having previously used the British/Irish group to find people to meet up with, Lisa moved out of the area and subsequently found the group less helpful, although she remained a member to give “encouragement” or “advice” to people feeling upset or homesick. Aoife also lived outside the group’s focus area, but because she prioritised information exchange over meeting up or developing bonds of belonging, this did not affect her use of the group. Jyoti questioned why many
members of the Sydney-based Indian mothers’ group lived outside Sydney, remarking “that’s a question I’ve thought of asking admins multiple times.” For Jyoti, the questions asked by those members distracted from the sense of local relevance, and she contrasted it with her preferred maternal Facebook group for mothers in her sub-metropolitan area, which provided useful local information. That she considered asking the administrators to explain the presence of non-local people in the group indicates her understanding of the administrators’ role in setting and enforcing boundaries. It also suggests that she feels able to hold the administrators to account for their decisions.

While members and administrators tended to accept that people might live in a different area of the city, or that they might move within Australia and remain a member, there were more divergent opinions about the acceptability of accepting people living outside Australia. Usha noted her first request to join had been rejected because her profile placed her in Dubai. When she explained to the administrator that she was in the process of migrating to Australia, her access was granted. Some administrators spoke about balancing the needs of potential migrants using the group to plan, or dream about, migration, with the needs of Australian-based migrants for hyperlocal information and social interaction. Ana recalled a member of the Brazilian group complaining about members who “were not even Brazilians and some were not even in Melbourne.” Ana explained her response:

“*We are not going to ban someone because they are not here. They might have the intention to come, they need to learn about the country, and it’s a good way to get information.*”

For Ana, facilitating the mobility of her fellow Brazilians is central to the purpose of the group. To this end, she has posted information in the group to advise members on how to facilitate the migration of their parents, and works with the Brazilian consulate to welcome new migrants. Ana’s community-oriented approach emphasises the importance of the group as a community service. Although her focus is on developing a local community resource, she maintains a diasporic sense of belonging, which includes prospective migrants from Brazil, as well as those who have already made the journey. For others, local relevance and localised diasporic belongings take precedence over transnational connections and
loyalties. In busy social media environments, many users are keen to see only the information most relevant to them, resulting in the development of algorithms as computational solutions to the desire for personalised relevance online. The presence of people with future mobility-focused priorities, rather than current settlement-focused priorities, may disturb some members’ attempts to curate a personalised Facebook experience. Ana’s future-orientation encompasses the possibility of future migration, echoing Tanja and Jenni’s future-focused curation of groups encompassing the possibility of equal parenting. While most administrators drew heavily on quotidian, pragmatic justifications for their boundary work, Ana, Tanja and Jenni make space for future potentialities.

5.2.3 Constructing the groups as sites of trust

Alongside constructing identities and belongings around the axes of motherhood, national identity and local residence, the boundary work performed by administrators appears to have another motive: the creation of a community of people who can be trusted. Trust in the context of strangers or acquaintances is referred to as “generalized trust”, defined as “the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible” (Delhey & Newton 2005, p. 311). Seligman suggests people construct a “narrative of sameness” – in this case, sameness based on maternity, nationality/ethnicity, and local residence – that brings a sense of confidence that we can predict how another person will behave (2012, p. 190). Seligman distinguishes between “confidence” and “trust,” reserving “trust” for situations in which there is no such familiarity to draw on, but as “trust” resonated in the participants’ narratives and is widely used in other scholarly discussions, it seems appropriate to use in this context. Delhey & Newton’s study concluded that “generalized trust is strongest where we have something in common with others, especially where we are from the same ethnic background” (2005, p. 324). My analysis suggests that shared gender, motherhood status and locality may also be contributory factors to generalised trust.

The groups’ boundaries, as upheld by the administrators, provide salient knowledge about the other members, which facilitates “pragmatic trust” (Weigert, 2012). Without these
mediating boundaries, the groups would constitute a context of complete ignorance, which, as Simmel argues, precludes any rational basis for trust (1950, p. 318, cited in Möllering 2001). Weigert’s concept of “pragmatic trust in a world of strangers” is helpful here. The administrators’ boundary work enables members to move from “trust-among-strangers,” which must be established through “trusting actions,” to “in-group trust” which can rely more heavily on assumptions of goodwill and common ground (Weigert 2012, pp. 176-178).

In the context of an online group, in which everyone may be a stranger at least at first, establishing boundaries of common ground appears to increase participants’ expectations of trustworthy behaviour. In the context of migration or motherhood, when people may encounter more strangers than usual, and in which they may have greater need to rely on the information, advice or goodwill of strangers than usual, finding spaces where one can leap into “in-group trust” appears to provide a level of comfort or security that is appealing. The administrators’ boundary work enables participants simultaneously to acknowledge that their group consists mostly of strangers, and to proceed in “a state of favourable expectations regarding other people’s actions and intentions” (Möllering 2001, p. 412). In Grainne’s words, “they may be a bunch of strangers, but they’re a supportive bunch of strangers online.” The variables that increase trust among these participants are: shared parenthood, shared national/ethnic background, and shared residential location. For many of the women, however, shared parenthood is not sufficient to engender trust, if the other person is a man.

Nevertheless, limits and tensions around trust between group members remain. While Winnie trusts the information and advice she receives from Malaysian mothers in the group, she is surprised to observe other members offering to take a new migrant into their home: “Just because they are Malaysian. I wouldn’t do that to a stranger! I’ve got three kids! Invite them to live in my house! Maybe I should, eh? [laughs] Just because they are from Malaysia?!” For Winnie, the “in-group trust” engendered by their common ground as Malaysian mothers may be sufficient for her to trust their information or friendship advances, but is not sufficient to overcome her perception of the risk involved in allowing access to her home and children. For Diya, while it is “nice” to receive advice from other British mothers, “on the other hand, it’s coming from a complete stranger, so it’s a bit weird at the same time.” While migrant mothers are grateful for the support and information
provided by relative strangers, albeit strangers with whom they share important common ground and online co-presence, it remains a source of unease. The common ground and “pragmatic trust” created by the administrators’ boundary work cannot completely overcome the sense of “strangership” (Horgan 2012) between members.

Distrust congregates in three areas. Firstly, distrust relating to revealing personal information to people who might misuse it, whether that is revealing information about your relationship to your husband’s friends, or revealing photographs of your children to people who might use them for nefarious purposes. As Nisha remarks,

“I personally wouldn’t feel comfortable sharing my kids’ photos when I don’t know everyone. Or when I don’t know whether everyone’s a parent or not [...] We take a lot of trouble to screen the requests that come so that we know that 1) they are all in Melbourne, 2) that they are all mums.”

Secondly, some participants noted a degree of scepticism towards advice or information offered in the group. Not because of a failure of goodwill on the part of the person offering such information, but because of a lack of contextual information relating to their expertise or qualification for offering it. Aoife expresses her frustration at people relying on uninformed opinions from group members, rather than accessing professional expertise: “random Jo Bloggs who’s moved to Sydney, what on earth do they know?” The third level of distrust relates to a sense of protecting oneself and one’s family from “random creeps” (Priya) online or in person. This is what prevents Winnie from taking new migrants into her home – “I’ve got three kids!”.

It is widely acknowledged that trust is culturally specific and measurements of generalised trust vary across nations, for example (Delhey & Newton 2005). As this study draws on the experiences of people from a range of countries, all now living in Australia, I do not attempt to draw concrete conclusions about levels of trust in the groups. My analysis does suggest, however, that the groups, as constructed and maintained by the administrators’ boundary work, may be an attempt to create strategic spaces of trust, in which migrant mothers can make pragmatic assumptions of trustworthiness, in order to access information and
resources that will support them in their role as migrants and mothers. The interaction between the boundary work performed by the administrators, and the trust and safety felt by the members, indicates the emotional significance of such boundary work and other tasks of curation.

5.3 Emotional curation, emotional labour

“It’s up to you as a community manager to make sure that everyone is happy, entertained, and achieving their purpose for being on your community.”

(Deborah Ng, Community Management for Dummies, 2012, p. 19)

The previous section focused on the boundary work performed at the entry and exit points of the group. This section draws attention to the administrators’ practices of curation within the group, specifically their efforts to curate the emotional atmosphere in the group. While emotional curation is commonly understood as a key part of any community manager’s role, as indicated by the quote above from an introductory guide to community management, there is little research on the impact of that emotional curation on either the curators or the community members (de Winter et al. 2017; Jacobson 2017). The argument advanced here is that much of the administrators’ emotional curation work seeks to reduce conflict springing from difference, as part of weaving a “narrative of sameness” to increase the trust and empathy shared by group members. It is thus an extension of the boundary work explored in the previous section. Where difference arises, such as with maternal practices, administrators seek to establish a norm of ‘compassionate mothering’ to minimise the affective disruption in the group. In this context, I propose the term ‘compassionate mothering’ to refer to compassion between mothers with differing (maternal) practices. It defines relations between mothers, rather than between mother and child. ‘Compassionate mothering’ stands in contrast to “combative mothering,” a term used by Moore and Abetz to describe media tropes that emphasise “the idea that mothers are in constant competition with one another over parenting choices” (2016, p. 53).
As with the entry/exit boundary work, the level of emotional curation varied between the groups, with some administrators frequently intervening, usually in the larger groups, and others taking a more ‘hands-off’ approach. Administrators engaged in both proactive and reactive practices to shape the emotional environment of their group. The proactive practices extended the boundary work of inclusion and exclusion, setting “community norms of practice” (Baym 2015, p. 84) and behavioural boundaries, the transgression of which may lead to expulsion. Administrators set guidelines for permissible content and tone. Sometimes these guidelines were included in the public information about the group, sitting alongside the nomenclature and group description at the entrance to the group. One group urges members to be “pleasant” adding that “any member that doesn't comply will be promptly deleted [smile emoticon].” In their interviews, administrators described role modelling gentle advice-giving and norms of interaction; sharing their own experiences to encourage others to feel comfortable requesting advice or information; and posting light-hearted content to create an atmosphere that is “not intimidating” (Nisha). The administrators’ work sets an affective framework in which civility, trust and empathy are valorised, while conflict and incivility are discouraged.

Administrators also engaged in reactive practices, addressing members’ undesirable behaviours or encouraging desirable behaviours. For example, administrators described replying to unanswered posts to ensure every “invitation to dialogue” received a response. Administrators intervened in discussions that threatened to bring conflict or incivility into the group, deleted comments or threads, and closed threads to new comments to halt the momentum of an argument. Some administrators contacted members privately to ask them to reconsider their post; others deleted without warning. This emotional curation work involved making judgements about the boundaries between civility and incivility, between “healthy discussion” (Ana) and disruptive difference. Ana had removed ten members from the Brazilian group after a woman called her in tears about comments she had received about breastfeeding:

“It’s fine, if someone said, “Look, I prefer to give formula...” [and someone replied] ‘Look, have you considered the benefits of breastfeeding for you and your child?’ That’s different. But going and saying, ‘You are not a mother, you
In this quote, Ana distinguishes between empathetic difference – "have you considered" – and confrontational difference – “you don’t deserve to have your child.” While the former implies common maternal ground, an assumption that interlocutors share an interest in achieving the best outcome for the child, the latter casts the formula-feeding mother as a ‘bad’ mother, as beyond the common ground of ‘good’ motherhood.

As this example illustrates, difference relating to maternal practices, such as infant feeding, co-sleeping and sleep disturbances, seemed to require particularly careful management. Administrators noted that ostensibly straightforward requests for information and advice could elicit strong, often emotive opinions. Priya described her practice of intervening when she deemed members’ advice or comments “insensitive or too direct.” Priya was careful not to take a position on these issues, but rather to attempt to moderate the degree or expression of the disagreement. Jenni described posting articles in the Swedish parents’ group espousing a range of views, to demonstrate her comfort with diversity in maternal practices: “I just think it’s really important to have a group and see that people do things differently and we can all be friends.”

Conflict among mothers has received attention in public and scholarly discourse, usually focusing on the surveillance and judgement of mothers by other mothers. At its most divisive this has been referred to, mostly in US literature, as “the mommy wars” (Douglas & Michaels 2004; Moore & Abetz 2016). In this study, participants tended to position other mothers in the group as empathetic and supportive, emphasising instead their fear of judgement by non-mothers (men and childless women) to justify the mothers-only space. Nevertheless, administrators’ attention to discussions around maternal practices suggests an understanding that these are potential disruptors of their carefully curated space of empathy and trust. This resonates with research that suggests mothers’ fear of judgement affects their willingness to express their information needs (Loudon et al. 2016; McKenzie 2002). The administrators’ curation practices establish a norm of compassionate mothering.
online, where the compassion is between mothers in relation to their mothering practices. These are meta-maternal practices which constitute a form of digital community mothering.

This management of difference in relation to maternal practices is common to many online mothers’ groups, but the migration context of these groups makes it particularly salient. Women turned to these groups not just for general advice around feeding or sleeping, but for advice on how to navigate conflicting advice on these topics, especially where those conflicts appeared to arise from cultural or generational differences. Migration provides a context in which women receive advice from many sources. Some noted that advice from their own mother conflicted with advice from their doctor or maternal peer group. For example, Sunita’s mother and her parents-in-law were “pretty upset” that her children had not yet been toilet trained. Many participants spent extended periods of time ‘back home’ with young children, and noted the difference in practices between them and their family members or peers. For example, on a visit to Brazil, Kate objected to her mother’s habit of giving juice to Kate’s daughter and niece, while her mother objected to Kate’s attempts to discipline them. The participants who had experienced child-raising or pregnancy in more than one country described nuanced differences in medical advice, health systems, and norms around motherhood. Navigating multiple frameworks of good motherhood is a key theme addressed in Chapter Seven, and here I draw attention to the role of the administrators in facilitating that. Administrators like Priya, Nisha, Aditi, Jenni, and Ana work hard to curate their groups as spaces that can tolerate difference in maternal practices by establishing expectations of empathetic and sensitive interactions, advocating a norm of compassionate mothering to ward off the spectre of “combative mothering” (Moore & Abetz 2016).
5.3.1 Curating content to minimise conflict

“Religion and politics have no place in your forum unless it’s a religious or political forum.”

(Deborah Ng, Community Management for Dummies, 2012, p. 107)

Unsurprisingly perhaps, given the emphasis on minimising conflict, posts about politics and religion were often deemed inappropriate. In many groups, this occurred without administrative intervention, as members assumed the groups to be apolitical spaces and refrained from posting ‘controversial’ content of this kind. This is consistent with a view that places motherhood in the private sphere of family, separate from the public sphere of politics and economics (Glenn 1994). Both Brazilian administrators, Kate and Ana, stated that discussions of a political or religious nature were banned, although Maria, a member of the group, recalled discussions about refugees and other news stories. Kate recalled a member’s response to the deletion of a religious post, during which the member made public allegations against Kate, causing Kate to fear for her safety. This incident indicates both the potentially disruptive effect of topics like religion and politics, and the potential impact of such conflict on the administrators. Members of the group for Indian mothers in Sydney reported discussions around politics and current affairs, such as the demonetisation in India, and murder of an Indian bus driver in Brisbane, both of which occurred in October-November 2016, when I conducted most of the interviews with this group. Jyoti cited these two discussions as evidence that she did not fully fit in with the group, noting that this inhibited her from participating in discussions: “I don’t [post] because my opinions are not agreed upon by [...] a majority of them.” Politics and religion, like the maternal practices discussed above, were seen to be potential disruptors of the group’s emotional atmosphere and “narrative of sameness.” Discussions around maternal practices were seen to be core to the groups’ purpose, so difference in that area required careful management, whereas politics and religion were deemed irrelevant or peripheral and therefore better excluded from the group.
A second area of content curation, which was an issue for administrators in almost every group, was managing posts relating to sales, advertising and other “business posts.” Administrators used a range of strategies including outright prohibition, restricting business posts to specific times or threads, or requiring prior administrator approval. Administrators agreed that regulating business posts was important for maintaining the groups’ sense of purpose. Aditi intended to maintain the “essence” of the Indian mothers' group as a “support community”: “we don’t want it to be just another buy/sell page.” Priya, too, privileged support over business: “Because in all fairness this is a support group, so if you want to do business, we do every Tuesday for business. But if you think Saturday is a Tuesday and if you post, that's not ok.” Managing business posts was, as Priya's tone indicates, a source of frustration for many administrators, and could cause conflict with members. The conflict was deemed worthwhile to maintain the integrity of the group. As Ana explained: “we’ve created the group with one intention and we want that to continue. If the rules are not followed, we have no other choice. We have a lot of conflicts over that.”

Even administrators who felt there was a place for transactional interactions in the group expressed concern that it might leave insufficient space for support and conversation. Women used the groups to offer migrant-specific services to members who might find them difficult to source elsewhere, such as traditional postnatal massage, catering, and handmade or imported clothing. In turn, those mostly small-scale services provided opportunities for income generation among women who might otherwise struggle. Karen, the administrator of the Singaporean mothers' group, opined, “it’s good for the mums if they want to advertise their business, especially if there are good things to share, but […] if you just join for the sake of advertising, then I say no, I will block you or I will delete the post.” For Karen, motives are crucial. It is appropriate for a ‘genuine’ member to leverage their network to promote their business. But somebody who joins with the sole purpose of promoting their business, and shows no interest in engaging in friendship, support, or information exchange, is deemed to be a ‘bad maternal digital citizen’ and is expelled. The migrant maternal information grounds may include transactional and promotional interactions as by-products of the social, informational and emotional interactions, but they must not be the primary purpose of the group. The administrators act to prevent the distortion of the groups by commercial drivers, even when this causes conflict.
5.3.2 Curating opportunities for offline social interaction

“After socializing online for a while, members become curious about one another. They’re especially curious as to whether the relationships they’re cultivating online hold true in the real world. [...] You may want to consider hosting some fun mixers and meetups to bring everyone together.”

(Deborah Ng, Community Management for Dummies, 2012, p. 292)

Most administrators took on the role of facilitating opportunities for social interaction beyond the digital space of the groups. Only two administrators had never organised an offline meeting, and one of those (Sherry) had created an online file of members’ details to facilitate autonomous meet-ups. For some groups, an offline meet-up had been a milestone event, once the group reached an appropriate size. Members of the UK/Irish group asked Rebecca to arrange meet-ups, and she did so. For Rebecca, this was an unexpected addition to her role, indicating that the role of these ‘accidental community managers’ may be shaped by expectations on both sides. Sociality in the groups is the focus of Chapter Six, so this section focuses on the role of the administrators in facilitating opportunities for members to develop social relationships offline.

Offline meet-ups were primarily arranged to facilitate social interaction between mothers, with secondary motivations around children’s social and/or linguistic development, and cultural maintenance. In terms of participants, events fell into three categories: mothers and children; mothers only; and family events. Events for mothers and children included casual meet-ups in parks or cafes, or more organised ‘playgroup’ activities. Playgroups involved additional labour: finding a venue, organising activities, marketing and promotion, and in some cases employing an educator to lead the group. Events exclusively for mothers primarily involved dinners in a local restaurant, and, less commonly, cinema trips (UK/Irish; Indian) and trips to tourist attractions (Brazilian). Family events took place at weekends, to enable spouses to attend as they were presumed to be unable to during the week due to employment commitments. Family events mostly involved picnics or cultural festivities such as crayfish parties (Swedish groups) or Christmas parties (Brazilian, Indian, German groups).

The offline meet-ups reflected the changing needs of the members. Groups that had been formed around mothers on maternity leave, with regular casual meet-ups in parks and
cafes, found such meet-ups became less frequent as members returned to work, and children became more active and enrolled in organised activities. The evening activities tended to be less affected by these changes, as mothers’ need for social interaction with other mothers continued to be salient beyond the early months of motherhood.

As with all elements of the administrators’ role, facilitating these offline events involves unpaid labour. Unlike other tasks, which could be completed during the day, on their phone, fitting between other family and work responsibilities, weekend events required negotiation with their spouses, who were often reluctant to participate. While her husband preferred to prioritise time as a family, Maria expressed a sense of duty to assist her fellow Spanish-speaking migrants: “I believe that we have to help. We have had a lot of support from different people, and I think we need to do it.” Sabina noted that she had “dragged” her husband to events to “encourage the dads to come” but admitted, “he really didn’t want to come!” This gendered, unpaid, labour is the focus of the next section.

5.4 Conceptualising the role of the administrators

“Your community is a reflection of you and your ability to manage effectively. A positive community reflects on you positively, and a negative atmosphere shows that you don’t have good control — or don’t care.”

(Deborah Ng, Community Management for Dummies, 2012)

The final sections of this chapter consider the kinds of labour the administrators are engaged in, drawing on concepts from information studies and feminist studies of digital media to discuss the administrators’ ‘meta maternal practices.’ The following three sections outline some alternative ways to conceptualise the administrators’ roles and practices. The first section uses the terms ‘information agriculture’ and ‘accidental community management’ to focus on the intentionality of their labour and its impact on the groups and administrators. The second section discusses the visibility that comes with their maternal leadership role, suggesting the administrators may in some cases have become ‘accidental
micro-celebrities.’ The third section attends to the types of gendered and maternal labour undertaken by the administrators, drawing on concepts like “digital housewives” (Jarrett, 2016) and “community mothers” (Collins 1991; A. E. Edwards 2000; Hill Collins 1994; hooks 1984; A. O’Reilly 2004) to suggest they may be engaged in meta-maternal practices that constitute a kind of digital community mothering.

5.4.1 Information agriculturalists and accidental community managers

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 outlined the intentional labour undertaken by the groups’ administrators. Concepts from information studies such as “information grounds” and “information foraging” tend to under-theorise the work of creating and curating environments in which people can seek information. To address this, I propose the term ‘information agriculture’ as a twist on the “information foraging” metaphor to conceptualise this labour. The agricultural metaphor acknowledges the labour, skills, time and energy involved in managing information environments, emphasising the purposeful management of those environments, as opposed to the wilderness implied by foraging metaphors. ‘Foragers’ seek information in environments created and managed by individuals and institutions.

Sherry’s experience of creating the group for Malaysian mothers in Australia illustrates the intentionality and labour involved in ‘information agriculture.’ In 2012, Sherry was preparing to move her family from Italy to Australia. Already a member of online mothers’ groups based in Malaysia, her home country, she decided that the knowledge she needed to make the best decisions for her family, resided in other Malaysian mothers in Australia. Seeking experiential (Loudon et al. 2016), relevant and reliable information from people with similar experiences (Landry & Fisher 2006), Sherry created a space for those people to gather, so she could ‘harvest’ their knowledge. Sherry invited the few Malaysian mothers in Australia she knew, and encouraged them to extend the invitation to their networks. Sherry has intentionally kept the group relatively small (under 400 members) to maintain its usefulness to her. She does not want “a whole influx of people coming into the group and asking irrelevant questions.”
The level of intervention undertaken by administrators of more active groups was often unforeseen at the point of the group’s creation. As groups surpassed their original aim of meeting the needs of a small group of peers, the administrators took on more intentional stewardship roles, becoming ‘accidental community managers’ or ‘information agriculturalists.’ An increase in the number and variety of posts led administrators to clarify their group’s purpose and discourage posts seen as distracting from that purpose. Aditi explained that the administrators of the Sydney group for Indian mothers “are now putting more time and effort into the group because it’s just a great forum and we don’t want this forum to go to waste. So, we have to admin a lot. Like, we don’t want it to be just another buy/sell page.”

‘Information agriculture’ denotes the intentional creation and curation of an information-rich environment, and is useful for focusing attention on the administrators’ labour that makes those spaces possible. However, it fails to capture the social and emotional nature of both the spaces and labour, and implies a level of intentionality that was not uniformly present in the administrators’ accounts. While Sherry intentionally curated the Malaysian mothers’ group to meet her informational needs, other administrators took a lighter touch approach or focused on social interaction. An alternative term, which perhaps captures the social and community aspects of the spaces and labour, is ‘accidental community management.’ This term also captures some of the maternal leadership elements, which will be discussed in the next section.

The ‘accidental community manager’ role brought hard work and rewards. While the administrators of smaller, or less active, groups described their role with more nonchalance, others described a deep sense of responsibility to their group. With the volume of posts, the round-the-clock vigilance required, and the expectations from members to explain administrative decisions, Aditi described her admin role as “exhausting.” She felt a strong sense of responsibility to the group and the continuous need to monitor the group encroached on her family life. Administrators of groups that required substantial effort to establish, or to maintain activities, were more likely to describe their role as exhausting or time-consuming, particularly if they received little positive feedback from members, or
encountered pressure from their partner due to the time they devoted to it. At times of personal crisis, managing the group took an additional toll, particularly the emotionally fraught moderation of disputes. Ana noted that her interventionist approach created conflict with members as the imbalance of power within this peer-led community becomes manifest: “for some reason, they think they have the right to post whatever they want!” Ana expressed a tension between administrators’ responsibility to curate the content and conversation to maintain the peer support community, and their desire not to be seen as “dictators of the group.”

Nevertheless, Ana, like many of the administrators, expressed a sense of pride and achievement. Aditi pronounced herself “very proud, to tell you the truth. We didn’t expect it to be so big, but the fact that it’s becoming big, I’m proud of it.” For Yasmin: “It’s one of my achievements in life so far,” and the group is “a feather in my cap” for Nisha. Karen reflected with satisfaction on her role in facilitating connections between Singaporean mothers:

“I am very happy when I hear people telling me, ‘Before this group, before I know you, I don’t know any Singaporean. I have been here for 18 years, but I don’t know any other Singaporean that is here.’ […] I’m happy for them that through this link, through my link, they managed to meet other friends.”

Both the pride and vulnerability expressed by Ana and the other administrators arose from the visibility of their leadership role in their online maternal communities, which brought increased social connections as well as responsibilities. The next section examines this ‘maternal leadership’ in more detail.
5.4.2 Accidental micro-celebrity and maternal leadership

“People will just randomly come up to me and say, ‘Are you Priya from [group]?’ [...] I don’t mean to sound like I have a celebrity status, but most people would know me or the other two [admins].”

Managing the groups has brought administrators reciprocal relationships, vicarious pleasure at observing emerging relationships between members, and also increased visibility within their migrant maternal community and beyond. In contrast to the loneliness and isolation Aditi felt when she had her first child in Sydney, she is now “much more social.” She has many friends and acquaintances to meet up with, and the other administrators of her group have “become good friends.” Kate, too, has met a wide range of people through her role, which has made her feel “popular” and “important,” especially when people express their gratitude for the group. Through their role, the administrators have re-established their social status and social networks, which were disrupted when they left her home country, and again when they became mothers. Counteracting the individualisation and privatisation of motherhood, or the confinement of motherhood to a ‘private sphere,’ the administrators have brought motherhood into this semi-public space, emphasising the importance of relationships between mothers. Mothers become visible to each other, and through the leadership of these groups, the administrators gain the visibility of a public role.

The visibility of this role suggests that the administrators are engaged in a kind of maternal leadership or ‘meta maternal’ role. Drawing on the concept of online “micro-celebrities,” a term proposed by Marwick (2013) to describe people who become famous to a niche group of people via social media, I suggest that some of the administrators have become ‘accidental micro-celebrities’ as a corollary of their role as ‘accidental community managers.’ They become well-known within their niche community of migrant mothers, as their name, profile and interactions bring recognition online that translates into recognition in the streets, shops and parks. Unlike the professional community managers interviewed by Jacobson (2017), these ‘accidental community managers’ did not engage in “identity
curation” or “personal branding” but their role in curating the communities led them to become identified with the group, and visible within it. This visibility spilled over into other areas, such as their workplace, or their husband’s workplace. Nisha recalled two occasions when her husband had been approached in his workplace by members of the group, leading him to declare, “People know you more than they know me!” This public recognition of her work has increased his estimation of it, and she says he now recommends it to women he encounters. For Nisha, who has spent years following her husband’s work across three continents, taking temporary, often unpaid work and raising two small children, this public and spousal recognition of her community work is significant. By contrast, Aditi’s husband found it “intimidating” to be approached by group members in his workplace. The intrusion of these “intimate mothering publics” (Johnson 2015) into the workplace is unsettling, troubling the binary that assigns motherhood to the domestic, private sphere. Their administrator role “stretches” their motherhood beyond domestic spaces, into online social spaces, and even public work spaces (Longhurst 2013).

This ‘accidental micro-celebrity’ status may bring increased social status, increased social connections and self-esteem, but the increased visibility may also bring vulnerability to judgement or even fears for personal safety. Priya joked that members tended to approach her just as she was wrangling her “misbehaving” children – “the most embarrassing times” – while Jenni acknowledged that her role in the group made her reluctant to ask for advice about social welfare payments. In a context in which mothers are hyperaware of societal surveillance and judgement, accepting a ‘meta-maternal’ role, in which they feel a responsibility to embody an ideal of knowledgeable information exchange and compassionate mothering, increases the administrators’ exposure to potential judgement. Although these women have not consciously curated themselves as “micro-celebrities”, unlike the YouTube beauty bloggers and political activists studied by Marwick (2013), some of the same vulnerability to criticism, accountability, and expectations of availability for direct interaction apply here too.
5.4.3 Digital housewives and digital community mothers

Feminist scholars of digital media have drawn parallels between the unpaid “consumer labour” undertaken by users of participative internet sites, and the unpaid domestic labour undertaken, traditionally and still most commonly, by women. Using a Marxist feminist analysis, Jarrett introduces the figure of the “Digital Housewife”:

Like housewives, consumers receive little or no direct financial compensation for their contributions to the revenue-generating mechanisms of digital media sites so that all of their labour produces surplus-value for the website provider (Jarrett 2016, p. 11).

Commercially-run websites like Facebook rely on consumers to generate content, to generate data to be sold to advertisers, to consume that advertising, and “to manage and maintain the symbolic and affective dimensions of their platforms,” including “policing other users” (Jarrett 2016, p. 79). Through this lens, all interactions by both administrators and members can be viewed as capital creation for the owners of Facebook. Jarrett argues that such consumer labour, while inherently exploitative, may be experienced as creative or empowering: “Like domestic work, consumer labour is both exploited and a site that serves myriad other socially meaningful functions.” While Jarrett’s argument treats consumer labourers as gender-neutral, other scholars have linked the social, affective and relational labour performed by women online to “women’s work” more broadly. Jacobson describes online community management as “the newest pink collar job” being gendered as naturally more suitable for women, involving care and relational work, and undervalued in comparison to masculine-coded work (Jacobson 2017, p. 97). De Winter et al. agree that community management is a “feminized profession” defined by “communication, care, and emotional labor” (De Winter et al. 2017, p. 40).

In terms of unwaged work, as noted above, scholars have argued for women’s online affective and relational labour to be seen as an extension of their offline labour in these areas (Portwood-Stacer 2014). Bringing these analyses together with a Marxist narrative, Arcy argues that “these practices are indissociable from traditional sexual division of labor whereby capital accumulation depends upon women’s unpaid labor”
From the perspective of their lived experience, the migrant mothers in this study use the groups to carry out their responsibilities for their family’s affective settlement after migration. Furthermore, the administrators’ role has extended beyond this family-centred responsibility into a kind of meta-responsibility: a responsibility for the affective settlement of other people’s families.

Drawing on a concept from Black feminist scholarship, I argue that this ‘meta-maternal’ role is a kind of digital “community mothering” (Collins 1991, 2000a; A. E. Edwards 2000; E. Lawson 2000), in which women take on responsibility for the well-being of children, mothers, and families in their community. As this Black feminist scholarship theorises from a specific African American context, in which community mothering has been a strategy for community survival, I use this term with some caution, to refer to maternal practices that extend beyond one’s own children. Collins describes “women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers” in which relatives and neighbours provide care to children and support to mothers, with the understanding the communities, not just individual mothers, are responsible for the children of the community (2000b, p. 178).

Edwards (2000) notes that in African American communities, community mothering may involve advocating for the needs of the community, providing “moral mothering” for children in the community, and spearheading the creation of institutions to address the needs of the community, particularly in the areas of health and education. Thus, African American community mothering can refer to a maternal role in relation to children other than one’s own, or to a meta-maternal activist role on behalf of the whole community.

In her study of professional community managers, Jacobson notes the prevalence of parenting metaphors in their descriptions of their work. Jacobson links these nurturing metaphors to the “feminisation” of the role, in which feminine-coded relational skills are emphasised, downplaying the equally necessary, masculine or neutrally-coded, strategic and analytical skills (2017, p. 103). Ng’s Community Management for Dummies also places community managers in the role of metaphorical parents:

There’s an expression that unruly children crave discipline. This is kind of the case with online communities. Online community members are not unruly
children by a long shot, but they do need to be molded and guided (2012, p. 80).

In this study, some of the administrators also utilised maternal metaphors to describe their role. Nisha described the group as her “third baby,” and Ana pronounced herself a “proud mum” of the group:

“It gives me a lot of satisfaction. I get beautiful messages of people saying, ‘Thank you so much, I was so depressed, and I found a friend’ […] You know like when a child gets an A? […] I really am a proud mum!”

As with motherhood, care work, and other social reproductive labour, stereotypes of women’s natural capacity for nurture and empathy are used to devalue their work in community management (Jacobson 2017). Many of the administrators noted that their husbands did not value their work with the group. Nisha’s husband characterised her work as “just wasting more time on Facebook” (her words) until his co-workers’ validation of its value caused him to reconsider.

In this chapter, I have proposed the term ‘meta-maternal practices’ to conceptualise the type of labour deployed by the administrators to manage the groups. These practices include establishing and maintaining boundaries and behaviours through role-modelling, empathetic interventions and compassionate discipline, and nurturing relationships between the members. They are the metaphorical mothers of their online community. I want to extend this idea, by drawing on concepts of “community mothering” from Black feminist thought, which emphasise an “ethic of care” that extends beyond the needs of one’s own children (Collins 1991). While the administrators did not engage in the kind of political and social activism that is often associated with “community mothering” in African American communities, their meta-maternal practices constitute a form of maternally-based community service and maternal community building in migration. Ana’s administrator role is part of a lifetime of community service: “I’ve grown up like that, I’ve always been community, […] since I was 8 years old, I was serving soup in a church, so I was always involved with that, so I can’t see myself not doing.” Ana uses this community service narrative to justify her involvement to her husband, who, although supportive, does not
share her dedication to community service and has suggested she dedicate less time to the group.

In the context of this study, I draw on concepts of community mothering to conceptualise the administrators’ maternal role in the online communities, creating and caring for the groups, and moulding behaviours within the groups. In this sense, they are ‘mothers’ of their digital communities. The administrators also provide care and support for other mothers in their community, whether by providing the group as a space in which they can seek support and friendship, by encouraging compassion between mothers, or by coordinating hands-on support for mothers in their community. The context in which this meta-mothering occurs is one in which mothers’ social infrastructure and/or extended family networks have often been disrupted by migration. In a migrant context, these digital community mothers facilitate the rebuilding of that social infrastructure, create ways for migrant mothers to exchange information, friendship and support, and organise formal and informal opportunities for community events and cultural transmission, such as playgroups and parties.

5.5 Conclusion

In the context of migration, Manohar argues, women build community to perform two migration-specific forms of carework: defining and generating new senses of belonging for their family, and providing an alternative to the “extended kin safety network” they have lost through migration (2013b, p. 30). Here, the administrators’ digital nurturing provides an online community infrastructure that allows other migrant mothers to fulfil their gendered affective settlement responsibilities to their family. It creates a space where mothers can generate new senses of belonging based on shared migrant maternal experiences, and can support each other in their maternal cultural maintenance role. The administrators’ “community mothering” supports the children of their community, by helping women to fulfil their various maternal roles. In addition, it supports women to meet their own need for friendship and social interaction, and to become an affective resource for each other. The next chapter will explore migrant maternal sociality in more detail, to demonstrate the role
of the groups in counteracting migrant maternal isolation and constructing spaces and relationships of belonging.
Chapter 6  Migrant maternal sociality: building relational and affective settlement

6.1  Introduction

Chapter Five analysed the role of the administrators in creating and curating migrant maternal online communities. As ‘digital community mothers,’ the administrators’ meta-maternal practices create opportunities for relations between migrant mothers, helping them to rebuild their social infrastructure, which has been disrupted by migration and/or motherhood. This chapter focuses on the concept of migrant maternal sociality, investigating how migrant mothers become an affective resource for each other, thereby counteracting widespread isolation and constructing spaces and relationships of belonging. While research exists on maternal isolation, and, to a lesser extent, on migrant maternal isolation, the issues of friendship, sociality and relational belonging in migrant motherhood remain relatively unexplored. Focusing on migrant mothers’ agency, this chapter analyses the ways they respond to isolation and ruptures in their social infrastructure, exploring some of the strategies they deploy to accomplish their “relational settlement” (Diminescu 2008, p. 571). The term “relational settlement” is used in this chapter not just to refer to the experience of new and mobile migrants, organising departures, returns and “intermittent integration” (p. 571). Here, “relational settlement” includes relational practices which have a “home-building” sensibility, aiming to create the “affective building blocks” of community, security, familiarity, and possibility (Hage 1997). It also includes the practices of migrant women trying to ‘settle into’ motherhood. The focus here is on how the interactions facilitated by the online groups produce relational and affective settlement into migration and motherhood. In the groups, shared identities and experiences as migrant mothers intersect with the “mediated intimacy” (Chambers 2013) of online sociality to create a “safety net” of latent ties, which is central to their relational settlement.

The impact of digital connectivity on intimacy and friendship is a key theme in this chapter. Scholars disagree about whether online communication is “conducive to sociality” (Chambers 2013, p. 16) or offers “the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship” (Turkle

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1 Gemma’s words
manifesting in a lack of authentic intimacy and a decline in empathy (Turkle 2016). Our apparent willingness to consider robots as pets, or even as friends or intimate partners, suggests to Turkle that “the performance of connection seems connection enough” (2011, p. 19).

Chambers, by contrast, argues that social network sites are embedded in everyday life, and largely used to maintain pre-existing offline relationships with “a small number of intimate ties”, and to generate and maintain a wider network of “non-personal, weak or latent ties” (2013, p. 16).

Chambers has coined the term “mediated intimacies” to look at the intersections of social network sites and concepts of friendship, family, home, and community. Chambers explores the use of Facebook to sustain personal networks through individual Facebook profiles, focusing on relations between individuals who are known to each other. By contrast, this chapter continues to focus on Facebook groups and considers how people navigate different levels of intimacy through the interface of the communal experience of an online group.

This chapter introduces its core theme of migrant maternal sociality by noting that although isolation and friendship have been explored in motherhood and migration literature, they remain conceptually underdeveloped. For example, I note the strong association of motherhood and isolation, and argue that this association is not inevitable, rather it is historically and culturally specific. I also note that difficulties forming friendships constituted a prominent theme in the participants’ narratives, yet the issue is only scantily addressed in migration scholarship (Westcott & Vazquez Maggio 2016). To address this conceptual gap, I propose a tripartite framework of migrant maternal sociality, clarifying the significance of the different modes of sociality produced by interactions in and around the online communities, from casual intimacy to heartfelt friendship. I suggest that each mode of sociality contributes to migrant mothers’ relational settlement. In establishing relationships of varying degrees of intimacy with other migrant mothers, participants construct a sense of belonging to a community in their locality of settlement. In the final part of the chapter, the focus shifts from relational settlement to affective settlement. I argue that that affective settlement is made possible by developing connections with other migrant mothers who can provide relief, validation, empathy, comfort, and reassurance. Emotions such as failure, homesickness, guilt, disconnection, and insecurity worked against participants’ ability to feel ‘at home’ in Australia. Participating in migrant maternal communities helped participants not to overcome these emotions, but to reconcile them with the possibility of belonging.
This kind of community-building is, as Manohar (2013b) contends, “a fundamentally gendered settlement activity” and “an integral component of their care work” as migrant wives and mothers. Migrant mothers often find themselves tasked with the “relational settlement” of their spouse and children, in order to effect successful migration. However, in line with the idea that mothers may sustain a “selfhood outside of and beyond motherhood” (A. O’Reilly 2016, p. 135), I suggest that this community-building is also designed to meet women’s own needs for intimacy, friendship, support, and advice. Participants’ experiences of friendship, or homesickness, for example, may be shaped by motherhood but are not determined by it. Therefore, I contend that subsuming women’s “relational settlement” practices into a framework of “care work” risks losing sight of what women do for themselves and each other.

6.2 Establishing the context: isolation and friendship

6.2.1 Migrant maternal isolation: literature

Scholarly research and popular writing have investigated the close association of motherhood with loneliness and isolation (Baraitser 2009b; Johnson 2017; Lee et al. 2017; Morris 2018; Rogan et al. 1997). Numerous research reports into maternal mental health recommend increased social support to reduce isolation, increase practical support and thereby improve mental health (Balaji et al. 2007; Barclay & Kent 1998; Hetherington et al. 2018; Leahy-Warren et al. 2012). Rogan et al.’s (1997) grounded theory study of early motherhood in Australia identified “aloneness” as one of six main categories that made up the social process of “becoming a mother.” More recently, findings from the Longitudinal Study of Australian children indicate that one in four mothers has nobody to confide in most of the time and less than weekly contact with friends (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2009, p. 14). Studies suggest that when migration intersects with motherhood, isolation and loneliness may be even more prominent and problematic. A 2014 meta-synthesis of recent qualitative research relating to migrant mothers’ experiences of childbearing and motherhood found that “feelings of isolation, loneliness and depression from lack of support” were common across many of the studies (Benza & Liamputtong 2014, p. 582). New motherhood is a time when women require support to help them recover from birth, care for the baby and re-shape their life (Seefat-van Teeffelen et al. 2011; Wilkins 2006). Migrant mothers often lack this support and may feel additional sadness when imagining the kind of help from family and friends they would have received ‘at home’ (Ward 2004, p. 80). Migrant mothers may
also face barriers in seeking support, such as language barriers, difficulties navigating unfamiliar systems, fear of being judged a ‘bad’ mother (A. Ahmed et al. 2008; Schmied et al. 2017), and lack of cultural competence from service providers (DeSouza 2013). A 2010 study found that proficiency in English significantly affected whether new migrant mothers in Australia reported feelings of loneliness (Bandyopadhyay et al. 2010, p. 419). Women from non-English-speaking backgrounds may be less likely to access council-supported mothers’ groups (D. Scott et al. 2001) and playgroups (Gregory et al. 2016) in Australia.

Motherhood and isolation are not inherently bound together, however. The association of motherhood with isolation is historically and culturally specific, and most research in this area has been undertaken in the normative context of white, middle-class mothers in nuclear family arrangements. As Adrienne Rich notes in *Of Woman Born*, mothers in pre-nineteenth century North America were rarely home alone with only children to care for, as the home was a site of intense (economic) activity and families were large (Rich 1976). In the late twentieth century, bell hooks (1984) and Patricia Hill Collins (1991) described widespread community childrearing in African-American communities, where neighbours and extended family provided daily childcare, as well as longer-term informal adoptions and child-focused community activism. In many Australian Aboriginal communities, extended kinship families play an essential role in childrearing, both because of enduring cultural practices and the ongoing effects of government policies that have disrupted family structures and parent-child relationships (Jane Moore & Riley 2010). Some participants in this study came from countries in which dense networks of support in the perinatal period, extended family structures, and more collective modes of mothering, were more commonplace. Nevertheless, research suggests that maternal isolation still exists even in these contexts, and may be considered a risk factor for maternal and infant health (Raman et al. 2014).

Bell and Ribbens have distinguished between a “psychological sense of isolation” and “social isolation in [...] localised daily life” of mothers with young children (Bell & Ribbens 1994, p. 238). Their ethnographic studies, mainly with white women in South East England, highlight the significance of the “complex maternal worlds” and “webs of relationships” constructed by mothers, mostly in their local area. They argue that a dichotomous understanding around [work = public] and [home = private] has led to an under-theorisation of the social contacts and interactions of mothers that cut across private spaces (private homes) and public spaces such as community groups, schools, shops, playgroups, streets, and shops. Nevertheless, they note that
for many women “involvement in these networks did not develop until babies were several months old” and the time before that was “described as lonely and difficult by many women” (p. 251). Migrant mothers, whose experiences were not explored by Bell and Ribbens, may additionally experience a sense of cultural isolation or dislocation, as a result of embarking on motherhood in an unfamiliar context.

In the decades since the studies conducted by Bell and Ribbens, widespread digital connectivity has facilitated the construction of “complex maternal worlds” and “webs of relationships” (1994, p. 248) in online settings, during pregnancy and the early days of motherhood, when women may not yet have developed other maternal relationships. These online connections have the potential to disrupt the [work = public = male], [home = private = female] dichotomy outlined by Bell and Ribbens. Mothers interact in the semi-public space of online groups while remaining physically in their home. They may also interact in one semi-public space (the online group) while physically present in another public or semi-public space, such as the workplace, playground, or waiting room. Participating in a locally-based maternal group increases the chances of repeated interactions with the same people, rather than relying on crossing paths in the local streets, shops, and playgrounds. For people with few local attachments, such as new migrants, those connections can provide a pathway out of isolation. Unlike the local maternal networks studied by Bell and Ribbens, the online groups do not exclude those in full-time outside employment (1994, p. 248) as they are accessible outside work hours, or even during work hours from a smartphone, for example.

6.2.2 Migrant maternal isolation: participants’ experiences

For the women in this study, experiences of isolation resulted from an intersection of factors, including motherhood, migration, work, and identity. The different ways these elements intersected in the assemblage of the participants’ experiences affected how that isolation had been produced. For example, where migration coincided with, or followed shortly after, a period of maternity leave from their full-time job, the result was often an extended period as a stay at home mother in a new country. Sunita, who migrated from India during her first maternity leave, had hoped to find a new role in Australia with the company she had worked for before migration and maternity leave, but that did not materialise. Instead, she remained ‘at home’ with her son and then had a second child. Although she described the additional time with her children as a
“blessing,” Sunita found her unfamiliar “homemaker” role challenging without the support of the full-time nanny and other domestic help she had had in India, and she planned to look for new employment before her baby turned one. The transition away from full-time employment was not always an unwelcome change. Usha cited the desire for part-time employment and more time with her son, as a motivating factor behind their migration from India. Nevertheless, the simultaneous loss of a working identity, work-related networks, and place-based networks, created a strong sense of isolation, of having been “cut adrift from the social moorings secured by affective ties of family and friends, as well as community and place” (Yeoh & Khoo 1998, p. 172). Migrant mothers also experienced the loss of the “social moorings” provided by work outside the home. Where migration preceded motherhood, women’s post-migration social networks often centred around the workplace, but those work-based relationships proved insufficient once women stepped outside the workplace as new mothers.

Where women had experienced the co-presence of family and paid domestic workers within the home, their post-migration domestic responsibilities provided a stark contrast. Karen had given up a successful career history and a burgeoning freelance career in Singapore to move to Australia. After their arrival, she was “at home full time for about 3, four years, full-time mum.” She recalled the shock of the increased domestic responsibility and social isolation:

“In Singapore, I have a domestic helper, who lives in with us, and I have my mum who comes every day to help out with the children, then the chores, so I don’t have to do much cooking, or any housework. When I came here, everything I had to do on my own.”

In Singapore, Karen’s workplace and home were both spaces of social interaction. In Melbourne, life revolved around a home populated only by the members of her nuclear family, for whom she was the sole source of the reproductive labour that sustained their lives as new migrants.

Some women contrasted their isolated situation with the support and social contact they imagined they would have had in their home country. Even women who came from countries with similar individualised and intensive modes of mothering to those encountered in Australia, imagined an alternative context with childcare and friendships on tap. For example, Lisa, Siobhan, and Gemma cited siblings ‘back home’ in the UK and Ireland who benefited from free childcare
from their mothers. Social media highlighted these comparisons. “I see, on Facebook, my friends back home, and they’re having weekends away and nights out ...” Gemma explained, noting that this socialising and respite was made possible by grandparental childcare. Some women admitted that the supportive context they imagined might not correspond with reality, their imagination glossing over the practical realities of busy lives, distances, economic realities and family dynamics when viewed from a distance. Kavita admitted she had “rose-tinted glasses” when thinking about friends and family at home, noting “we see them more when we go back than they see of each other and they live quite close [to each other].”

The experience of Siobhan is outlined in the following vignette. Siobhan migrated to Sydney from Ireland about a year before the interview, and her experience illustrates a particular assemblage of work, motherhood, migration, and imagination, and the isolation it produced for her.

6.2.2.1 Vignette: Siobhan

Siobhan, a 40-year-old Irish migrant, lives in an apartment in central Sydney, where few other families live. All the mothers’ groups and baby clinics take place at least a bus ride away, which she has found difficult with a newborn baby. Even her nurse refused to visit her when she left the hospital, as there was nowhere for her to park near the apartment. Siobhan’s husband got a new job shortly before their son was born, working longer hours, sometimes six or seven days a week. In his industry (construction), and as relatively new migrants, they felt he had to take the work that was offered, whatever the impact on their family life.

Back home in Ireland, she lived close to her parents and saw her mother nearly every day. Her mother looks after her other grandchildren until they go to school, and her mother’s house is the “meeting point” for the whole family. Living in the same town she’d grown up in, she had a large network of friends and family. Her husband’s family also lived nearby. The contrast is stark with the long days she now spends alone with her baby. She imagines the companionship of having friends or family to bring her a cup of tea, or hold the baby for a moment, and the freedom of taking the baby “out for a spin” in the car, none of which she experiences in Sydney.

Siobhan regards loneliness as the most challenging aspect of her migration experience, even before becoming a mother. Neither antenatal classes nor her council-supported mothers’ group have...
resulted in ongoing friendships. At the time of the interview, she looked forward to returning to work, where she had started to make friends before she went on maternity leave. It was her (Australian) manager who told her about the UK/Irish mothers’ group. Even though she has never met up with anyone from the group, she finds it reassuring to know that she could. She joined when she was pregnant, and found it reassuring to see that women still socialised once they became mothers. Observing interactions in the group reassures Siobhan that she is “not the only person feeling that way,” that is, lonely and homesick.

6.2.3 Migrant friendship

Even in an age of digital connection, migration disrupts an individual’s social infrastructure, consisting of friends, extended family, professional networks and colleagues, domestic employees, and casual acquaintances. Westcott and Vazquez Maggio argue that migration literature tends to overlook the “hidden emotional cost” of migration that results from migrants’ need to make new friends. The process of initiating new friendships can be challenging, they argue, and can “contribute to the migrant’s overall feelings of success and security living in a new place” (Westcott & Vazquez Maggio 2016, p. 505). As well as needing the instrumental support and information that friendships can bring, “the migrant faces certain loneliness unless they are able to forge social connections” (p. 505). In their study of migrant mothers in Ireland, Gilmartin and Migge noted that new friendships were a key mechanism by which their participants developed “a connection to Ireland and […] a sense of place-belongingness” (Gilmartin & Migge 2016, p. 10). The study also found that participants relied on friendships with other migrant mothers, because of their mutual openness to new friendships in the absence of an established network, and their mutual need for support (for example, help with picking up children from school) in the absence of family support (p. 11-12). The formation of friendships is a key element of “relational settlement” but has largely been overlooked in studies of migrant motherhood.

The difficulty of establishing friendships was a prominent theme in participants’ recollections, and the struggle led to loneliness, depression, low confidence, frustration, and homesickness. Winnie recalled the loneliness of her first years in Australia:
“I had no friends, no one. I was pretty depressed, and I feel like I’m very separate from the society. I couldn’t get into the society here, I couldn’t find anybody to talk to, to understand me, to be my friend, and I had pretty low self-esteem at the time.”

Participants noted the loneliness that resulted from leaving friends “back home” (Pooja), particularly friends with a shared “history,” with whom they could be "brutally honest" (Michelle). Members of the German mothers’ group noted that people in their specific area of Sydney were particularly “cliquey” (Katja), attributing this to the fact that many local people had grown up in the locality, and therefore had dense, settled social networks. Other barriers included navigating differences in modes of conversation and sociality. As Katja remarked, “Australians are easy to meet but hard to get to know.” Nicole expressed frustration at the superficiality of everyday conversations, which she contrasted with Germans’ more straightforward, open mode of conversation. Michelle found local mothers to be “really rude” and felt her age created an additional barrier to making friends with younger mothers. Winnie, who was quoted above, was a migrant from Malaysia and cited barriers created by dominant Australian cultural practices of sociality, such as alcohol-related socialising and conversations centred around sport, which she found uninteresting and alienating. Winnie was the only participant to cite racism as a factor, but other women mentioned a lack of interest among local mothers in getting to know outsiders (Nicole), or the tendency of local Australian mothers to stick together to the exclusion of migrants or non-Anglophones (Kate). Tanja recalled feeling “quite alone” when she arrived speaking limited English, before she met another German mother through her daughter’s school.

Mobility among migrants in Australia disrupted friendships, suggesting limits to the ability of digital technologies to overcome the importance of proximity for social relations. The German mother who helped Tanja soon returned to Germany. Michelle recounted being asked by Australians and fellow migrants how long she would be staying, indicating their unwillingness to invest in a friendship if her stay might be short-lived. Other participants recounted experiences of friends returning home or moving elsewhere, their hard-earned friendships disrupted again by migration. Grainne described the emotional turmoil of seeing her friendship group “dwindle”:

“It’s a real struggle. So, we had one big group dwindle quite rapidly about two years ago, and it was [after] they all had their second child. But in the last year or 18 months, it’s been ... even ones that have just had their first baby and they’re going.
Like my friend [...] she’s pregnant with her second, and there’s seven weeks between her little boy and my little boy, and now there’s only 12 days between our due date this time. She’s going home to Ireland to have her baby. And she couldn’t tell me face to face because she knew ... I was devastated. Because [...] we used to go to those groups together when we were on maternity leave, and she really helped me through all the struggles at the beginning and vice versa [...].”

Grainne associates her friends’ migration decisions with their maternal journeys; a factor often overlooked in migration literature. Lisa, who moved to an outer city suburb after the birth of her second child, described how her friends are “all scattered around” as they have sought “a bigger house and more comfortable rent, as families have grown.” Stefanie described a series of departures, including her sister, a German friend, and an English friend, which left her “devastated” and “upset.”

The preceding discussion demonstrates a range of issues facing migrants as they attempt to meet their need for friendship in a new country. Struggling with emotions relating to leaving friends ‘back home’ (Westcott 2014), migrants encounter barriers to building new friendships, including perceived unwillingness by local people to reciprocate moves towards friendship, cultural differences, language barriers, and ongoing mobility that continues to disrupt friendships. Digital connectivity enables migrants to stay in touch more easily with friends and family back home, but does not erase the potential for mobility to disrupt friendships, and may even enhance the sense of separation from supportive networks engendering “that tinge of jealousy every time you FaceTime and everyone’s there” (Gemma). Friendship, migration, and motherhood, are closely associated in migrants’ accounts. These factors help to explain the need for groups like the online migrant maternal communities where migrant mothers can befriend each other. Migrants in these settings match each other’s need for friendship and can sidestep the “frustration, shame, embarrassment and alienation” that can result from failed communication with potential friends (Westcott & Vazquez Maggio 2016, p. 509).
6.3 Migrant maternal sociality as relational settlement

Both migration and motherhood rupture women’s established social networks at the precise time their need for support, advice, information, empathy and companionship increases. Building new social networks around their new maternal role is a critical means by which mothers re-shape their world following the momentous upheaval that is the transition to motherhood. New mothers reach for each other to create a community of mothers, either in their local area, or connected in online communities or blogging networks (Arnold & Martin 2016; Bell & Ribbens 1994; Madge & O’Connor 2006; Strange et al. 2014a). Similarly, migrants work hard to make social connections, to build networks and communities in which they can find friendship, empathy, fun, and belonging. Much migration research focuses on the material benefits to be found via these connections, using a social capital framework (for example, Patulny 2015; Ryan 2011). While material and emotional benefits may be interconnected, this chapter focuses primarily on the affective connections between migrant mothers.

Because of the dual ruptures of migration and motherhood, ruptures which have enduring impacts, the significance of the groups in facilitating sociality was as apparent to women who had arrived in Australia already mothers, as it was to those who became mothers after migrating. Lisa, who arrived from the UK pregnant with her first child, described how it felt to inhabit the doubly liminal space of ‘just arrived’ and ‘not yet a mother’:

“With regards to an identity when I was coming over, I didn’t feel as though I was the work person I was when I left, and then I was also pregnant, and I didn’t really know how to handle that because it was the first time I’d been pregnant. And then I didn’t have any friends here, so I didn’t know how to handle that either! So it was weird. The first few months were really quite … quiet, lonely, being pregnant, not wanting to do anything. It was, it was a bit of a weird phase, I guess. One that I wouldn’t want to do again. […] It wasn’t really until I started my antenatal classes and going to meetings regarding the pregnancy that I started meeting people. So then I became that mum figure. I kind of fit into something then.”
For Lisa, the combination of migration and emergent motherhood entailed a loss of her worker identity, which, as a fitness instructor, was also bound up with her changing pregnant body. Migration deprived her of her existing network of friends. Motherhood gave her access to an alternative identity and a way to meet new people, but she was only able to access these benefits towards the end of her pregnancy. A secondary rupture in her maternal networks occurred when many of her new friends returned to work, about a year after their children were born. Lisa was unable to return to work, due to the cost of childcare and lack of family support. Seeking new friends to replace those no longer able to meet up during weekdays, Lisa joined the UK and Irish mothers’ group. Meeting other mothers was a crucial part of becoming “that mum figure,” enabling her to “fit in” and begin the process of building belonging in a new place, and in a new life phase.

Lisa’s experience of seeking new friends when her other friends returned to work exemplifies the consciously pragmatic way many participants talked about friendship. While women sought friends with whom they “got on” or “clicked” and had “something in common,” they also sought friends who lived nearby, could meet at convenient times, had children the same age, and other practical considerations. In some cases, the pragmatism related to the practical benefits that might accrue from friendship. For example, Celine hoped to find potential babysitters, and people to help pick up her children from school, and therefore focused her attention on local people. To Celine, the sense that you “got on” with someone seemed less useful as a basis of friendship than a joint project or activity that would bring people together on a regular basis. She described her pragmatic approach to meeting people in a new place:

“I was part of a migrant mums group there [in New Zealand], so I had lots of migrant mums around, and I used to go and knit with them, because that’s what you do [both laugh]. So, I’ll do whatever! I’ll knit if that’s what you do to go and meet people!”

The experience of the ruptures of migration and motherhood had increased participants’ awareness of the processes by which friendships are made and maintained. Their decision-making processes included aspirations for themselves (friendship, empathy, someone to share common experiences, belonging), for their children (friendships, language acquisition, identity) and for their whole family (creating a social structure, creating a sense of belonging for the whole family).
6.3.1 Constructing a theory of migrant maternal sociality: from casual intimacy to heartfelt friendship

The following sections propose a framework of migrant maternal sociality as viewed through the lens of the online groups. In this framework, migrant maternal sociality is separated into three levels of intimacy, all of which provide support, reassurance, companionship, and belonging. Firstly, women talked about casual contacts, and social interactions that functioned as a kind of entertainment. Secondly, they spoke about the importance of intermediate ties, people who were neither family nor friends, but on whom they could rely for emotional and practical support. Finally, women spoke about intimate friendships they had developed, or hoped to develop, around the group. Distinguishing between these levels of sociality facilitates a nuanced analysis of the types of social relations and structures that have been disrupted by migration and motherhood, and of the different ways migrant mothers utilise the affordances of the Facebook groups to rebuild their social infrastructure.

6.3.1.1 Casual intimacy and culturally-inflected “banter”

One of the challenges migrants face is the sense of having been “cut adrift from the social moorings secured by affective ties of family and friends, as well as community and place” (Yeoh & Khoo 1998, p. 172). Participants reported missing people with whom they could gossip, exercise, go to the cinema, or whose daily life dramas they could observe. New mothers may also miss being part of the sociality of the workplace, or need companionship during daylight hours when their friends are at work. The migrant maternal online groups provided them with opportunities to start rebuilding “the social and community fabric in which their lives were embedded” (Yeoh & Khoo 1998, p. 172).

Celine explained that one of her primary motivations for joining was to “broaden [her] social circle” by attending evening meet-ups. Belonging to the group gave her access to a potential social life: “It's just nice to know that you've got an invitation somewhere.” The migrant maternal groups offered a first step to re-building a social network: easy to access online, a sense of belonging generated by meeting the group’s membership criteria, some commonalities to spark discussion, and opportunities to meet offline. Kate, an administrator of the Brazilian group, distinguished between two kinds of friends, based on emotional intimacy and exchange of personal information: “You have two kinds of friends, just the socialising ones, and then the ones you talk about your
life.” She described the group of fellow single mothers she had met through the group as “just to go out girls, they’re not like the friends I tell everything.” Nevertheless, she cited these “go out girls” as one of the main benefits of participating in the group. Both the close friendships Kate had developed through the group, and the casual social relationships formed there, constituted important elements of her migrant maternal social infrastructure.

The groups afforded the possibility for light-hearted, playful chat, in online discussions and offline meet-ups. Not necessarily intended to lead to deeper friendships, although they sometimes were a pathway to intimacy, these opportunities for “banter” were a significant form of culturally-inflected social connection. For example, Priya noted the enjoyment of participating in light-hearted “chat or banter” with other Indian mothers, such as discussing plans for Valentine’s Day:

“I think it’s a good sort of place to just vent and talk about random stuff as well. So, it can be a good distraction as well; it’s not just a support group. [...] Just random sort of chat or banter with people from the same background. Valentine’s Day is massive in India, even though it’s not our festival, because of you know, Hallmark cards and commercialised, so all of us have grown up with Valentine’s Day as massive.”

Susie recalled the “banter” from the offline British mothers’ meet-up, discussing each other’s clothes, familiar clothes shops, and sourcing “real English chocolate” in Australia. Kate likened watching activities on the group to the Brazilian soap operas she grew up with, providing light entertainment. Interactions categorised as banter or entertainment involved relatively superficial topics but with a cultural specificity that lent them additional significance. Shared backgrounds make such “banter” possible. In turn, the “banter” provides a connection to home and culture that lends it more affective weight. Migration literature drawing on concepts of weak and strong ties tends to focus on the types of capital that migrants can accrue through social ties, such as skills, opportunities, and childcare (Manohar 2013b; Ryan 2011). Mothers in this study, however, emphasised the affective benefits of casual conversation, such as fun, belonging, and relief.
6.3.1.2 Intermediate intimacy: supportive strangers and latent ties

“I feel like they are a bunch of strangers, but at the same time, they’re a bunch of strangers that are very supportive to each other.” (Grainne)

The intermediate nature of the groups was a recurring theme. In Karen’s words, “it’s not too close but it’s not far away either, it’s just at your fingertips.” The phrase “at your fingertips” might imply proximity, but in this context, Karen is referring to the fact that the group is accessible via her phone, which is often literally at her fingertips. Nevertheless, because the connection is via her phone, she is also able to turn it off or put it away, so it is not “too close.” She is in control of the degree of connection. Karen’s words appear to resonate with Turkle’s assertion that, “technology makes it easy to communicate when we wish and to disengage at will” (2011, p. 13), an affordance dubbed “volume control” by Baron (2008). Online connections are both close at hand and a safe distance away, and under control. Despite this desire for control, participants’ experiences contradict Turkle’s claims that digital connections create only the “illusion of companionship” (2011) and a “decline in empathy” (2016). While the digital connections manifest in the group may not always be expressions of deep friendship, they are more than an empty performance or illusion. The groups provide a conduit for empathy and support between people who might never have met in person, but who consider common membership in the group to be sufficient grounds for providing support.

The relationships developed through the groups seemed to exist in an intermediate space between strangership (Horgan 2012) and friendship, between weak and strong ties (Petrózzi et al. 2007). The groups afforded the opportunity for people to interact casually, answer each other’s questions, perhaps meet at a playgroup, without developing into a friendship. The significance of those intermediate relationships lies in what could be characterised as the “latent ties” which underlie them. A latent tie, in this context, is a potential relationship of obligation, support, or empathy, by virtue of mutual membership of the group, which can be activated by a request for information or help, but which before that request has only a latent value. Haythornthwaite’s concept of latent ties emphasises potential ties created by infrastructure, such as a departmental email list acting as a “potential connector,” but does not conceptualise the affective impact that results from people’s awareness of those latent ties (2002). By contrast, in this study, the participants’ awareness of the potential ties, and what those ties might offer them, provided a significant source of comfort. Members are aware of the potential connection but currently have
no, or only very limited, experience of intimacy, communication or reciprocity (Granovetter, 1973) with the other person or people.

The latent ties produced by these intermediate relationships produced a specific sense of security through interdependence. Gemma valued “that instant kind of support from people who you don’t know. That straightaway you could just join the group and post something, and you’ll get that back straight away.” Such support was immediate, not dependent on developing a relationship or time spent in the group, and could be activated at any point. Immediacy is particularly important to migrants who have not had the opportunity to build trusting relationships. Petra described how she had been part of the German mothers’ group for a while, without seeking emotional support. When a distressing incident occurred at the playgroup she organised through the group, she instantly received meaningful support:

“We’re not close friends, but I think there’s a certain connection that grows over the years. You don’t have to be, like, deeply connected at all times, but when there’s someone needs, there’s a connection. You know, someone needs us now. Because I was pretty devastated, and they picked that up […] And I think that’s because we’re from the same culture, I think that’s why it was, yeah.”

The mothers’ shared background and experience produce empathy, understanding, and willingness to provide support.

The statements by Petra and Gemma refer to emotional support, but women also related instances of members providing practical support. Aditi recalled a member of the Indian mothers’ group receiving fundraising support from the community, as well as support with raising awareness around her child’s rare genetic disorder. She received support from individuals and structural support from the group, which provided a place to post about her charity and attempts to find a cure. “We give her that space in whatever way we can,” Aditi explained. The same group helped a newly separated mother find culturally appropriate accommodation, to reassure her concerned family. South Asian mothers in West Melbourne put together a roster to cook and deliver meals to a struggling mother who had contacted the group administrator for help. On another occasion, they helped a mother locked out of her apartment with her children. Ana
described Brazilian mothers helping to find employment for members’ husbands who had lost the jobs on which the family’s visa depended. Such support need not be directly reciprocal.

Witnessing others’ interactions online, as Siobhan observed other mothers arranging to meet up, or receiving support for homesickness, created awareness of potential ties residing in the community. All members, whether they have organised, received, offered or witnessed acts of support or social activities, are aware of the potential for the group to respond to members’ needs. This creates a sense of security through interdependence, based on membership of the group. This security through interdependence provides a contrast to Hage’s individualistic concept of security as a vital element of migrant home-building (1997). Hage’s migrants must feel they are a “wilful subject” in their home to feel secure and thus “at home.” Specifically, they must feel they able to pursue their own needs and exclude “threatening others” from their home. This, however, takes little account of patriarchal gendered power relations in the home, under which women, and particularly mothers, are encouraged to pursue others’ needs above their own, and under which women may not be able to exclude “threatening others” (which may include their male partner) from the home. Homebuilding for the migrant mothers in this study involved inclusion and reliance on (selected) others, rather than independence and the power to exclude.

The groups provided access to a “safety net” (Gemma) of other migrant mothers, which built a sense of home. Winnie explained:

“Even though I don’t use them every day, but when I need them, they are there. I know where to go if it’s something that I just want to ask Chinese – maybe just my culture thing or whatever – they are there. And I can find people to instantly meet up, if I want to meet someone who speaks my language. So, I think that is really important, helpful, and makes me feel like I’m home. [...] I don’t feel like I’m so lonely, I find that people will still understand me and are here to support me if I need to.”

Building a community, through interactions and interdependence, is, in Manohar’s words, “a fundamentally gendered settlement activity” in which migrant mothers use “gendered labor” to “construct a dynamic community” (Manohar 2013b, p. 25). Manohar’s participants, Tamil women in the US, identified community building as “an integral component of their care work as mothers
and wives in the United States” (p. 32), and as a response to the “loss of the extended kin safety network” they had experienced in India (p. 30). In this research, the shared identity as migrant mothers from a particular background intersects with the “mediated intimacy” (Chambers 2013) of online sociality to create a ‘safety net’ consisting of latent, intermediate ties. Not kin, sometimes not even acquaintances yet, but a community from which one can expect support.

6.3.1.3 “Exchanging hearts”: Pathways to friendship

In their interviews, some participants discussed friendships they had formed through the group, people they characterised as “good friends,” of whom they spoke with a sense of intimacy or affection. Criteria they used to differentiate these relationships from other connections formed around the groups included: frequency of meeting (offline), meeting unrelated to activities organised through the group, sharing significant elements such as common maternal practices, shared leisure interests, children of the same age and/or gender, and the extent to which they derived practical or emotional support from the friendship. For example, in the following account, Diya explains how her friendship started through the UK/Irish mothers’ group, and grew beyond it, based on common interests, children who are the same age, and shared “parenting ethos”:

“We met [...] on the group, yeah, and then we met up at one of the meet-ups. And then, we meet up individually outside of the meetups, and obviously, our babies are now the same age so we can have playdates and things. [...] We’ve got more in common, [...] we’re into similar things, or we have a similar parenting ethos or yeah... we’re both really into healthy food and cooking, and so we’ll share tips on that sort of stuff. So, we have got more in common, and I guess that’s why we’ve become friends. As opposed to some of the other women who I’ll mainly just see at a meet-up and say hi.”

Lina, too, distinguished between “acquaintances” and “friends” based on her desire to meet friends, regularly, outside group interactions:

“I want to meet the ones that I formed a connection with in that Swedish group. I want to see them at least every month, at one point. We definitely always go to each other’s birthday parties. So, they are friends.”
Usha recalled posting on the group for Indian mothers, looking for mothers in her locality who might want to meet. From the resulting meet-up, she developed a close friendship, and the two families celebrated Diwali together. For Stefanie, while she cited her mother as her primary source of personal emotional support, she had come to rely almost entirely on her circle of fellow German mothers for support around issues relating to her children. Petra was her closest friend from the group, which she attributed to the fact they both worked nearly full-time, unlike many other German mothers in her social circle, and happened to work near each other. This made it easy for them to meet, for example, for a coffee on their way to work, and discuss the challenges of managing work, long commutes, and child-raising.

Becoming ‘Facebook friends’ was also cited as a step on the pathway towards ‘real’ friendship. Becoming Facebook friends entails revealing more personal information, whereas interactions on the group can remain relatively anonymous. As a performative act, becoming ‘Facebook friends’ can be a ritualised public display of a personal connection, involving rapid and intense self-disclosure (Chambers 2013, p. 166; Lambert 2013). By contrast, members of the same group can interact for months or even years, while retaining more control over personal disclosures. As research suggests people interpret self-disclosure online as representative of intimacy, leading to reciprocal disclosure (Jiang et al. 2013), this move to Facebook friendship can be characterised as an escalation of intimacy.

The groups offer a sense of hope and the possibility of friendship, when many women had struggled to form close friendships since migrating to Australia. Participants discussed group-related interactions that might blossom into more intimate friendships. Winnie had joined the group hoping to find “quality friends” with whom she could “exchange hearts.” While she didn’t feel she had yet achieved that, she had found “quite a close friend” through the group, and continued to hope for more. Heike spoke about her hopes for a friendship with a woman who had lent her a dirndl:

“I picked it up, and I had to alter it a bit and then I had to alter it back. As a thank you, I gave her a voucher to the German shop where you can buy all the German products. So, I gave her a voucher to that to say thank you. And she’s coming to the

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1 Traditional German skirt
flea market. So that’s kind of …” [later in the interview] “Well, that lady with the dirndl, that’s brewing. [...] Again, she has a very small child, and I’m not quite sure whether I’m going to invest that time.”

In this series of interactions sparked by a post on the group requesting to borrow a dirndl, Heike sees the possibility of friendship “brewing” although the gap between the ages of their children (Heike has teenaged children) presents a potential barrier to this imagined intimacy. Kavita similarly imagines the future of a friendship that has developed from the group, outlining the steps that will move it into the category of a close “natural” friendship:

“We’ve done a few things, we’ve been to each other’s kids’ birthdays, our blokes have met, we’ll probably do more things together. You know, you just kind of get to that stage where you know, as your network or your foundation, relationship develops, you get more overlap, and then it just becomes really natural, doesn’t it, after a while?”

These examples from Heike, Kavita, and Winnie make visible the temporal and developmental nature of friendship. The participants were highly aware of the work involved in moving friendships along a scale of intimacy. The groups provided an opportunity to make initial contacts, to select potential friends based on location or the content of their posts, to meet up with them offline either at a group event or separately. While the group-based interactions, whether online or offline, were in some ways seen as contrived or mediated by the frame of the group, they provided a potential pathway to deeper, more “natural” friendships.

6.4 “I’m not alone”: affective settlement and solidarity

This section shifts the focus from relational settlement to affective settlement. The two are deeply intertwined: affective settlement is made possible by developing connections with other migrant mothers who can provide relief, validation, empathy, comfort, and reassurance. Emotions such as failure, homesickness, guilt, disconnection, and insecurity worked against participants’ ability to feel ‘at home’ in Australia. Participating in migrant maternal communities helped participants not to overcome these emotions, but to reconcile them with the possibility of belonging. I trace how this emotional home-building process works through the exchange of emotional responses
between migrant mothers. Using the key themes of failure, homesickness, guilt, and disconnection, which were identified by participants as emotions that troubled their affective settlement, this section explores how the migrant maternal groups offer relief, validation, empathy, and comfort. This enables women to build a sense of belonging in which their previously troubling emotions become sites of commonality and connection.

6.4.1 Failure

Participants described the emotional challenges they faced as migrant mothers, such as loneliness, emotional isolation, guilt, homesickness and difficulties adjusting to changed circumstances. In the context of migrant isolation and individualised maternal responsibility, some women had attributed these challenges to a personal failure or inability to cope. The emotional isolation this engendered was enhanced by the sense that people in their intimate circles (for example, their husband, their husband’s family, and non-migrant friends) did not understand, or validate, the challenges they faced. Finding others who shared their experiences empowered them to recognise the structural or contextual factors contributing to their troubles, which relieved their sense of personal failure. Winnie, who migrated from Malaysia to Australia to marry an Anglo-Australian man she had met online, struggled for years to find friends. When they moved from Queensland to Melbourne, Winnie joined the group for Malaysian mothers hoping to find “some quality friends that we can exchange heart.” She particularly hoped to find someone who married to an Anglo-Australian, “because we’re both in-between and because we both understand both cultures.” In our interview, Winnie expressed her deep sense of relief from the realisation that other Asian migrants also found it difficult to make friends in Australia:

“Feel great, I feel [inhales] oh my goodness! After all these years, I finally feel that I find some friends. I’m not alone, and I’m not the one who has mental issues because I see everyone, actually, when I step more into the Asian society, and know a lot of them, and see that actually everyone has a common issue, in the sense of making friends in Australia.”

Winnie reported that her husband had told her she just needed to “try harder” to make friends, failing to understand the cultural and linguistic barriers, or the racism, that Winnie encountered. Winnie’s participation in the group helped her husband place their experience in a broader context, which had eased an area of conflict in their marriage.
“He does understand now that... [...] It’s from your background, same background, that’s where you can find the best friends, and just instantly you trust each other, you are just comfortable and you can just speak so comfortable, not to worry about, oh am I going to offend you and this and that because you know each other’s culture.”

Even when women had a migrant spouse who understood some of the issues, it was nevertheless a relief to find a community of people who experienced similar challenges. Grainne explained that “it’s like you’re reassuring yourself that it’s OK to feel this way, other people do.” This reassurance could come from responses to one’s own post, from involvement in a discussion started by another member or from witnessing responses to a post made by another member. Katrin recalled feeling homesick and posting on the group, asking, “Is this normal? Will it ever go away?” The responses she received in the group discussion and through private messages, reassured her that it was a common experience and not a personal failure:

“Everyone just wrote, I don’t think it will ever stop. So, and that kind of makes you feel better in a way of... [...] because sometimes you think: am I failing, should I just move back home? But people were like, ‘the grass is not greener on the other side, and it just won’t go away. You just got to learn to live with it, unfortunately, so don’t think your life’s too bad.’ So that was actually quite helpful. It sounds not helpful, but it actually was.”

Participants who would not initiate a discussion about homesickness, because they are “too private” (Siobhan) or too “internal” to want “everything out there” (Lisa) were still able to derive a sense of relief or solidarity from witnessing others’ posts. Siobhan explained:

“So even though I’m not commenting, or I’m not putting my own stuff out there, seeing that other people are doing it, seeing that other people have those feelings [...] I do like to see – not that I like to see that people are lonely but I like to see that people, you know, you’re not the only person feeling that way. So that’s the value of the groups really, isn’t it? To see that, and thank god some people are brave enough to post on it.”

Although Lisa and Siobhan refrained from initiating discussions, they understood the importance of responding, even just clicking ‘like’ on a comment, “just to show I understand, I hear you”
(Siobhan). In this exchange of empathy, both participants and observers are able to place their emotions in context. They construct an imagined community of migrant mothers, to which they belong, members of which share similar emotional responses to migrant motherhood.

Chapter Seven builds on this notion of imagined migrant maternal communities, as communities of people who share particular sets of maternal practices, which may differ from the dominant practices in their country of settlement. Here I focus on the experiences of non-Anglophone mothers’ desire to teach their children their heritage language, in the face of incomprehension, indifference, and judgement from their Anglophone partner and their partner’s family. These experiences were often a key driver for non-Anglophone women to join the migrant maternal groups. Women cited practical justifications for teaching their children their own language, such as communicating with non-Anglophone family members, or greater access to jobs and education. The mothers’ ambitions of raising bilingual children related to their aspiration to build a transnational identity (Utomo 2014, p. 176), which would link them to their children through a shared language. Raising a bilingual child was also seen by some women as a marker of good migrant motherhood. Because of these emotional motivations, failure to pass on their language to their child had a potential emotional impact that was difficult for those who were not migrant mothers to understand. For example, while Sabina noted that fluency in Swedish might enable her son to access free tertiary education in Sweden, her main motivation for teaching her son Swedish was in fact emotional, or identity-based. Sabina recalled her husband’s assessment of Swedish as “such an insignificant language compared to Spanish,”2 to which Sabina declared, “you can’t really say that about a language.” Explaining the centrality of language to her identity, she said, “when I’m old and senile and have forgotten everything else, I’ll speak Swedish.” Teaching her son Swedish was a means of establishing a link between him and this core part of herself.

Some women encountered resistance or indifference from their partner or partners’ family towards this maternal project of language transmission. Eva, Usha, Annika, Katrin, Lina, and Winnie also described resistance from their children to speaking their mother’s language. “When I speak to [my son],” Katrin explained, “he’s like ‘nah, mum, nah, I want to hear English, I don’t want to hear German.’” Eva explained her strategy of maintaining social relations with Swedish speakers, to maintain the possibility of language transmission: “He doesn’t speak Swedish, he

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2 Born in Latin America, Sabina speaks fluent Spanish, Swedish and English.
chooses to speak English, but hopefully with just regularly – we see Swedes every week, and at least it’s there all the time.” Some women faced emotional responses from their parents, who became “angry” (Annika) or “upset” (Katrin) at their grandchildren’s refusal to speak their language. This compounded their feelings of guilt and failure. Petra explained how her son’s exclusion from the German playgroup felt like a personal failure, which her husband struggled to comprehend:

“Probably an Australian couldn’t – like my husband struggles to [understand] why it was so important to me [...] He’s like, come on, he will learn German anyway. [...] I felt, I tried to do this bilingual thing, and I kind of felt I’d failed or something. It was a sore spot.”

For Petra, “this bilingual thing” is a core part of good migrant motherhood and failure to raise a bilingual child has a deeper emotional impact than her husband can grasp. Where previously Petra was ambivalent about the idea of focusing her social interaction on fellow German migrants, she admits: “I had to revise my view that it’s not a bad thing to, it’s actually not a bad thing to know some Germans. It can actually be helpful.” Finding other migrant mothers through the groups, who were also committed to raising bilingual children, validated their decision, and their identity as mothers with an overseas heritage in Australia. It also gave them access to language-based playgroups, and social contacts with mothers and children who spoke the same language, which supported their maternal linguistic project.

6.4.2 Homesickness

Homesickness, “the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home” (Thurber & Walton 2012), is often perceived in the literature as a temporary, transitional state, which diminishes as one adjusts or adapts to the new context (English et al. 2017; Stroebe et al. 2015). This perception may be related to the predominance of studies with university students leaving home for the first time (English et al. 2017; Thurber & Walton 2012). By contrast, Stroebe et al. have described homesickness as a “mini-grief,” suggesting a more complex phenomenon with parallels to bereavement-related grief (Stroebe et al. 2016). In the data from this project, homesickness was not conceptualised as a temporally linear experience, with intense emotion

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3 There is also a suggestion that women may experience homesickness more than men, or may be more open to discussing it and seeking support (Scharp et al. 2016)
fading gently over time. Some newer migrants had found it disconcerting to realise, from


discussions on the groups, or with other friends, that homesickness might not diminish. Siobhan


found it “kind of scary” to realise that homesickness might be a salient experience, even many


years later, “because you think, oh, sure in six years’ time I’ll be well settled, you know, surely I


won’t still be thinking I want to go home!” Diya spoke dismissively of women who still participated


in the group despite having been in Australia for many years: “I just think if you’ve been here


eighteen years, surely you’ve built a network for yourself.” Long-term migrant Heike declared that


she had “never really had too much problems with homesickness,” but for others, like Susie and


Rebecca, homesickness had been a constant affective accompaniment to their lives since

migration. Rebecca cited homesickness as her biggest challenge, and noted: “there isn’t a day that


goes by where I don’t wish that we were all still living in London.” Susie sought counselling over


many years for mental health issues relating to homesickness, and spoke about how she tried to


manage her feelings for the sake of her children:


“I still go off and see someone, just because you know, it still rehashes, you go

through these phases of homesickness and regret and ‘what have I done?’ [...] And

then I think, no, I’ve got to be strong for my kids now, because I don’t want them to

have a mum that’s depressed and regretful and thinks ‘what have I done with my

life?’”


Stefanie noted that her approach to homesickness had changed since she had her son. She

recalled crying on her wedding day, with the realisation that she was committing to living in

Australia with her Australian spouse. Since the birth of her son, she explained, “I’m not as

homesick anymore. I’m homesick, yes, for him, because I would love him to know his family a lot

more.” For Aoife, the most intense homesickness came when her mother returned home following

a month-long stay after the birth of her child: “It’s so much easier if your mum’s there, you can

chat and have a cup of tea, [...] I think I felt very lonely at that point, and thinking, I really wish I

was at home.” The birth of Katrin’s second child brought her most severe bout of homesickness.

She remembered struggling to manage with two children, yearning for her mother’s support: “I

love my dad, but I know mum would just come and chip in.”


In addition to weddings and childbirth, participants noted annual events and seasons precipitated

more severe homesickness. For example, Swedish, German and British migrants noted Christmas
brought intense homesickness. Annika wistfully recalled her German childhood traditions of attending church, advent calendars, anticipation around gifts, Christmas trees, cold weather and elaborate meals, mostly orchestrated by her mother, and contrasted that with the “laissez-faire” attitude of her in-laws: “you know, just throw something on the barbie!” This homesickness for community traditions drove some women to seek sociality with their fellow migrants. Homesickness relating to her daughter’s first Diwali sent Kavita searching for the Indian mothers’ group. For Eva, events organised by the Swedish Church provided a comforting link to home at Christmas time. Ana noted that a Brazilian mother had used her group to organise a Christmas dinner for other families to counteract their seasonal homesickness. Again, women often found people in their intimate circles unable to provide the empathy or support they required, and turned to other migrant mothers instead. Rebecca, the creator of the group for UK/Irish mothers in Sydney, explained how the group had supported her through bouts of intense homesickness, while her husband understood neither her homesickness nor the impact of the group:

“At first, I don’t actually think he could understand why I was setting the group up (almost like he didn’t think I needed any support). Then he seemed to feel a bit threatened by it and felt like it was a place where everyone whinged about Australia or living here! Now I think he feels like it’s something I run in the background that probably gives me some sort of comfort but apart from that I don’t think he thinks it’s of as much value to me as I feel it is.”

6.4.3 Guilt

While the importance of passing on language and the challenge of homesickness were particularly misunderstood by Anglophone and non-migrant family and friends, the guilt of migration had a gendered aspect that transcended the nationality of the participants’ partner. That is, whether their partner was also a migrant or Australian, women recounted a sense of migration-related guilt not entirely shared by their partner, which again drew them to the community of other migrant mothers. This guilt related specifically to depriving their children of extended family relationships, depriving their parents of a close relationship with their grandchildren, being far away and unable to carry out family responsibilities such as providing care for sick or elderly relatives, or having not spent time with relatives before they died. Kavita described herself as “completely wracked with guilt” during her first six years in Australia, a guilt which returned once she had a child. Susie
described herself as “ridden with guilt” and noted her mother had “drilled” that guilt into her, asking “How could you leave us? How could you leave your family?”

Women also expressed a sense of pre-emptive guilt about family emergencies or bereavements that had not yet occurred. Grainne explained her feelings of guilt in relation to their parents, and her sister-in-law, foreseeing future health issues which “play on our mind.” Her mother-in-law had breast cancer the previous year, and Grainne stated that “if anything like that happened again, we probably would just go.” Although Grainne used “we” and “our”, implying that her husband shared the feelings of guilt and worry, a few minutes later she differentiated their responses: “I think with [husband]'s mother, when she had the health scare, terrible thing to say, but I think if it was my mum, I’d have gone. I think I’d be gone.” Kavita too recalled a health scare involving her husband’s parent, and imagined herself acting differently:

“If it had been me, and if it had been my parents, once I found out that there was a malignancy in the biopsy, I probably would have just dropped everything and gone straight home. But boys are quite different.”

Participants’ gendered guilt resonates with research in this area. Although Wilding (2006) has suggested that online technologies have helped overcome some of the gender divide in transnational family matters, because men’s increasing involvement via email relieves some of the “kinwork” traditionally done by women (p. 135), research suggests that female migrants still feel more responsibility for transnational caregiving, particularly when it requires in-person or emotional care, and that migration-related guilt may be gendered (Baldassar 2015; De Silva 2017; Vermot 2015). Migrant women’s guilt, Baldassar suggests, is “a ubiquitous and ever-present feeling of not having adequately met kinship obligations to care” (p. 87). In Baldassar’s study, Italian daughters who migrated for love or career, not economic necessity, received more parental disapproval and subsequently experienced more guilt for leaving. In De Silva’s study, Sri Lankan parents expressed disappointment in their migrant sons’ unwillingness to provide transnational emotional care, whereas their daughters’ “constant emotion work provided satisfaction and happiness” (p. 13). In this study, guilt also related to disrupting the family network, in particular the relationships between grandparents and their grandchildren. Migration made it impossible for them to fulfil their familial role of facilitating these intergenerational relationships. In the context of gendered migration-related guilt, migrant mothers were unable to find empathy from their
spouses who, in most cases, did not experience the same intensity of guilt. In response, they sought empathy from other mothers in the same position.

6.4.4 Disconnection

A combination of missing home, and disrupted connections with friends, family, and culture, left many women with a yearning for homely familiarity and security, which the groups provided. Lina described recently arrived Swedish migrants in the group as feeling “home-y to me, so it’s like Sweden is not that far away.” This feeling was enhanced by the fact that fellow group members were not just Swedish, but also “Swedish people who have travelled, just like me.” Eva described the Swedish group as “a bit of home, but nearby [...] It feels nice.” Gemma described the nostalgic feelings precipitated by seeing posts on the British group about “watching Wimbledon” on the television. The sense of comfort, closeness, and connection had a familial sense for Grainne, who explained: “When you meet up with them, I think they... they’re just... they feel a bit more like family.” Communication between members was described as “easy” and “comfortable” in comparison to more fraught interchanges with Australians. Annika recalled collecting an item from a German mother she had never met before, “you just click, you know, we talk, it was fun, it was like we talk about the same things and it felt easy, you know, sometimes maybe not so easy with Australian mums.” Archana too felt their shared background facilitated a greater sense of connection with Indian mothers:

“Culturally we come from a similar background, so there are some issues which are probably very [...] Indian in nature, at the core. So, I think that’s where it probably becomes more comfortable. [...] I feel it’s just a little easier to connect, like I said I have a few Australian friends, very few....”

The groups can be “a bit of home,” and they can also make people “feel more at home” (Michelle). In a migrant maternal context where isolation is widespread, and social networks have often been ruptured, the groups offer the possibility of support, information, and sociality, creating a reassuring sense of comfort and security. Significantly, this comfort was felt even by participants who rarely interacted in the group. “Just knowing that they’re there, it’s a bit of a comfort,” Siobhan explained. Grainne described the group as a “comfort cushion” while Sabina used the image of a “fire extinguisher – you might never use it but [...] you’re happy it’s there.” Winnie explained, “Even though I don’t use them every day, but when I need them, they are there.”
noted that, as a migrant, it was "comforting to know that you've got people around you." She described feeling “more at peace, definitely, knowing that people are just literally around the corner.” The participants’ words resonate with the literature around homesickness (Scharp et al. 2016) and home-building (Hage 1997), which indicate that “comfort and safety are integral to defining what ‘home’ means to homesick individuals” (Scharp et al. 2016, p. 1191) and that “social support acts as a buffer against the negative effects of homesickness” (p. 1192).

6.5 Conclusion

Migrant mothers, at the intersection of maternal isolation and migrant loneliness, use migrant maternal groups to rebuild their multiply disrupted social infrastructure. This reconstructed infrastructure encompasses casual, intermediate, and emotionally close forms of sociality. Each level of sociality carries affective weight and contributes to new senses of belonging that are place-based, identity-based, experiential, and relational: I belong here, with these people, on whom I can rely, because we have shared experiences and identities, and therefore understand each other. Through these varying levels of social intimacy, migrant mothers gain companionship, reassurance, comfort, and belonging. In contrast to claims of a crisis of intimacy resulting from a reliance on technology and social media for social interactions, analysis of this data suggests that migrant mothers use the affordances of social media to create and access forms of intimacy, support and belonging that are necessary to their wellbeing, and which their existing networks of family and friends cannot provide.

Many studies of migrant maternal isolation end with calls for more social support but rarely define the kind of support needed, nor how it might be delivered. By dissecting the different layers of sociality operating in the groups, and emphasising their creation by and for migrant mothers themselves, this chapter suggests that when migrant mothers build their own communities of support, they gain sustenance from opportunities for casual sociality, relationships of instrumental interdependence, exchanges of empathy and pathways to more intimate friendships.

A focus on migrant mothers’ relations with each other, and their potential to form an affective resource for each other, offers a perspective which honours their selfhood beyond their maternal identity and emphasises the importance of lateral relationships between mothers. By participating in, or observing, interactions between mothers in the groups, women are able to position
themselves within an imagined community of mothers who share important experiences and practices. Chapter Seven develops the concepts of ‘connected maternal migrants’ and ‘imagined maternal communities,’ in relation to which migrant mothers navigate the various frameworks of “good motherhood” they encounter, and seek to implement their maternal projects and aspirations for their children.
Chapter 7  Connected maternal migrants and imagined maternal communities

7.1  Introduction

Winnie’s heartfelt comment – “After all these years, I finally feel that I find some friends. I’m not alone” – exemplifies the argument made in Chapter Six about how migrant mothers become an affective resource for each other through their participation in migrant maternal online communities, rebuilding disrupted social infrastructures and thereby creating new senses of belonging, as part of a process of affective and relational settlement (Diminescu 2008, p. 571). In Chapter Five, I described how national identity acts as a key organising principle for the online migrant maternal groups, and can overlap or intersect with ethnic, linguistic, or regional identities.

In this chapter, national identity is conceived as a collection of historical practices, a spatially-based community, and a socially-constructed – and imagined – solidarity. Migrant mothers carry their connections to these practices, community, and solidarity with them. Those who become mothers in migration may find those attachments are activated, or re-activated, by their new maternal role. Drawing on Diminescu’s concept of “connected migrants” (2008), I suggest they are connected maternal migrants: connected contemporaneously to their networks of friends and family as Diminescu argues, and also connected across space and time to their imagined maternal communities. Their connections to those imagined communities, like their connections to their digitally-enabled networks of family and friends, may be disrupted, re-imagined, or jeopardised, by the process of migration.

Motherhood scholars have demonstrated the many ways in which motherhood is contextual, contingent, and shaped by gender ideologies and “good mother” discourses (for example, Collins 2000b; Goodwin & Huppatz 2010; Thurer 1994/1995). Scholars of migrant motherhood have shown how the experience of migration can change notions of “good motherhood” and maternal practices, whether migration involves mothers being apart from their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997; Madianou 2012) or being co-located with their children in a migrant context (C. Ho 2006; Liampittsong 2006; Manohar 2013a; Manohar & Busse-Cárdenas 2011; Utomo 2014; Ziaian 2000). This chapter is framed by an understanding that migrant mothering of co-located children
can involve “complex reinventions of everyday practices to produce a sense of identity and belonging that is never fixed and taken for granted” (Gedalof 2009, p. 89). One example of this reinvention of everyday practice is the ethnic socialisation of children, undertaken by mothers in their role as keepers of culture and described by Manohar as “mothering for ethnicity” (Manohar 2013a). It is important to note that all families, migrant and non-migrant, in both marginalised and dominant groups, attempt to instil a sense of ethnic-cultural identity. While non-migrant families from culturally dominant groups may do this largely unconsciously, leaning on mainstream media representations, institutions and discourse, migrant and marginalised families must do this explicitly and intentionally, drawing on personal, familial and national narratives (J. Keller 2010).

While this chapter draws on Manohar’s concept of “mothering for ethnicity,” it places it within a broader perspective, which explores the role of personal narrative and imagined maternal communities in migrant mothers’ approaches to motherhood. Central to the analysis is Manohar’s finding that “women are not passive performers of cultural norms regarding motherhood, but active creators of it” (2013a, p. 180).

To frame this chapter’s analysis of maternal communities and practices, Section 7.2 outlines in more detail the framing concepts of imagined maternal communities, and individual and shared narratives of motherhood, and how these may be constructed or reconstructed in a migration context. Section 7.3 explores how imagined maternal communities may become activated by motherhood, focusing on the experiences of women who had settled in Australia before becoming mothers. Section 7.4 focuses on the role of values in imagined maternal communities, suggesting that women heavily invested in values-based imagined maternal communities may find that their migrant context forces them to “renegotiate their identities as moral mothers” (Liamputtong 2006). Section 7.5 analyses how mothers materialise their attachment to an imagined maternal community in their everyday maternal practices and their attachment to everyday objects such as toys, clothes, and books. Section 7.6 looks at how migration draws women into alternative imagined maternal communities, how these present new possibilities, but also conflict and potential loss. Finally, section 7.7 examines the role of memory and how this intersects with imagined maternal communities, maternal projects, and good motherhood.
7.2 Constructing imagined migrant maternal communities and narratives

In this chapter, I draw on Kanno and Norton’s re-working of the concept of “imagined communities,” proposed by Benedict Anderson to conceptualise a sense of belonging in nation-states, which transcends tangible and immediate personal connections (Anderson 1983/2006; Kanno & Norton 2003). Kanno and Norton re-work the notion of imagined communities to provide “a theoretical framework for the exploration of creativity, hope, and desire in identity construction” (2003, p. 248). They suggest that an individual’s investment in an imagined community can drive choices and (re)frame experiences. Although imagination implies hope and possibility, Kanno and Norton also note that the imaginary that is available to a person or group may be limited by “social ideologies and hegemonies” (p. 247). In her exploration of the role of the imagination in cross-national couples’ decision-making about where to live, Adams (2004) argues that imagination may be deployed as a decision-making tool, to bolster or undermine an argument, or as a “coping mechanism” to assuage present unhappiness. In a context dominated by Western dualism, in which ‘reality’ and ‘rationality’ are accorded more validity than imagination or emotion, framing another person’s imaginings as “mere fantasy” serves to undermine them. Adams suggests that a person with less power may be more likely to have their imagination dismissed in this way, and more likely to use imagination as a “refuge” to assuage the sadness they feel about a situation they cannot change (pp. 289-290). In relation to motherhood, Baraitser has suggested that motherhood “creates a commons that is the endurance of communality across time” (2012, p. 121). For Baraitser, motherhood generates “the potential for new and unexpected social bonds” that are not limited to the present moment or immediate locality. Drawing these concepts together, I explore how migrant mothers imagine themselves within local, national and diasporic maternal communities, how their attachment to these maternal communities may be experienced as “new and unexpected,” how these imagined connections can be deployed as decision-making tools or coping mechanisms, and how they relate to identity construction, hope, and desire.

As women move into motherhood as migrants, or move into migration as mothers, a powerful but mostly unexamined narrative surfaces and is challenged by the new context. This narrative is individual, relating to childhood memories, self-identity, and imbued with hopes for their own future. It is relational and familial, formed through memories, family stories, interactions with
family members, with her partner, with her baby, and it shapes her hopes for her children’s future. The narrative is social and cultural, shaped by popular discourses, interactions with institutions and other mothers, framed by state legislation and national or ethnic identities. It is a narrative of what she knows about motherhood, what she understands about herself and her nation or culture, what it means to be a German mother, an Indian mother, or a Brazilian mother, how her child’s life should unfold and her role in that process. In Maria’s words, “it’s all the culture, like the things that you have seen that are done, and what you heard, that they need to be done.”

Migration challenges the cohesion of that narrative. This challenge may be experienced as rupture, as conflict, as autonomy, as loss. This chapter examines women’s responses to the challenge presented to their maternal narrative. In migration, maternal practices become a site of increased intentionality, charged with meaning about identity, connection, and hope. In discussing their decision-making and emotions around maternal practices, the migrant mothers in this study appeared to draw on imagined communities of maternal practice and identity, which shaped their choices and how they framed them.

In the rest of the chapter, I analyse how these maternal narratives become activated as women move into migrant motherhood and imagine themselves as inside, outside, or between imagined maternal communities, which are underpinned by different values and logics. For example, I explore how the Swedish mothers drew on values of gender equality, which they defined as national values, to explain their attachment to gender-equal or shared parenting. I analyse how everyday decisions about maternal practices, such as swaddling or discipline, are made in relation to an imagined maternal community, leading to comments such as “we don’t swaddle babies in Germany.” There is an important temporal element to these imagined communities. Women draw on individual narratives based on memories of their own childhood, of being mothered, to anchor themselves within their imagined maternal community. Past and present policies shape personal experiences, and women draw on historical and national specificities to contextualise their own maternal practices. The imagined communities also have a future, into which women project themselves and their children. Migration troubles the temporal continuity of women’s maternal narratives, introducing rupture and discontinuity. In response, women choose to draw on attachments and connections to frame, understand and reconcile themselves to these challenges. The migrant maternal online communities are sites in which these connections are forged. While other attachments and networks remain salient, I suggest the migrant maternal online communities constitute a metonymic representation of their diasporic maternal community.
7.3 Activating imagined migrant maternal communities

Women who became mothers some years after their migration to Australia described how motherhood sparked an increased interest in their national or ethnic attachments, particularly in relation to their new maternal role. Before becoming a mother, Stefanie had few German friends in Australia. Living in Australia for over a decade before having her son, married to an Australian man, Stefanie had felt no need to seek out other German migrants. Indeed, she continued to be sceptical about how much common ground she had with most German migrants, whom she described in our interview as arrogant, transient, querulous and unwilling to adapt to Australian life. Stefanie did not imagine herself as part of a community of German migrants in Australia, but once she became a mother, she began to identify with an imagined community of German mothers. This was reflected in how she thought and spoke about motherhood, and in the choices she made about maternal practices and the people she surrounded herself with. In explaining why the friends she has made since becoming a mother have mostly been German, Stefanie contends, “we raise our children fundamentally different to a lot of Australian people.” She explains this difference with reference to their own childhoods: “I think they grow up very differently to the way I’ve grown up, so I wouldn’t watch much TV, I wouldn’t watch any American TV.” This difference then manifests in the way Stefanie’s son plays:

“I think, just from a toys perspective, so, yes, I know a lot of Australians do play with the same toys but a lot of Australians always have these electronic telephones, and it doesn’t interest him. So he just, he plays very differently, and I think a lot of the German girls do the same, so, so....”

Stefanie’s narrative makes clear that “mothering for ethnicity” is not simply about passing down knowledge or values to the child, but also about enacting a mode of mothering that reflects and produces her sense of being a mother from a particular place, who has been formed by her own experiences of childhood. Stefanie positions herself within an imagined German maternal community, the members of which raise their children in a way that is distinct from the dominant maternal practices in Australia. To support her in maintaining these practices and this sense of herself as a ‘good German mother in diaspora,’ Stefanie has drawn around her a local network of German mothers. This German maternal identity, practice, and community, help to produce a
sense of her son as a German child who “plays very differently” from the Australian children around him. Stefanie’s sense of this difference produces a desire for support and validation from German maternal peers, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Kavita, a British migrant with Indian heritage, had lived in Australia for nearly a decade before becoming a mother. Her experience illustrates how migrants position themselves in relation to different imagined communities, and how motherhood shifts that positioning, activating attachments which had been less salient. When she and her husband, also a British migrant with Indian heritage, settled together in Sydney, they chose to live in Sydney’s eastern suburbs, an area she identifies as suitable for “young professionals” in contrast to Sydney’s western suburbs where they might have found a more established Indian community. “Reasonably solid” in their British-Indian identities, and imagining themselves as part of a mobile, middle-class migrant community, they had felt little need to forge links with Indian communities in Sydney, beyond a desire to locate food and ingredients that they were used to having easy access to in the UK.

Pregnancy and motherhood activated Kavita’s geographically-distant female-centred family network, which emphasised Indian prenatal and postnatal rituals and traditions, and then her desire for a locally-based Indian maternal community to support her maternal project of raising her daughter with sufficient understanding of her Indian heritage. Impending motherhood activated a familial and cultural narrative in which she would be nurtured by female relatives in pregnancy and early motherhood. Living a long distance away from her network of maternal support, who would have cooked and cared for her at this time, Kavita instead gathered recipes from her older female relatives, and prepared them herself:

“I got the recipes from my mum, and my mother in law, and my aunts, all that age of women in our family, and I said we need these because there’s not always going to be someone who can do these things for us. We’re going to have to do them for ourselves. So I made a lot of these things for me, I actually made a semolina pudding that’s really nourishing when I was in pre-labour, so it was ready for when I came home.”
In caring for herself in this way, Kavita was not just connecting to her heritage; she was drawing on an imagined Indian maternal community that takes pre-natal and postnatal care of mothers seriously, in a way she suggested was less common in “our Western society.”

Kavita was not a member of an Indian mothers’ online group when she became a mother, and in our interview, she suggested that had she been a member, she might have sourced postnatal support from the group:

“There’s a lot of first-generation women that have come over that will cook, so you can get this tiffin service where someone will cook for you for a week and bring food over. I might not have done that, but I might have asked somebody to bring me some of those postnatal foods and drinks over.”

In fact, it was her daughter’s first Diwali that inspired Kavita to look online for Indian community groups. She recalled, “I posted on every page I knew to see if there were any Indian mums out there, you know, what do they do for Diwali, like where could we go.”

For Kavita, good mothering involves not just teaching her daughter about Indian languages, clothing, festivals, and music. It also involves making a place for her daughter, and their heritage, in their local community. She feels a particular responsibility because their decision to live away from established Indian communities in Sydney means “she’s not around many brown faces at the moment”:

“I’m not happy about that. I mean, I did make the conscious decision to live in [Sydney’s eastern suburbs], but not at the expense of my daughter being able to ... [...] I wonder if she’ll think, am I different and are there other people like me? I need to make sure that she’s around those other people like her.”

She noted that her own identity as a “person of colour” had not been on her “radar” for many years, but that becoming a mother had brought it back to her attention.

Like Stefanie, Kavita drew on her childhood memories to formulate her concept of good mothering. Kavita recalled her mother, a migrant to the UK, teaching the children at her school about elements of Indian culture, as Kavita has been doing at her daughter’s daycare. Unlike her
mother, Kavita has been able to draw on the online mother’s group for the knowledge, ideas, and confidence, to support her in this: “I know that that can be done because my mum did that, when I was in school, but it’s a very different world that we live in now, and I might not have felt so confident about doing it if it wasn’t for that group.” Kavita also planned to teach cooking classes in her local area, “sending them home with spice pack, so they’re getting confidence in spices.” Through this work with her daughter’s peers, and her own generation, Kavita hoped to engender “more integration of our culture into general society.” Kavita’s maternal projects can be understood through the lens of “community mothering” outlined in Chapter Five. Stretching beyond the mother-child dyad, Kavita advocates for a place for Indian culture – and by extension for her family – in her local, predominantly white, Australian community. Kavita deploys her imagined maternal community, imbued with childhood memories, a familial narrative of good motherhood, and liberal values of cultural diversity and acceptance, as a tool to change the Australian imagined national community.

For Stefanie and Kavita, embarking on motherhood after migration activated a sense of being part of imagined maternal communities, linked to their childhood, familial narratives and national and ethnic identities. These attachments became salient to them in new ways as they moved into motherhood, and drove them to forge connections with mothers whom they understood to share this diasporic maternal identity. The local online diasporic mothers’ groups provided a hub for these connections. As well as joining the Indian mothers’ group, Kavita also joined the group for British and Irish mothers in her area, and found comfort in being part of a community of mothers who shared her experience of raising her child a long way from family, missing British chocolate, managing family visits, long flights and migration-related guilt. Kavita’s membership of the British and Irish group was less focused on her daughter’s experience, and more on her position as a British mother in Australia, in relation to other British mothers in Australia. “Just knowing that they’re there” and “hearing them pipe up about their stories and what’s going on for them” enabled Kavita to construct a sense of a migrant maternal community from which she derives a sense of solidarity and “sisterhood”: “just you know, god we’re all in the same boat.” Her memberships of the two groups positioned her within two imagined maternal communities, drew on different strands of her personal narrative, and enabled her to meet her need for sociality and emotional support as a migrant woman with a disrupted social infrastructure, as well as her need for cultural connection and support in her project of “mothering for ethnicity” (Manohar 2013a). Motherhood drew Kavita and Stefanie into these imagined maternal communities, and they, in
turn, drew their fellow migrant mothers closer to them in order to construct a sense of themselves as British-Indian, or German, mothers in Australia, and to facilitate their maternal projects which would meet their standards of good motherhood.

7.4 Grounding imagined migrant maternal communities in shared values

Imagined maternal communities are structured according to different logics and underpinned by different values. Like many of the mothers’ groups, the Swedish mothers’ imagined maternal communities were grounded in a logic of shared experience, language, history, food, and practices. They were also grounded in what they understood to be a shared value of gender equality, which is underpinned by Swedish state legislation, policy and rhetoric, such that “gender equality has been constructed as part of the [Swedish] national identity” (Kvist & Peterson 2010, p. 188). This was evident in the interviews with Swedish mothers. Jenni described Sweden as “culturally [...] gender equal” and throughout the interviews, gender equality emerged as a key theme, structuring their discussions of their decisions around gender roles, paid employment, their husbands’ experiences around work and paternity leave, their aspirations for inculcating “Swedish values” in their children, and in the ways in which the groups formed and continued to operate.

Through their analysis of policy and political debates, Kvist and Petersen (2010) have demonstrated how the specific form of gender equality espoused in Sweden since the 1970s depended on state provision of childcare, elderly care, and other support services to increase men’s involvement in caring and women’s paid labour market participation. The Swedish mothers in this study shared a sense that good Swedish motherhood involved dividing the responsibility and rewards of child-raising and paid employment equally between mothers and fathers, and passing on a similar notion of gender equality to their children. While they still imagined themselves as part of a community of mothers who shared this value, this narrative was challenged by their lived experience of mothering away from the structural and social supports

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1 Relevant to the intersections of migration and motherhood, Kvist and Petersen (2010) outline how the retraction of the welfare state in the 1990s left a gap, which was increasingly filled by migrant domestic workers to safeguard (non-migrant, middle-class) women’s participation in the workplace. Men’s participation in the workplace was not seen to be jeopardised by the withdrawal of state provision of childcare.
that underpinned it. Married to Australian and British men who did not share their identity-based commitment to gender equality, and living in Australia, with its more limited state provision of childcare, less political commitment to gender equality, and more widespread acceptance of separate gender roles in parenting and work, they struggled to live up to their aspiration to mother in accordance with their Swedish values.

Lina described gender equality as “a Swedish value I would like my children to get,” although she admitted that she and her husband had not modelled it in their division of domestic and paid labour. Besides their differing work patterns when the children were very young, Lina does “all the cooking” and “a lot more of the housework than he does, despite the fact that I’m working now.” Lina described this arrangement as unsatisfactory, primarily because of the message it sends to their children: “We have to change that before they really grow up!” she laughed. However, she struggled to see how they could change it, in a context in which her husband’s employers took little account of his parenting responsibilities:

“Even if he [husband] said, ‘oh yeah, I can stay home,’ in his profession a man is not really allowed to do that. Even though they say he is allowed, but it wouldn’t be accepted that he hasn’t produced anything. They can say as much as they want, it’s gender equality, it’s not. It’s not.”

Here, Lina highlights the importance of unwritten rules, based on gender ideology, that can override official policies of gender neutrality. Eva had found it difficult to work in Australia because of her husband’s inflexible employment and lack of childcare beyond school hours. Apart from some periods of temporary, part-time employment as a nurse, Eva had mostly been at home with her son, who was three at the time of the interview, an arrangement she felt would have been unthinkable in Sweden. In terms of support for new mothers, Eva noted that her friends in Sweden provided less support to her as a new mother, compared to the support offered by her friends in Australia when she arrived there with a three-month-old baby. Eva ascribed this to her Swedish friends’ and family’s expectation that new mothers’ partners would be around to cook, whereas her friends in Australia provided meals for new mothers in their circle, knowing their spouses would not take on this role. Unfortunately for Eva, this meant that, alone in Sweden with her newborn baby after her husband returned to his job in Australia, she received very little hands-on support.
As noted in Chapter Five, while Eva, Lina, and Sabina drew on their lived experiences as mothers in Australia to explain their matricentric online groups, despite the apparent contradiction they presented to their commitment to gender equality in parenting, Jenni drew on the values of her imagined community to explain the importance of including fathers in her online group:

“I don’t want to bring my babies up in a world where it’s like that. I want, I try to be very conscious about trying to be equal, trying to be ... dads are just as much parents as mums.”

Jenni articulates a personal narrative in which she, as a Swedish mother, has a vital role in educating her children in the Swedish value of gender equality. This personal narrative relates to a shared narrative in which gender equality is an aspirational goal, which takes conscious effort to achieve. Accordingly, Jenni’s role extends further than her own children, into the kind of “community mothering” discussed in Chapter Five, in which she has a responsibility to shape the world around her, to reflect and encourage the enactment of that value. Jenni’s investment in this “possible world” of gender equality (Kanno & Norton 2003, p. 248) influences how she frames her own parenting, and how she runs her online group. For Lina, this “possible world” of gender equality exists in Sweden but not in Australia, and frames her judgement of her parenting and work practices, and her hopes for her children. She pronounces herself “desperate to get them to become Swedish” and notes that while she speaks Swedish to her children, “it’s the whole values” she wishes to impart. Migration has challenged her understanding of herself as a Swedish mother who co-parents with her spouse to raise children with the same attachment to a value of gender equality. While Lina maintains a hopeful desire to re-balance her family and work life along more gender-neutral lines and provide an appropriate role model to her children, she acknowledges the structural constraints in an Australian context that inhibit that possibility. Migrant mothers who draw on imagined maternal communities and personal narratives grounded in values strongly underpinned by state and social institutions, may find that the migrant context forces them to “renegotiate their identities as moral mothers” (Liamputtong 2006).
Materialising migrant maternal imaginaries in everyday practices and objects

In this section, I analyse how mothers draw on their attachment to an imagined community of mothers to make and justify decisions about everyday maternal practices, drawing on the example of German mothers. In discussing the ways in which maternal practices in Germany differed from those they observed in Australia, German research participants mentioned a range of practices, for example, the widespread use of homeopathic products in Germany, the practice of giving tea to small babies, modes of bathing, state support for postnatal mothers, preferences around toys and games, parenting ethos, gendered child-raising, pedagogical approaches in childcare, use of ‘natural’ products, school starting age and school routines, breastfeeding, part-time working, and first foods for babies. Swaddling babies\textsuperscript{2} was mentioned by most of the German, and some Swedish, mothers as a practice with which they had been unfamiliar prior to having a baby in Australia. This section focuses on the ways in which mothers navigated choices around swaddling.

Despite Annika’s assertion that “I think you just step into it, you just do what other mums do here,” all the German participants talked about the various ways they attempted to incorporate, or chose not to incorporate, elements of German maternal practice. For many of the German mothers, swaddling was a focal point for navigating their position as German mothers in Australia. While some adopted the practice, others resisted. Petra recalled: “That’s where I lived my Germannness. We don’t swaddle [laughs]. What the heck?! Petra had moved to Australia three years before she became a mother for the first time. Nevertheless, she expressed strongly-held ideas about how maternal practices in Australia differed from those in Germany, and how these practices related to her sense of herself as a German mother. Katja, who had predominantly lived in Australia since leaving high school in Germany, remembered having arguments with the midwives in the hospital who tried to swaddle her baby. She told them: “We don’t swaddle babies in Germany! You do not swaddle my baby!”. By contrast, Heike chose to swaddle her babies but bathed them the way she knew from her upbringing in Germany:

“In Australia, we do swaddle them, so they don’t wake themselves. I thought, this kind of works, and I did it with all three of them. […] So I swaddled my kids, but I

\textsuperscript{2} Firm wrapping of a baby in a piece of material for the purposes of “settling an infant and promoting supine sleep positioning” (Young et al. 2013).
stuck them in a bucket to bath them. [...] Because the same reason for swaddling is the same reason Germans use for their bucket bath. Because it’s like being in the womb and they like that confined space.”

Heike positions herself as part of an Australian maternal community, as well as a German one, drawing them together using a child-centred logic that positions infants as having instinctive preferences that transcend cultural differences. Many of the women in this study drew on a similar logic of efficacy to justify their decisions, adopting “whatever works” (Lina) and abandoning practices which “weren’t working” (Aditi). In this context, what “worked” was often defined as what increased the amount of sleep achieved by the baby and therefore the mother. Resonating with the study of cross-national couples mentioned in this chapter’s introduction (Adams 2004), women deploying the logic of efficacy attributed more validity to ‘reality’ and ‘rationality’ than to the maintenance of their position within an imagined maternal community. By contrast, Katja and Petra positioned themselves firmly within an imagined German maternal community, which does not swaddle its infants. It is noteworthy that the views of their Australian spouses on swaddling are conspicuously absent from their accounts.

All three women were apparently able to identify individual practices as “German” and others as “Australian.” As first-time mothers in a new country, they brought with them knowledge and practices accumulated through their own upbringing and observations of maternal practices. These had accreted over time to form a narrative of themselves as German mothers, which lay largely unexamined until activated by their move into motherhood. Decision-making around maternal practices brought this narrative into focus, as it was challenged by alternative narratives and their lived experience of motherhood and baby care. These challenges to their maternal narrative could be confusing, as women struggled to decide which advice to follow, but it could also be liberating, giving them a critical distance to all proffered advice. They were also important moments of identity construction, as they enacted or shifted their attachments to their imagined communities, reconstructing or reconciling their personal narratives in their changed context.

In their discussions and decisions around everyday maternal practices, migrant mothers engaged with their maternal narratives, as these narratives were challenged, ruptured or re-shaped by the experience of migration. For some women, imagining themselves in relation to a national or ethnic maternal community produced a desire for everyday objects of motherhood, like toys, books,
clothes, food, and remedies, and this desire drove them to participate in the online groups. German participants, in particular, spoke about procuring German toys and books for their children, relating them to a notion of German child-rearing, which they understood as more child-centred, more ‘natural,’ less technology-focused or competitive than the Australian practices they observed. Books represented both a practical means to share and impart mothers’ language to their children, and also a vehicle for particular values. For example, Jenni appreciated Swedish books for normalising diverse family formations and gender-equal parenting through the characters represented in the books, discussing “controversial things like death and spiritual stuff” and depicting a broader range of possibilities for childhood behaviour.

Objects also represent the nostalgic pull of home, or of their own childhood, a link to their individual journey to motherhood. Eva described how Swedish objects or brands, enabled women “just to have a bit of Sweden with you.” Jenni observed that Swedish parents in her group expressed a greater sense of trust in Swedish brands than in their Australian equivalents. Annika had recently bought twenty German children’s story audio tapes from someone in an online group, despite not owning a working tape recorder. She drew on links with her childhood to explain her “excitement” about this purchase, and suggested the tapes could provide a pathway to being a ‘better’ mother:

“My mum says we used to just listen to it all day and we’d have it with us all the time, and you know, it was our entertainment, there wasn’t TV and now it’s like iPads, phones,... And sometimes I feel bad, but I sometimes have no choice because I have to put my little one down and what does the older one do?”

Annika implies that using older technologies like tapes to entertain children represents a morally superior parenting choice compared to contemporary technologies like “iPads, phones,” reflecting popular discourses that position digital media as “risk amplifiers” that increase children’s vulnerability and threaten normal development (Clark 2013, p. 6), or “digital babysitters” used by “neglectful” parents (Steinkuehler 2016, p. 358). Annika positions herself within an imagined German maternal community that still makes use of such superior, older, technology, aligning herself with the German woman from whom she purchased the tapes, and her own mother, for whom tapes were a memorable part of her mothering experience, and who Annika hopes might
bring a tape recorder from Germany when she next visits. By contrast, she notes, “you can’t buy tapes in Australia.”

This chapter offers a broad argument about the migrant maternal imaginaries, but in line with the notion of motherhood as culturally and historically specific, which underpins this research, it is also important to examine some of the specific ways in which these imaginaries manifest. While mothers from all backgrounds discussed differences in everyday maternal practices, and linked these to an imagined sense of themselves as a mother from a particular place or community, this section has drawn out some of the specific ways German migrant maternal imaginaries are materialised in maternal practices and objects. For German women, practices like swaddling, and objects like wooden toys and ‘natural products’ were central to their migrant maternal imaginaries. By contrast, Indian women dwelt on practices like co-sleeping, care and rituals for pregnant and postnatal women, and expectations about collective care between family members. In the next section, I analyse the ways in which migrant mothers navigate alternative maternal imaginaries, drawing particularly on the experiences of Indian participants.

### 7.6 Navigating alternative migrant maternal imaginaries

The experiences explored so far have demonstrated that in migration, women encounter unfamiliar beliefs about motherhood and maternal practices, yet remain connected to the beliefs and practices of the community in which they were raised. Migration therefore requires women to navigate parallel beliefs about motherhood (DeSouza 2005), held by the imagined communities to which they perceive themselves as belonging. This can be difficult and stressful. However, the physical separation of migration can also offer some freedom from cultural constraints: mothers can leave behind the “interference” (Priya) and “over-involvement” (Kavita) of extended families or communities and “discard old ways of doing things” (DeSouza 2005, p. 91). Migration may offer access to an alternative imagined maternal community, one in which it is possible to mother differently. In this section, the focus is on how mothers navigate family advice as a new mother.

Some of the Indian mothers in this study contrasted a collective mode of motherhood, which they associated with an imagined Indian maternal community, with a more individualistic mode of
motherhood, associated with an imagined Australian maternal community. Although the collective mode of motherhood offered the potential for increased social support and delegation of childcare and domestic tasks, individualised motherhood offered a sense of independence and self-determination, which was also appealing. Priya imagined raising her children in India:

“\textit{It would have been very challenging for me to raise my child the way I want to raise. Because there is 17 people coming in every day telling you what to do, [...] so it would have been difficult for me to say ‘No, no, no, but this is what the research says. So, yes, you raised me this way, and I survived, but this is how I want to raise my child.’ [...] So, if I make my mistakes, they are my mistakes, it’s my journey, and yes you support, but I’m still the one going through this journey.”}

Although Priya’s mother, and then mother-in-law, lived with them in Melbourne for the first year of her baby’s life, being situated in Australia enabled Priya to navigate a path between the professional advice she received from doctors and midwives, the research she read independently, and her personal experience of what “made sense” to her. Nisha articulated a similar view, positioning the imagined support she would receive in India as interfering with her maternal practices, and as a hindrance to her mode of good motherhood:

“\textit{I know it takes a village to raise a child, but I think, like, even if there’s a whole village, it’s the mother that should have the biggest bond with them, the strongest bond with them, and that’s just how it is for me.”}

During family visits, Nisha appreciated the help for a while, but then reclaimed her maternal autonomy: “\textit{OK, you guys can stay here, but don’t tell me what to do with my kids, no, [laughs], I can’t cope with that.” Nisha judged herself to be a better mother because she was more “hands-on” than the mothers she knew in India, who shared care with family and domestic staff. She felt she knew her children better and could better meet their needs. Her husband worked long hours away from home and was unable to participate fully in child raising, but Nisha claimed, “\textit{I would rather do it my way.”}

Aditi strategically deployed her position as a migrant mother to validate her choices of maternal practice. When her mother offered unwelcome advice about when to bathe her baby, Aditi used her mother’s absence to rebuff her advice: “\textit{It was like, ‘I’m here by myself, I need to do what}
works, and if you want to give me your advice, you better move here and help me out, and then I’ll do it your way.” At other times, Aditi used her mother’s support for co-sleeping and “feeding to sleep” to validate her decision to dismiss dominant Australian advice to avoid those practices:

“Mum was OK about feeding to sleep, whereas here we recommend don’t feed to sleep. [...] So I was told here: don’t fall asleep with your baby. My mother slept with me when I was a baby [...] in the same bed. I was fine. I slept with my son in the same bed. And they said then the transition to cot will be difficult. It wasn’t.”

Like Heike in the previous section, Aditi positions herself as part of both an Australian maternal community – “here we recommend don’t feed to sleep” – and an imagined maternal community linked to her country and family of origin, and her own experience of being mothered. Awareness of alternative frameworks and beliefs enables migrant mothers to approach dominant practices with a degree of scepticism and distance that leaves more room for personal choice than their non-migrant counterparts might experience. As a new mother in Singapore, Aoife drew on her personal network of “physio friends” in the UK and Ireland to help her decide whether to pursue a treatment for her baby. Her refusal “horrified” her practitioner in Singapore, and Aoife felt she had been judged “a delinquent parent” as a result. Nevertheless, her ability to draw on alternative expertise and frameworks of “good parenting” enabled Aoife to shrug off this judgement, and relate it as a humorous encounter. In Heike’s words, “I actually picked what suited me, and I still sort of do that. [...] Because I have access to two different cultures of raising kids.” Lina felt her experience, becoming a mother in China as a Swedish temporary migrant before moving to Australia, gave her the freedom to choose her own path. Away from their mothers (“mums have a lot of ideas about thing,” she laughed) and already planning their move away from China, Lina felt she didn’t “have to listen” to anyone. Instead, she described relying on her “own reasoning” and “logic.” Lina compared this to her peers in Australia who “felt horrible” if they were not able to breastfeed, due to the perceived pressure from health professionals to breastfeed.

Alongside the migrant-specific maternal online groups, many of the women had also joined local online mothers’ groups aimed at all mothers in the local area. These generic mothers’ groups offered rapid insights into local maternal norms and practices. Michelle described them as “like watching one of those reality TV programmes but online” and Kate compared them to the soap operas she grew up with in Brazil. Jenni reflected on the ways her maternal practices had been
influenced by her observation of these generic local mothers’ online groups. For example, she insisted her parents get vaccinated against whooping cough when they came to visit her newborn baby, purely on the basis that she observed local mothers discussing it on the online groups of which she was a member.

“Looking back on it now, I didn't even reflect about that; maybe it was a bit extreme. [...] Other people did that, so I thought... oh you know... which maybe was a bit extreme. [...] I wouldn't do that today.”

Generic local online mothers’ groups were a means by which women became aware of local maternal norms and practices, alongside information gleaned from Australian-published pregnancy manuals and baby books, and interactions with health professionals. They were also a means by which women imagined themselves as part of a local community of mothers.

Navigating between practices that resonated with a maternal narrative that linked them to their national or ethnic imagined maternal community, and those which positioned them within a local community of mothers in Australia, did not always bring relief or freedom. For some women, the negotiations were more fraught. Maria described placating her mother by telling her she had adhered to a Colombian practice, even when she had not: “The things that I didn't believe, I didn't do it.” The disapproving reaction of her mother and mother-in-law to the news that Maria was not sleeping in the same room as the baby left her feeling “so guilty, so, so guilty.” The decision to move the baby to a separate room had been the result of tense negotiations with Maria’s husband, based on their need for sleep and space for themselves as a couple, but was unthinkable to their own mothers. Maria’s parents-in-law stayed with them for six weeks after baby’s birth.

Despite the practical support they provided – “for six weeks, we didn’t look after the house, didn’t do anything at home, didn’t cook a thing, we didn’t go to the supermarket” – Maria remembered her anger at the unsolicited advice offered by her mother-in-law, which conflicted with what she had chosen to do: “there were moments that it was like ’arrgghhh! Just let me do whatever I want to do!’ And now I know she didn’t do it because she wants me to do it her way, she was just probably giving an opinion, but in that moment, it sounded like she was telling me ‘you are doing something wrong.’”
As women remained connected to imagined maternal communities linked to their national or ethnic identities, they also forged connections with imagined maternal communities in their new location. These new connections challenged the continuity of the maternal narratives women carried with them. Women responded to those challenges in different ways. At times, Maria drew on a sense of connection to Colombian motherhood to justify practices which differed from the Australian norm: “When I was with my mothers’ group, I wouldn’t do it, but when I was at home I would do it because I would think it was the right thing to do, or everybody does it in Colombia.” At other times, Maria used the rupture in her maternal narrative to assert a sense of self-determination: “The things I didn’t believe, I didn’t do it.” As illustrated above, asserting a disconnection to her maternal community, represented by her mother and mother-in-law, had emotional consequences including guilt, fear of judgement, and anger in response to familial disapproval. Migrant mothers actively create new modes of mothering that draw on culturally-based maternal narratives and respond to changing circumstances and challenges to those narratives. Nevertheless, migration is not a guaranteed pathway to self-determination. In the next section, I focus on two Indian participants’ experiences with infertility to analyse the ways in which migration may offer freedom, in the form of release from stigma, but at the same time, that stigma may be maintained within migrant communities.

7.6.1 Navigating maternal taboos in migration: infertility

As described above, the issues the mothers are navigating in the groups range on a continuum from relatively trivial to more critical issues. Wherever on the continuum they were situated, they generated discussion between the mothers in the groups and in our interviews. In contrast, some issues relating to motherhood, becoming or not becoming a mother, operate in shifting dynamics of stigma-induced silence and open discussion. Migration, and the resulting shifting attachments to imagined maternal communities, were particularly significant in navigating issues of stigma and taboo. In an Indian context, in which motherhood is often viewed as the ultimate, compulsory, and sacred destiny for all women (Manohar & Busse-Cárdenas 2011) infertility is often highly stigmatised (Riessman 2000). Pooja and Jyoti, both of whom had migrated from India to marry their fiancés, who were already established in Australia, explained how their experiences with infertility related to migration. Pooja, a 37-year-old senior manager who had migrated to Australia four years before our interview, contrasted the taboo surrounding infertility in India with the openness and lack of judgement with which friends and colleagues in Australia discussed IVF.
“What helped me was I had so many women in my office who had gone through IVF and so on, and they were very open about it. So, at some point I started thinking, well, maybe that’s what I need to do. You know, because there’s other people that have gone through it and they’re happy to share that experience, you don’t feel like it’s something horrible, like you feel it’s alright. But in India that wouldn’t be the case. Definitely not when I was there, maybe things have changed now, but definitely not when I was there.”

Migration brought new people and perspectives into her immediate maternal community, enabling her to receive treatment for her gynaecological health issues. Distance from her friends and extended family enabled her to avoid the judgemental surveillance she would have experienced in India.

Like Pooja, Jyoti migrated to Sydney to marry her fiancé, but it had taken them twelve years to conceive their daughter. While Pooja expressed a sense that migration had liberated her from the stigma surrounding infertility, Jyoti described how the same stigma persisted in her network of Indian friends in Sydney. The intrusive questioning and pity she received from their Indian social circle led her to distance herself from them, preferring the company of “Australians, or other communities,” who respected her privacy in this matter:

“When we moved, of course we made a couple of Indian friends. And all of them were couples like us, and in the course, they all fell pregnant, had kids, one after another. So you become a childless couple, with a group of families that have got kids [...] and sometimes you could see the pity, in their eyes for you.”

Jyoti’s experience is a reminder that migrant communities, while a potential source of support for each other, can also act as a mechanism for surveillance and judgement, particularly of women’s behaviour (Manohar 2013b, p. 49). Jyoti’s response to her community’s judgement was to distance herself, and that continued into motherhood. While she remained a member of the Indian mothers’ group, she maintained a critical distance from it, asserting that she “thinks differently” to other members. By contrast, she was an enthusiastic participant in her local (non-migrant-specific) online mothers’ group, finding it a valuable source of support for raising her daughter. She referred to it as her main source of “counsel” and connection to other mothers in her area. Jyoti used the Indian mothers’ group to find information and services, and participated in
discussions on the group. But she maintained that she derived little sense of emotional attachment or belonging from the Indian group, attributing this to their “different mindset” and her belief that they disagree on some fundamental issues. While Pooja felt liberated from the stigma of infertility after migration, for Jyoti that stigma persisted in her post-migration co-ethnic networks, leading her to seek sociality and emotional support elsewhere. Nevertheless, it was her migration to Sydney that provided Jyoti with alternative maternal networks, in which she could navigate maternity and infertility without fear of stigma.

7.7 The role of memory in constructing imagined maternal communities and narratives

Women’s memories of childhood and of being mothered, of witnessing mothering, connect them to their imagined maternal communities. Those individual memories are also layered with cultural memories and family narratives, creating strong attachments to a “maternal commons” that endures across time and borders (Baraitser 2012). As discussed above, women carry this “culture of bonds” (Diminescu 2008) with them as they move countries, sometimes remaining latent until activated by impending motherhood. Women also forge new connections in migration, creating attachments with new imagined maternal communities, which may offer new possibilities, conflict or distress. In their interviews, some women drew on childhood memories, emphasising the importance of memory to their mothering. Situating themselves in an individual maternal narrative that stretched from their own childhood in the past, into the future represented by their children, women centred themselves in the middle of an idealised unbroken narrative, in which part of their maternal role was to replicate parts of their own childhood experiences in their mothering practices. Migration had made that impossible, fracturing the continuity of their individual maternal narrative, leading to a sense of loss and sadness. This suggests that, as well as having a past, women’s maternal narratives also have an imagined future, which may be disrupted by migration. Unable to deploy memories in their present mothering and therefore unable to share them with their children, women expressed a sense of loss and discontinuity as those memories must remain only in the past.
Michelle recalled memories of her English childhood, “digging up worms” while exploring her local forest, explaining that she wanted the same experiences for her son, but this had been jeopardised by moving to a country containing dangerous Australian spiders and plants:

“My god, is my son ever actually going to go and play in the garden? And it’s like what I’m kind of brought up with, and I kind of hoped he would go and lift rocks and stuff, and because I wasn’t born here, and I don’t know what the dangers are, and I don’t know what’s safe and what isn’t....”

As she describes herself in this narrative, Michelle appears to be at risk of failing to perform two of Sara Ruddick’s three key maternal practices: preserving her child's life, and fostering his “physical, emotional, and intellectual growth” (Ruddick 1980, p. 348). Or rather, she fears that her attempts to preserve his life – by restricting his garden exploration – might hinder his growth. Migration has caused an epistemic deficit that jeopardises Michelle’s attempts to draw on her childhood memories to frame her notions of what good motherhood involves. The practices of her imagined maternal community have less salience in her family’s new environment.

Some women expressed a deep sense of nostalgic longing for their childhood, and a sense of loss at their inability to curate their children's experiences to include the same memories. Rebecca described “struggling” with the fact that her six-year-old daughter would not experience elements of her own childhood in south-east England, which were encapsulated for her as “amazing memories”:

“I would love to be seeing [daughter] experiencing some of the things that I did as a child (excitement of waking up to snow, big family lunches, day-trips into London, being so excited that summer was coming and the contrast of the seasons, cheap/quick/easy travel to Europe from London and then the more nostalgic, smaller things like playing in the parks that I used to etc.”

Rebecca’s wistful childhood memories were echoed in Susie’s nostalgic recollections of sheltering from inclement British weather with “decent TV,” board games and “a nice roast dinner on a Sunday,” experiences she desired for her own children. Sheila conjured up vivid images from her Malaysian childhood. She recalled being “dragged into the kitchen” with her cousins to help cook for festivals; “being privy to adult gossip” during extended family gatherings; playing in the street
with neighbours’ children; speaking multiple languages and dialects with her extended family. As much as she tried to replicate elements of her childhood, she noted regretfully, “it’s still not the experience like we had as children, being taken by an uncle to go fish in an abandoned tin mine. You know, go swim in the rivers, and just to experience all of that. We just don’t have it here.” In acknowledging the impossibility of replicating those experiences, the women note the ruptures to their personal and family narratives resulting from migration, and the sadness that engenders for them.

Memories of childhood experiences were attached to notions of home and national identity for many women. The inability to share childhood experiences of home with their children introduces a rupture in their personal narrative that runs from ‘being mothered’ to ‘mothering,’ and troubles their attempts to instil a sense of national or ethnic identity which would link their children (future) to their own childhood (past). Lina recognised that her childhood was a form of ‘home’ temporally as well as geographically inaccessible to her children: “my home is my childhood home that doesn’t really exist, but that’s in my mind.” Home for Lina is the Swedish landscape and language, Swedish values and identity. While she can teach them to speak Swedish, the “greenness, and the lakes and the trees in Sweden” encapsulate a sense of home that she cannot share with her two children who relate more to “eucalyptus and wallabies.” While the Swedish landscape may remain relatively unchanged and accessible at least by visits home, Lina expressed a sense that the values she identifies as Swedish belong only in the past: “the values of my childhood is not the same any more in Sweden, so I don’t know. My idea of Swedish might not be actual Swedish.” Susie has tried hard to instil a sense of ‘Britishness’ in her Australian-born children, drawing on childhood memories to formulate the skills and experiences that a good British mother helps her children to attain, such as resilience to bad weather and boredom, and a “quirky sense of humour”:

“I want them to splash around in puddles and get wet and get dirty. [...] I find that all the Australian kids that come to our house, they get bored, like if it’s not sun shining and they can’t be outside, [...] when I grew up we used to just be at home a lot, play board [games] ... like being at home, I think that’s what I mean as well.”

Susie’s sense of failure is palpable when she describes how her youngest child “waves an Australian flag around the house, singing the national anthem.” She sighs, “it’s really weird, and
it’s not what I wanted. But then I’ve created it.” Susie appears to be articulating a responsibility to teach her children how to cope with everyday conditions to which they are no longer exposed: inclement British weather, and the resulting indoor lifestyle. She is frustrated by her failure to perform this element of maternal practice, which may be just a residual shadow of a no longer relevant maternal project.

This sense of failure resonated with some of the other mothers. Usha expressed this explicitly:

“It’s very nice that he adapts, he’s able to adapt himself, you know, adapt to different countries, and adapt himself for different cultures. But for me, I feel somewhere have I failed as a parent, to not instil in him what India really means to him.”

The impossibility of replicating their own childhood experiences, and transmitting the skills, values and emotional significance embedded in those memories, highlighted the rupture in their maternal narratives. They worried that this discontinuity might create emotional distance between them and their children. Aditi noted, “some things that mean so much to me, they mean nothing to them. And that’s kind of disappointing.” Nicole, perturbed by her 18-year-old, Australian-raised daughter’s values, communication style, and outlook, planned to return to Europe so her two younger children could grow up with a more similar outlook and experience to her own. These experiences suggest that “mothering for ethnicity” is not just about preserving culture as a common good that can be passed down the generations. It is also about nurturing bonds between mother and child and maintaining a sense of continuity in women’s maternal narratives into an imagined future. While some elements of maternal narratives can be productively re-worked or reconciled in migration, the way women spoke about childhood memories, home, and identity, suggests that some elements may be irrecoverably lost, causing a melancholic sense of maternal failure.

7.8 Conclusion

Migrant mothers, even first-time mothers, bring with them knowledge, practice, and values accumulated through their upbringing and observations of maternal practices. These accretions of knowledge, practice, and values form a narrative of themselves as mothers in relation to an
imagined national community, which often lies largely unexamined until activated by their move into motherhood. Decision-making around maternal practices brought this narrative into focus, as it was challenged by alternative narratives and their lived experience of motherhood and baby care. These challenges to their maternal narrative could be confusing, as women struggled to decide which advice to follow, but it could also be liberating, giving them a critical distance to all proffered advice. They were also important moments of identity construction, as they enacted or shifted their attachments to their imagined communities, reconstructing or reconciling their personal narratives in their changed context. Nevertheless, some elements of their maternal narratives were not able to be reconstructed or reconciled after the rupture of migration. The irrecoverable loss of these elements, encapsulated in the childhood memories discussed above, produced a sense of sadness and maternal failure, which some women struggled to overcome.

The role of the digital in managing the ruptures and connections of migrant motherhood is multi-faceted. Digital connections in the form of localised migrant maternal online communities provided opportunities for migrant mothers to discuss their decision-making around maternal practices, their observations of local maternal practices, and their attempts to incorporate or resist culturally-inflected elements into their mothering. Membership of these groups can be seen as a way of positioning themselves within particular imagined maternal communities. Joining online groups aimed at local mothers generally (not just migrant mothers) enabled migrant women to observe local maternal norms and practices, and offered the possibility of aligning themselves with an Australian maternal community. Other forms of digital connection challenged or confirmed women’s shifting attachments. For example, online connections with family and friends back home facilitated surveillance and judgement of those practices at a distance. When Jenni and Eva adopted the locally dominant practice of swaddling, photographs posted online provided the opportunity for family members to comment or criticise. Eva recalled: “they thought I was trapping him, like he couldn’t move!”

The migrant maternal online communities are sites in which women’s attachments to their diasporic maternal community are forged and re-confirmed. In this sense, they act as a material form of community, a means by which they become visible to each other, can interact with each other and form relationships. In addition, the groups function metonymically, standing in for a wider imagined community. The existence of the group confirms that other people ‘like them’ exist, even if they are not all members of the specific online group. The group represents “the
image of their communion” (Anderson 1983/2006, p. 6), a representation of their collective maternal imaginary, as well as a mechanism for forging ‘real’ connections with other members of the community. The groups become attractive, or relevant, as their maternal narrative becomes activated in the journey to motherhood or migration. Discussions facilitated by the group help women to respond to challenges to their maternal narrative, help them re-shape their narrative and reconcile their hopes and desires with their lived experience, or to comfort each other in their shared experiences of loss.
Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the experiences of contemporary migrant mothers in Australia, through the lens of migrant maternal online communities. Through analysis of data generated by scoping, survey, and semi-structured interview methods, those online communities have been shown to function on instrumental, relational, affective, and metonymic levels. A focus on migrant mothers’ relations with each other has offered a perspective that honours their selfhood beyond their maternal identity, and the significance of bonds that emanate from shared experiences of migration and motherhood. I also aimed to answer broader questions, such as: How might a focus on motherhood extend or trouble current understandings about migration? What insights into motherhood can be obtained by centring the experiences of migrant women? What can be learned about online behaviours and digital cultures by exploring the experiences of migrant mothers online? In this concluding chapter, I present both specific and broader findings, outline the implications of these findings, and present directions for future research.

8.1 Findings

An analysis of the digital and emotional labour performed by the groups’ administrators, conceptualised here as ‘meta-maternal practices’ has laid bare how migrant mothers play a vital role in supporting each other’s settlement in Australia. These practices, which include boundary work, emotional curation, and social facilitation, create spaces for migrant mothers online, which are characterised by trust, similarity, and sociality. I have argued that this role constitutes “digital community mothering,” a kind of community service performed mostly but not entirely online, in which women take on responsibility for the well-being of children, mothers, and families in their community. This community service may be experienced as exhausting but it also brings pride and satisfaction. The administrators’ digital nurturing of their communities and the mothers who constitute those communities, encourages a mode of ‘compassionate mothering’ between group members, which helps mothers to transcend differences in maternal practice and to build migrant maternal solidarities.

Over time, some of these accidental community managers have become accidental community leaders. The visibility of their leadership within their migrant maternal online communities spills
out into the public spaces of their local community, into their workplaces and their partners’ workplaces, bringing pride and social status, but also vulnerability. This visibility and leadership, forged in these communities which transcend domestic space, trouble a binary social imaginary that associates motherhood with privacy, domesticity, and intimate care. This thesis has also made migrant mothers’ digital community labour and leadership visible in the context of academic scholarship. By positioning mothers as both consumers and producers of digital information and community, and as active agents working to effect settlement and create belonging for themselves and others, this thesis works to bring mothers out from the shadows of migration and digital social research.

The administrators’ creation and curation of the online groups enable other migrant mothers to fulfil their gendered settlement responsibilities to their family, to effect their own relational and affective settlement, and to position themselves within a migrant maternal imaginary. Mothers use the affordances of the groups to create and access forms of intimacy, support and belonging that are necessary to their wellbeing, and which their existing networks of family and friends cannot provide. In the groups, they are able to rebuild their multiply disrupted social infrastructure, and gain companionship, reassurance, comfort, and belonging from each other.

By exchanging information and forging social connections, migrant mothers help each other to build a new home for their family after the disruption of migration. Furthermore, they support women to meet their own needs for friendship and social interaction. Social connections at all levels, from casual intimacy to heartfelt friendship, are fundamental to building a new locally emplaced sense of belonging. The groups are spaces where mothers can generate new senses of belonging based on shared migrant maternal experiences. In this thesis, I have called this process of building belonging through social connections, ‘relational settlement.’ Through these social connections, migrant mothers become an affective resource for each other, helping each other to manage their complex emotional responses to migration and motherhood and, in some cases, to reconcile ongoing negative emotions with the possibility of belonging. In this thesis, I have called this collective and individual emotion work, which has the aim of generating a sense of belonging and comfort out of disruption and discomfort, ‘affective settlement.’
The thesis has presented the concepts of migrant maternal narrative and migrant maternal imagined communities. A migrant maternal narrative is a personal narrative of oneself as a mother, in relation to an imagined national community, and which often lies largely unexamined until activated by their move into motherhood. Those narratives are formed from an accretion of knowledge, practice, and values accumulated through their upbringing and observations of maternal practices. This thesis has shown how these maternal narratives are challenged by the alternative narratives encountered after migration, and by their lived experiences of motherhood and baby care. In response, migrant mothers enact or shift their attachments to their imagined communities, reconstructing or reconciling their personal narratives in their changed context. Some women found elements of their maternal narratives that were not able to be reconstructed or reconciled, and this produced a sense of loss, sadness and maternal failure.

This thesis has examined the role of the digital in managing the ruptures and connections of migrant motherhood. Digital connections in the form of localised migrant maternal online communities provide opportunities for migrant mothers to discuss their decision-making around maternal practices, their observations of local maternal practices, and their attempts to incorporate or resist culturally-inflected elements into their mothering. Discussions facilitated by the groups help women respond to the challenges to their maternal narrative, help them re-shape their narrative and reconcile their hopes and desires with their lived experience, or to comfort each other in their shared experiences of loss. Mothers position themselves within particular imagined maternal communities by creating or joining online groups that reflect their community attachment. Joining a group is, in part, a performative act of attachment to a migrant maternal identity. The groups are sites in which women’s attachments to their diasporic maternal community are forged and re-confirmed. They also act as a material form of community, a means by which fellow migrant mothers become visible to each other, interact with each other and form relationships. The existence of the group confirms that other people ‘like them’ exist, even if they are not all members of the specific online group. It is a representation of their collective maternal imaginary, as well as a mechanism for forging ‘real’ connections with other members of the community.
8.2 The conceptual framework in practice: findings

In Section 3.3 ‘The conceptual framework in practice’, I outlined how the conceptual framework shaped the project from conception to representation and analysis. In this section I extend this to include the findings. Firstly, in terms of a feminist ethics of research purpose, this thesis has drawn attention to understudied areas of women’s experience, specifically migrant mothers’ experience. The research has drawn attention to the intentional, relational, digital and community work undertaken by migrant mothers. In a context in which theorising about motherhood has drawn only lightly on migrant mothers’ experiences, and theorising about migration has sidelined experiences of mothers, this research has built its findings around experiences of migrant mothers. Overall, the findings reflect the standpoint feminist view that insight gained from diversely generated perspectives can lead to more complete knowledge, empathetic understanding and solidarity. For example, exploration of migrant mothers’ ‘meta-maternal practices’ in their online communities shines a light on administrator practices in non-commercial online communities. A feminist-inflected focus on the “micropolitics of everyday life” (Mohanty 2003a, p. 509), combined with a matricentric feminist emphasis on maternal practices, has brought to the surface some key findings about the everyday lives of migrant mothers in Australia. These findings encompass the practical, emotional and imaginative consequences of migration, motherhood and the combination of both. For example, the gendered nature of parenting in Australia is made clear in the practices within the online groups and the participants’ rationalisation of those practices, drawing on everyday experiences and gendered discourses around sociality, responsibility, support needs and parenting.

Intersectionality, with its attention to multiple axes of difference and to the relationality that emphasises the interconnectedness of people and the centrality of the network of relationships of which we are a part, framed this research’s findings. For example, Chapter Seven presented the key findings around migrant maternal narratives and migrant maternal imagined communities by demonstrating the different ways in which those narratives and communities were constructed, activated, grounded, materialised and navigated, and the common ground between these different pathways. While many of the mothers’ imagined maternal communities were grounded in a logic of shared experience, language, history, food, and practices, the Swedish mothers’ communities and narratives were also grounded in what they understood to be a shared value of gender equality, which is underpinned by Swedish state legislation, policy and rhetoric. By
contrast, the German mothers drew more heavily on everyday maternal practices and objects in their construction of their maternal narratives. Rather than proceeding from an understanding of migrant maternal identities as essentialised, atomised spaces of difference (which stand in comparison to each other and to a White Australian ‘norm’), this research has explored how those self-understandings are constructed and materialised, how they interconnect, how they differ, where they draw on similar logics, where those logics and discourses differ. The findings point to the importance of the imagination for the construction and manifestation of intersectional identities. For these migrant mothers, motherhood is something that is imagined, remembered and desired, as well as practised.

8.3 Theoretical contributions and implication for practice

This thesis makes a number of theoretical contributions, and some of the findings have implications for practice, particularly in relation to support provision for migrant mothers. Firstly, the analysis of the digital and emotional labour performed by the groups’ administrators provides insights into the labour that underpins contemporary forms of community-building, in which online community-building plays a central role. The thesis advances concepts which have been developed from this specific research with migrant mothers, but which may also provide a platform for further research into the role of online community managers in non-commercial spaces. For example, to conceptualise the information-based, emotional, and community-building practices of migrant mothers, I have developed the concepts of ‘information agriculture,’ ‘meta-maternal practices,’ and ‘digital community mothers.’ In the wealth of research on digital cultures and communication, relatively little has addressed ‘closed’ online groups specifically, and even less has interrogated the labour of those who create and maintain those spaces.

Secondly, I have devised a theory of migrant maternal sociality that extends current understandings of the different types of maternal social connection that are important for migrant mothers. In particular, I have argued that migrant mothers create a sense of security through interdependence, by establishing latent ties in migrant maternal online communities, and that this may be a gendered process of “migrant home-building” (Hage 1997). While Haythornthwaite (2002, 2005) has established the concept of latent ties as connections which are “technically
possible but not yet activated socially” (2005, p. 137), I argue that the shared visibility of interactions in the Facebook groups creates an awareness of those latent ties, and what those ties might offer, providing a significant source of comfort for the groups’ members. Thus, I contend, the Facebook groups provide a space in which migrant mothers’ shared identities and experiences intersect with the “mediated intimacy” (Chambers 2013) of online sociality to create a safety net of latent ties, which is central to their relational settlement.

By constructing a theoretical framework of migrant maternal sociality, I have disaggregated the kinds of support migrant mothers seek in online communities, including casual sociality, relationships of instrumental interdependence, exchanges of empathy and pathways to more intimate friendships. This framework offers possibilities for practitioners working with migrant mothers, providing a theoretical grounding for potential interventions and resources to tackle migrant maternal isolation and improve wellbeing.

Also related to the ways in which mothers interact with each other, I have proposed a concept of ‘compassionate mothering,’ understood as a mode of mothering in which women are encouraged to engage with other mothers with empathy, especially when they encounter differences in maternal practice. This mode of mothering can be set against more confrontational tropes such as “combative mothering” (Moore & Abetz 2016) or “the mommy wars” (Douglas & Michaels 2004; Moore & Abetz 2016) and is specifically aimed to facilitate maternal communities, in which women can exchange information and support. The concept of ‘compassionate mothering’ may have resonance beyond an academic audience. Providing mothers with an alternative to contemporary competitive models of maternal interaction could encourage new modes of maternal solidarity.

Thirdly, this thesis intervenes in scholarly discussions in the relevant fields of motherhood, migration, and digital cultures. In the introduction, I asked how a focus on motherhood might extend or trouble current understandings about migration. In this thesis, I have suggested that a matricentric focus exposes the limits of a labour market centred migration research agenda, which cannot fully account for the experiences of mothers, who are often rendered invisible by a focus on employment. In re-framing widely accepted “middling migration” taxonomies to include a relational perspective, and proposing new criteria, such as access to both transnational and locally
emplaced knowledge networks, and orientation to paid domestic labour, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of middling migration which better accounts for motherhood. In addition, in noting the impact of gender on migration decision-making, which may be exacerbated by motherhood, I challenge the notions of choice and self-determination as criteria for distinguishing middling migration.

Fourthly, the concept of imagined communities of maternal practice, in association with which mothers construct, reconstruct and reconcile their personal maternal narratives, is a significant contribution to the literature on motherhood. The importance of connections between mothers – both tangible and imagined – and the role of the imaginary in mothers’ shifting and complex intersectional identities provides important insights into the ways in which mothers respond to the ongoing challenges of motherhood. It suggests that encouraging and facilitating these lateral relationships between mothers is important not just to manage the ‘transition to motherhood’, as has been widely argued, but also to support ongoing maternal well-being. For those working to support mothers in Australia’s diverse communities, the concepts of imagined maternal communities and maternal narratives could be used to deepen understanding of mothers’ attachments and resistances to specific maternal practices, which could inform the design and implementation of maternal support services.

Following on from that suggestion, this thesis also provides important insights into the kinds of information, emotional support, and social support, that migrant mothers need. In the literature around migrant motherhood, particularly around post-partum mental health and isolation, there is a tendency for studies to end with a call for more “social support” for migrant mothers, without defining either the parameters of that social support or how it might be brought into existence. While this study was not designed to specifically answer those questions, by exploring the networks and activities instigated by migrant mothers themselves we can gain a clearer idea of their needs. Given the current enthusiasm for online interventions in maternal health (George et al. 2012; Jones et al. 2013; Kernot et al. 2013; Mitchell et al. 2018), an exploration of what migrant mothers design for themselves, using the easily accessible affordances of Facebook, could provide a useful starting point for new interventions. At the very least, health and social care practitioners might find it useful to signpost these kinds of Facebook groups to their migrant mother clients.
Researchers and policymakers interested in increasing social cohesion and successful settlement after migration, may find useful the findings that online communities can facilitate both locally emplaced senses of belonging and belonging relating to more geographically and temporally distant attachments, and can assist migrants in navigating and negotiating between these shifting and multiple attachments of belonging. While not dismissing the concerns that digital technologies can be used to create “virtual ghettos” (Komito & Bates 2012, p. 107) or “echo chambers” (Del Vicario et al. 2016), this research has found that migrant mothers use online communities tailored to their needs, alongside other tailored and generic, online and offline, sources of information and support, to make a place for themselves in their local community and build new attachments to their local community. Organisations supporting the settlement of migrants in Australia might consider encouraging migrants to join, participate in or create similar online communities. Support organisations might consider providing resources, guidelines and training to facilitate the participation of migrants who might not have used or created such online communities before. Tailored training for potential administrators addressing both technical issues and advice on successful facilitation could improve the support offered in migrant-specific online communities. Community organisations could approach the administrators of existing online communities and propose joint social events or seminars, co-production of information resources, and other partnership activities. Grantmaking institutions might encourage such activities to increase the impact and reach of their funding programmes and to ensure the voluntary labour of group administrators is appropriately recognised.

8.4 Future research directions

In terms of future research directions, the salience of fatherhood to men’s experiences of migration and settlement in Australia, of friendship, and of online communities, presents intriguing possibilities. Migrant fatherhood has received even less research attention than migrant motherhood, particularly fathers who relocate with, rather than away from, their children. During the mapping phase of this research, I found mixed-gender parents’ groups but no groups exclusively by and for migrant fathers. After the completion of my fieldwork, I discovered a newly created Facebook group for Indian fathers in Sydney, which at time of writing has over 3,500 members. In the context of increasing cultural and scholarly interest in “involved fathering” (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda 2014; Coles et al. 2017; T. Miller 2011; T. Miller & Nash 2016; Wall & Arnold 2007) and fathers’ use of digital technologies (Ammari & Schoenebeck 2015; Rowland &
Correia 2018; G. M. Thomas et al. 2017), a study of migrant fatherhood online would bring fresh insights and extend the analysis presented in this thesis.

Many of the participants in this research discussed the extended visits, or even permanent migration, of their parents to Australia, and the often complex emotional intergenerational navigations this involved. Future research to explore those experiences from the perspective of the “grandparent migrants,” to investigate their use of social media, and to consider potential lateral relationships between grandparent migrants, might usefully extend the transnational ageing (E. L.-E. Ho & Chiu 2018; Näre et al. 2017; Nedelcu 2017; Zickgraf 2017) and contemporary grandparenthood (Hank et al. 2018; Margolis & Wright 2017; Shwalb & Hossain 2017) research agendas. Deploying a relational intersectionality approach to this topic would facilitate an analysis of the ways in which age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and class shape the experiences of grandparent migrants in the digital age.

Another avenue which emerged during the research, but which the parameters of the project constrained me from investigating, is the role of migrants’ Facebook groups in narratives and decision-making around return and re-migration. The existence of specific groups for migrants who have returned home after migrating to Australia, or are considering such a move, suggests a phenomenon worthy of research attention. A related avenue might explore the significance of social media for the phenomenon known as “ancestral,” “second-generation,” or “counter-diasporic” migration (R. King & Christou 2011).

The participants in this research can be broadly categorised as “middling” or middle-class migrants, with easy access to online technologies and the skills to utilise them, as discussed in Chapter Four. Further research with either more marginalised or more elite migrant mothers into their support needs, and the extent to which those can be met by migrant maternal online communities, would broaden the insights presented in this thesis. This would be particularly important for support organisations or health professionals, to ensure more marginalised mothers and migrants are not excluded from interventions based on the insights in this thesis.

More research is also needed into the roles and practices of online community managers. Such a research project might draw on the findings of this thesis about the ways migrant maternal group
admins create and curate their online communities, to explore the roles and practices of online community managers in other non-commercial online community settings. One potential avenue might be to compare the practices and experiences of professional and voluntary community managers.
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Study of migrant mothers’ use of online communities

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT - SURVEY

This survey is part of a research study about migrant mothers’ use of online communities. The study is looking at mothers who are raising their children “away from home” (in a country which is not the one in which they were born or raised) and how they use online communities, such as Facebook groups. This survey is the first part of the study. After the survey we will be interviewing mothers in Sydney, Australia to find out more.

Studies have shown that mothers in this situation may face additional challenges and may benefit from more social support, including peer support networks. Although there have been some studies of how mothers use online communities, there has been little research about how migrant mothers specifically use these groups and what impact that has.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a mother of a child under 5 and you are living and raising your child(ren) in a country which is not the country of your birth/upbringing. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and contact the researcher about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:
✓ Understand what you have read.
Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

Leah Williams Veazey is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of Catriona Elder, Associate Professor in Sociology & Social Policy at the University of Sydney.

What will the study involve for me?
If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to be complete an online survey. It will take you approximately XX minutes (to be determined after testing the survey).

The questions will be about your experiences of migration and motherhood, and your experiences with creating and using online groups for migrant mothers.

To take part in this survey you must be:
• a woman aged 21-55
• the mother of at least one child under the age of 5
• living and raising your child in a country which is not the country of your birth/upbringing, and you have been living in that country for 10 years or less.

Because of this, we believe you to have relevant experiences to share as part of this study. If you do not meet these criteria, please do not complete this survey. The survey is in English only.

In the second part of this study, we will be interviewing mothers who are living in Sydney, Australia to find out more about their experiences. If you live in Sydney and are interested in being interviewed, please contact Leah Williams Veazey on lwil2929@uni.sydney.edu.au.

Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

Submitting your completed questionnaire is an indication of your consent to participate in the study. You can withdraw your responses any time before you have submitted the questionnaire. Once you have submitted it, your responses cannot be withdrawn because they are anonymous and therefore we will not be able to tell which one is yours.

Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?
Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any significant risks or costs associated with taking part in this study. However, as you will be asked about your experiences of migration and motherhood, you may find this brings up distressing memories or emotions. If you do experience this, there is support available from organisations such as Beyond Blue (in Australia).
**Beyond Blue** provides support for people experiencing depression and anxiety. They have specific support for issues relating to pregnancy and early parenthood, and for people from diverse backgrounds.

https://www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/multicultural-people

Phone: 1300 22 4636 (open 24hrs)

Support is also available by email and web chat https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support

If you experience distress and you are not in Australia, you may still find Beyond Blue’s online information helpful but you may also want to seek help from a local organisation, counsellor or doctor.

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study. However, we anticipate the study will increase understanding of the challenges faced by migrant mothers and some of the strategies mothers can use to overcome them.

**What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**

This is an anonymous survey using SurveyMonkey. No personally identifying information will be asked for (e.g. your name). The survey does not track IP addresses, so your answers cannot be traced back to you. The SurveyMonkey account is password protected and only the researcher has access to it. For more information about SurveyMonkey see their privacy policy https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/privacy-policy/ and security statement https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/security/

Data will be stored securely on SurveyMonkey servers and University of Sydney data storage, on password protected computers and in locked rooms, during and after the study. Data will be kept for 5 years after the end of the study and after that it will be destroyed. The study results will be published in a student thesis and in related publications such as journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations. As this is an anonymous survey, you will not be personally identifiable in any publications.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

**Further information**

You are welcome to tell other people about the study.

If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please contact:
Leah Williams Veazey, PhD candidate, University of Sydney
lwil2929@uni.sydney.edu.au

Catriona Elder, Associate Professor, Dept of Sociology & Social Policy, University of Sydney
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by contacting the research team. This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished. If you wish to receive feedback in a different form, you can discuss this with the researcher.

**What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?**
Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney, protocol number **2015/724**. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

- **Telephone:** +61 2 8627 8176
- **Email:** ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au
- **Fax:** +61 2 8627 8177

**CLICK CONTINUE TO PROCEED TO THE NEXT SECTION**

To start the survey, click “yes” if you agree with the following statements:

- ✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- ✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- ✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- ✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney now or in the future.
- ✓ *I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.*
- ✓ I understand that my questionnaire responses cannot be withdrawn once they are submitted, as they are anonymous and therefore the researchers will not be able to tell which one is mine.
- ✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
- ✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

When you click “yes” you will be taken to the start of the survey. Remember, your responses are not part of the study until you click submit at the end of the survey.
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT (FOR ADMINISTRATORS)

Study of migrant mothers’ use of online communities

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is this study about?
You are invited to take part in a research study about migrant mothers’ use of online communities. The study is looking at mothers who are raising their children “away from home” (in a country which is not the one in which they were born or raised) and how they use online communities, such as Facebook groups.

Studies have shown that mothers in this situation may face additional challenges and may benefit from more social support, including peer support networks. Although there have been some studies of how mothers use online communities, there has been little research about how migrant mothers specifically use these groups and what impact that has.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are the creator or admin/moderator of an online group for migrant mothers and have expressed an interest in being part of this research. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:
- Understand what you have read.
- Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
(2) Who is running the study?
Leah Williams Veazey is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of Catriona Elder, Associate Professor in Sociology & Social Policy at the University of Sydney.

(3) What will the study involve for me?
If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to be interviewed by Leah Williams Veazey at a time of your convenience. The interview, with your consent, will be audio-recorded and should take approximately 1-1.5hrs of your time. The interview will be conducted at a place of your choice, such as your home (if you feel comfortable) or a public place such as a library, café or university campus. If it is not convenient to interview you face-to-face, we can conduct the interview via video software such as Skype, or even via email.

The questions will be about your experiences of migration and motherhood, and your experiences with creating and using online groups for migrant mothers.

(4) You have been invited to take part in this study because you are:
- a woman aged 21-55
- the mother of at least one child
- the founder or administrator of an online group for migrant mothers
Because of this, we believe you to have relevant experiences to share as part of this study.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time before the end of the project. You can do this by contacting the researcher, Leah Williams Veazey, or her supervisor, Catriona Elder, using the contact details on this sheet. There will be no consequences for you of withdrawing from the study.

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?
Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any significant risks or costs associated with taking part in this study. However, as you will be asked about
your experiences of migration and motherhood, you may find this brings up distressing memories or emotions. If you do experience this, there is support available from organisations such as Beyond Blue.

**Beyond Blue** provides support for people experiencing depression and anxiety. They have specific support for issues relating to pregnancy and early parenthood, and for people from diverse backgrounds.


https://www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/multicultural-people

Phone: 1300 22 4636 (open 24hrs)

Support is also available by email and web chat [https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support)

(7) **Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?**

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study. However, we anticipate the study will increase understanding of the challenges faced by migrant mothers in Australia and some of the strategies mothers can use to overcome them.

(8) **What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?**

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published in the researcher’s thesis, journal publications, book chapters, conference presentations and so on.

Although every effort will be made to protect your identity, there is a risk that you might be identifiable in publications due to the nature of the study.

- At the interview you will be asked to nominate a pseudonym to be used (instead of your real name) in the notes and results of the study. No other identifying details will be used in the study. We will also modify the name of the online group you are involved with, to help keep your identity confidential. However, because your name may be publically listed as the administrator of the group, it may be possible for someone to identify you, despite our efforts to avoid that.

With your consent, the interview will be recorded so that the researcher can transcribe your words accurately. These recordings will only be used for analysis and will not be made public in any way.

Data will be stored securely on University of Sydney data storage, on password protected computers and in locked rooms, during and after the study. Data will be kept for 5 years after the end of the study and after that it will be destroyed. The study results will be published.

You can request access to your personal information by contacting the researcher or her supervisor.
By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

(9) Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, Leah Williams Veazey will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact:
Leah Williams Veazey, PhD candidate, University of Sydney
lwil2929@uni.sydney.edu.au

Catriona Elder, Associate Professor, Dept of Sociology & Social Policy, University of Sydney
9351 3080
catriona.elder@sydney.edu.au

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished. If you wish to receive feedback in a different form, you can discuss this with the researcher.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney, protocol number 2015/724. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:
• Telephone: +61 2 8627 8176
• Email: ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au
• Fax: +61 2 8627 8177

This information sheet is for you to keep
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT (FOR MEMBERS)

Study of migrant mothers’ use of online communities

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about migrant mothers’ use of online communities. The study is looking at mothers who are raising their children “away from home” (in a country which is not the one in which they were born or raised) and how they use online communities, such as Facebook groups.

Studies have shown that mothers in this situation may face additional challenges and may benefit from more social support, including peer support networks. Although there have been some studies of how mothers use online communities, there has been little research about how migrant mothers specifically use these groups and what impact that has.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a member of an online group for migrant mothers and have expressed an interest in being part of this research. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

✓ Understand what you have read.
✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?
Leah Williams Veazey is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at The University of Sydney. This will take place under the supervision of Catriona Elder, Associate Professor in Sociology & Social Policy at the University of Sydney.

(3) What will the study involve for me?
If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to be interviewed by Leah Williams Veazey at a time of your convenience. The interview, with your consent, will be audio-recorded and should take approximately 1-1.5hrs of your time. The interview will be conducted at a place of your choice, such as your home (if you feel comfortable) or a public place such as a library, café or university campus. We are also doing some ‘paired interviews’ where you would be interviewed together with another mother from the same online group. If you would prefer a paired interview, please let Leah know.

The questions will be about your experiences of migration and motherhood, and your experiences with creating and using online groups for migrant mothers.

(4) You have been invited to take part in this study because you are:
- a woman aged 21-55
- the mother of at least one child
- a member of an online group for migrant mothers

Because of this, we believe you to have relevant experiences to share as part of this study.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I’ve started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time before the end of the project. You can do this by contacting the researcher, Leah Williams Veazey, or her supervisor, Catriona Elder, using the contact details on this sheet. There will be no consequences for you of withdrawing from the study.

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.
(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any significant risks or costs associated with taking part in this study. However, as you will be asked about your experiences of migration and motherhood, you may find this brings up distressing memories or emotions. If you do experience this, there is support available from organisations such as Beyond Blue.

Beyond Blue provides support for people experiencing depression and anxiety. They have specific support for issues relating to pregnancy and early parenthood, and for people from diverse backgrounds.

https://www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/multicultural-people

Phone: 1300 22 4636 (open 24hrs)

Support is also available by email and web chat https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study. However, we anticipate the study will increase understanding of the challenges faced by migrant mothers in Australia and some of the strategies mothers can use to overcome them.

(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published in the researcher’s thesis, journal publications, book chapters, conference presentations and so on.

At the interview you will be asked to nominate a pseudonym to be used (instead of your real name) in the notes and results of the study. No other identifying details will be used in the study. We will also modify the name of the online group you are involved with, to help keep your identity confidential. You will not be individually identifiable in the publications relating to this study.

With your consent, the interview will be recorded so that the researcher can transcribe your words accurately. These recordings will only be used for analysis and will not be made public in any way.

Data will be stored securely on University of Sydney data storage, on password protected computers and in locked rooms, during and after the study. Data will be kept for 5 years after the end of the study and after that it will be destroyed. The study results will be published

You can request access to your personal information by contacting the researcher or her supervisor.
By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

(9) Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, Leah Williams Veazey will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact: Leah Williams Veazey, PhD candidate, University of Sydney
lwil2929@uni.sydney.edu.au

Catriona Elder, Associate Professor, Dept of Sociology & Social Policy, University of Sydney
9351 3080
catriona.elder@sydney.edu.au

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished. If you wish to receive feedback in a different form, you can discuss this with the researcher.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney, protocol number 2015/724. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:
- Telephone: +61 2 8627 8176
- Email: ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au
- Fax: +61 2 8627 8177

This information sheet is for you to keep
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study of migrant mothers’ use of online communities

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ............................................................ [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.

✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.

✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.

✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney now or in the future.

✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

✓ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don’t wish to answer.

✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

I consent to:

• Audio-recording YES □ NO □

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES □ NO □

If you answered YES, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: ____________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________
☐ Email: ________________________________

............................................................
Signature

............................................................
PRINT name

............................................................
Date
APPENDIX E: SAFETY PROTOCOL

This safety protocol addresses potential risks to the researcher and participants in this project in line with the duty of care requirements.

Duty of care to the researcher

- The research involves interviews with mothers of young children, so it is anticipated that most of the interviews will take place in the participants’ home. The researcher will be conducting interviews alone. However her supervisor considers that the safeguards provided in this safety protocol are sufficient to manage the safety risks to the researcher.
- Risk management strategies have been discussed between the researcher and the supervisor. Before interviews are conducted, the researcher will discuss interview safety with the supervisor and perform practice interviews.
- The time and location of all interviews will be communicated to the supervisor, and the researcher will contact the supervisor prior to commencing any interview in participants’ homes again and once the interview is completed.
- As the interviews will take place in a private home, the researcher will take steps to ensure that she is able to leave at any time. This includes only entering ‘public’ areas of the house where possible (such as kitchens and living rooms), ensuring that the exit route is clearly known, and watching to ensure that the door is not locked after entering.
- Should anything untoward happen, or the researcher becomes uneasy for any reason, the interview will be terminated immediately and the interviewer will leave. The supervisor will be contacted as soon as practically possible.
- Where possible, interviews will be conducted in daylight hours or in the early evening.
- Transport to and from the interview will be by bus or car and, where necessary, taxi. Where a taxi is needed, both the outward and return journeys will be booked in advance.
- As the researcher is a member of the broad cohort of participants (migrant mothers in Sydney) there is the potential for her to experience emotional distress during the interview process. This has been discussed with the supervisor. The researcher will debrief with the supervisor following the first interview, and following any interview in which this has become an issue. The researcher is aware of other resources to help, including the University counselling service and external organisations.

Duty of care to the participants

- The research explores migrant mothers’ experiences and participants will be asked about their experiences of migration and motherhood, which may involve talking about distressing experiences.
- Participants will be made aware of this before agreeing to participate in the research, both in the survey via the informed consent statement and in the interviews via the informed consent statement and preliminary discussions prior to the interview. The risk is judged to be considerably lower for the survey participants, as the questioning will be more superficial, but this protocol recognises that the researcher will not be present while participants are completing the survey and therefore needs to make the participants aware prior to their involvement and to refer them to appropriate resources for support where necessary.
- At the start of the interviews, the researcher will discuss with the participants the possibility of causing distress, and will agree a protocol with them if that situation were to arise. This might include taking a break from the interview, rescheduling the interview for another time, or withdrawing from the interview process. The participant will identify somebody they might want to call in the event of becoming distressed. The researcher will also have available details of outside resources appropriate to the participant, which she will provide to the participant in case they need support after the interview.
• Some of the participants will be offered the choice of participating in a paired interview with another participant of their choice. This will be a person they know and trust. These participants will therefore have a potential source of support in the room during the interview.

This safety protocol has been agreed and accepted by the researcher and the supervisor.

____________________
Catriona Elder (supervisor)

____________________
Leah Williams Veazey (PhD candidate)
APPENDIX F: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

This survey is part of a research study about migrant mothers’ use of online communities. The study is looking at mothers who are raising their children “away from home” (in a country which is not the one in which they were born or raised) and how they use online communities, such as Facebook groups. This survey is the first part of the study. After the survey we will be interviewing mothers in Sydney, Australia to find out more. If you live in Sydney and are interested in being interviewed, please contact Leah Williams Veazey on lwil2929@uni.sydney.edu.au.

The following information tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read it carefully and contact the researcher about anything that you don’t understand or want to know more about.

About you and your family

1. How old are you?
2. How old are your children?
3. In what country do you currently live?
4. When did you move to the country where you currently live?
5. Which was the last country you lived in before you moved to the country you live now?
6. Why did you move to where you are now? (Select any that apply. Feel free to add more in the “other” field.)
   a. Lifestyle (e.g. weather, activities, quality of life etc)
   b. For my job or career prospects
   c. For my partner’s job or career prospects
   d. Fleeing war, persecution, natural disasters etc
   e. To be closer to family
   f. To experience something different
   g. Other (please specify)
7. Which of these was your main reason for moving? (Please choose ONE answer only). [Same options as Q6]
8. Did you have any children before moving to the country where you live now?
9. Have you had any more children since migrating?

10. How long after migrating was your first child born?

11. Which nationality are you (i.e. which passport(s) do you hold?) If more than one, please write them all.

12. Did you use any online resources (e.g. websites, forums, social media) to help you prepare for your move or to help you settle in during the first few months after arrival?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don't know

13. Which online resources did you use to help you prepare for your move?
   - Government or tourist websites
   - Forums or discussion boards
   - Facebook groups/pages
   - Blogs by people who live there
   - Instagram
   - Twitter
   - Other

14. What information were you looking for online? Information about...
   - Housing
   - Health
   - Education
   - Social life
   - Facilities for children
   - Travel and transport
   - Employment
   - Visas and/or other paperwork
   - Other (please specify)

15. Did you make any choices or decisions influenced by these online resources? (e.g. where to live, choice of schools etc)
16. If yes, please give examples of the choices you made that were influenced by what you found out online.

17. What was the most useful site, forum or group that you used to prepare for your move? (Please be precise, with a URL (website link) if you can.)

**Migrant mothers online**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Becoming a mother</th>
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<td>57%</td>
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17. Did you become a mother for the first time in a new country, or away from your “home country”?  
- [ ] Yes  
- [ ] No

**Becoming a mother**

18. Did you become a mother for the first time in a new country, or away from your “home country”?  

19. Did you use any online resources (e.g. websites, forums, social media) to help you prepare for becoming a mother or in the early months of motherhood?

20. Which online resources did you use to help with becoming a mother? (Select any that apply.)
   - [ ] Health websites  
   - [ ] Forums  
   - [ ] Facebook groups or pages  
   - [ ] Blogs written by other women  
   - [ ] Instagram  
   - [ ] Twitter  
   - [ ] Other (please specify)

21. What information were you looking for online? Information about...
   - [ ] Pregnancy  
   - [ ] Birth  
   - [ ] Being a new mother  
   - [ ] How to look after a new baby  
   - [ ] Shopping/products  
   - [ ] Feeding babies  
   - [ ] Relationships  
   - [ ] Other women’s experiences  
   - [ ] Other (please specify)
22. Did you make any choices or decisions influenced by these online resources? (e.g. birth choices, feeding choices, parenting style, general life approach or emotional stance)

23. If yes, please give examples of the choices you made that were influenced by what you found out online.

24. What was the most useful site, forum or group that you used to prepare for becoming a mother? (Please be precise, with a URL (website link) if you can.)

**Migrant mothers online**

**Being a mother away from 'home'**

These questions are about how you use (or don't use) online resources to support your life as a mother in a new country.

23. **Have you joined any online groups specifically for mothers from your country of origin, background or cultural group?** For example, a Facebook group for Thai mothers in Sydney, a forum thread for Australian mothers in France, or an online network for expat mothers.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

**Being a mother away from home**

25. Have you joined any online groups specifically for mothers from your country of origin, background or cultural group? For example, a Facebook group for Thai mothers in Sydney, a forum thread for Australian mothers in France, or an online network for expat mothers.
   
a. If yes, please write down the name of the group(s), thread(s) or website(s). Please be precise and include a URL or web link if you can.

26. Why did you join these groups? What were you hoping for when you joined?

27. What did/do you mostly use the groups for?

28. Have you ever met up in person with someone you have first made contact with in one of these online groups?
   
a. If yes, please give more information about what happened

29. How do you usually access these online groups? Select any that apply.
   
a. Desktop computer
b. Laptop computer
c. Tablet computer
d. Smartphone or internet-enabled phone
e. Other (please specify)
30. How often do you visit these online groups or see posts from the group e.g. in your Facebook newsfeed?
   a. Multiple times most days
   b. Once or twice a day
   c. A few times a week
   d. Less than once a week
   e. Only when I need something specific
   f. Only in response to an alert or notification
   g. Other (please specify)

31. Have you ever STARTED an online group specifically for mothers from your own country, background or cultural group?
   a. If yes, please give details. Why did you set it up? What has happened in the group?

32. How does it feel to be part of an online group of mothers from the same country or background as you? What does it mean to you? Has it helped you? Why or why not?

33. What do you use to communicate with other mothers in your local area? (Select any that apply.)
   a. SMS/text message / iMessage
   b. WhatsApp or other instant messenger app
   c. Facebook
   d. Twitter
   e. Phone call
   f. Face to face
   g. Letters or notes
   h. Video-calling (e.g. Skype/Facetime)
   i. Not applicable / I don’t communicate with local mothers
   j. Other (please specify)
34. What do you use to communicate with family and friends who do not live near you?
   a. SMS/text message / iMessage
   b. WhatsApp or other instant messenger app
   c. Facebook
   d. Twitter
   e. Phone call
   f. Face to face
   g. Letters or notes
   h. Video-calling (e.g. Skype/Facetime)
   i. Not applicable
   j. Other (please specify)

33. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?
   - Married
   - Widowed
   - Divorced
   - Separated
   - In a domestic partnership or civil union
   - Single, but cohabiting with a significant other

Some final questions…

35. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?
   - Married
   - Widowed
   - Divorced
   - Separated
   - In a domestic partnership or civil union
   - Single, but cohabiting with a significant other

36. Do you identify as LGBTQIA (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex or asexual?)

37. Please describe your race/ethnicity.

38. In what language do you speak most fluently?

39. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
   - Employed, working full-time (including self-employed)
   - Employed, working part-time (including self-employed)
c. Not employed, looking for work  
d. Full time child-raising, home duties  
e. Retired  
f. Disabled, not able to work  
g. Studying full time  
h. Studying part time  
i. Other (please specify)

40. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

41. Please use this box to say anything else you’d like to mention on the topic, about being a mother away from home, about online groups for migrant mothers or what online communications technology means to you...

Thank you!

Thank you so much for your time and effort in completing this survey. For the next stage of the research we will be interviewing mothers in Australia. If you live in Australia and are interested in taking part in interviews, please email the researcher on lwil2929@uni.sydney.edu.au.

You can also stay in touch with the project through the Mamas Away Facebook page.

Click SUBMIT to submit your responses to this survey. Thanks again for taking part in this research.
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

INTRO – consent form, anonymity/pseudonym etc, how to proceed after interview, recording & withdrawing etc.

STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEW – talk briefly about how you came to be in Australia, about becoming a mother, about being a mother away from home etc. And then we will discuss the FB group in more detail.

MIGRATION
1) Tell me about how you came to live in Australia
   o When, whence, why, with whom? [alone, lifestyle, study]
   o Feelings and expectations; challenges/surprises
   o (Did you join any online groups or forums before you left to help with the process?)
   o Do you think you’ll stay in Australia?

MOTHERHOOD
2) Tell me about becoming a mother for the first time
   o Experience of pregnancy, birth and post-partum period
   o Biggest challenges and surprising elements
   o Did you join any online groups or forums specifically relating to becoming a mother beforehand or in the early days?

MOTHERING AWAY FROM HOME
3) Where is ‘home’ to you?
4) What is it like for you, raising your children in a different country?
   o Specific challenges or advantages of mothering away from home
   o How do you think it would have been different if you were raising your children “back home”?
   o Areas of conflict/difference eg advice from family/traditions versus expectations from doctors/friends/media in Australia?
   o What is it like being a Swedish mum in Australia?
   o I can see you part of online mothers’ groups based in Sweden – why?

USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA
5) How important are technology and social media to you, in terms of managing being a mother away from home?
   o Time spent / frequency of use of online communication tools
   o What sort of tools or platforms do you use for this?

[GROUP]
6) Do you remember how you first came across the group?
   o When did you join (date, and also where it fits in their migration and motherhood timelines)?
   o When did you become an admin?
   o Why? What inspired you to join the group? Was it important to you that the group was just for mothers? Just for people from the same/similar background? Local to your area of Sydney? Why?
   o What did you hope would happen when you joined the group? What were you looking for?
   o What were your first impressions of the group? How did you feel about the posts you saw?
Did you post straight away? Read through posts? What did you think about the posts you read? How did they make you feel?

**About the group now**
- How would you say the group has changed since you joined?
- How do you decide who can join? Do you ever not let anyone join? How do people find out about it?
- Number of posts (per hour/day), number of responses per post, estimated number of active posters etc
- What sort of topics are discussed in it? Which topics come up most often? Which topics gain the most passionate responses?
- I’ve noticed in some other groups that at certain times of the year there are more posts, or more emotional posts – is that the case in your group?
- Have there been any tensions in the group? Caused by?
- What is your role as administrator of the group? Do you have explicit (written) rules/guidelines? If not, are there implicit rules?
- Do you feel like the other group members are your friends? How would you describe them if not?
- How much time do you spend on running the group?
- What do you most like about the group? Anything you don’t like? What do you use it for?
- Why do you think other people use the group? What do they use it for?
- Have you ever posted? Post regularly? Why/why not?
  - If you have, what sort of things have you posted about?
- Do you respond to other people’s posts? Why/why not?
  - If you have, what sort of posts do you tend to reply to? Why?
- How do you access the group? Laptop/smartphone etc? How often do you see posts (come up in feed all the time, or check specifically on occasion, only look when you want to find info/post)?

**Impact in / interaction with offline world?**
- Have you ever made a decision (big or small) based on information or opinions offered by the group? Or have you been influenced by opinions on the group?
- Have you met up with anyone who you met for the first time in this online group?
- Do you arrange meet-ups for the group?
- What difference would you notice in your life if the group disappeared forever overnight?
- What does your partner/other friends/family think about the group (if at all)?

**How does it feel to be connected to other local [group] mothers through the group?**
- How does it feel to have this community of [group] mothers through this group?
- Does it affect how you feel about your local community here in Sydney?
- Does it affect how you feel about your links with home, or the [group] community (here or more broadly in the world)?
- Do you think it has changed your experience of motherhood, (for yourself, how you feel, how you identify OR for how you raise your kids)?

END INTERVIEW
- Any other questions?
- Can you tell me why you volunteered to be interviewed?
- Know anyone else who’d like to be interviewed?
- maybe go back to issue of transcript?
**APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MEMBERS**

INTRO – consent form, anonymity/pseudonym etc, how to proceed after interview, recording & withdrawing etc.

STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEW – talk briefly about how you came to be in Australia, about becoming a mother, about being a mother away from home etc. And then we will discuss the FB group in more detail.

MIGRATION
1) Tell me about how you came to live in Australia
   - When, whence, why, with whom?
   - Feelings and expectations; challenges/surprises
   - Did you join any online groups or forums before you left to help with the process?

MOTHERHOOD
2) Tell me about becoming a mother for the first time
   - Experience of pregnancy, birth and post-partum period
   - Biggest challenges and surprising elements
   - Did you join any online groups or forums specifically relating to becoming a mother beforehand or in the early days?
   - Where did you seek information/support?

MOTHERING AWAY FROM HOME
7) Did you become a mother for the first time away from home? (check quex)
   - Where is ‘home’ to you?
8) What is it like for you, raising your children in a different country?
   - Specific challenges or advantages of mothering away from home
   - How do you think it would have been different if you were raising your children “back home”?
   - Areas of conflict/difference eg advice from family/traditions versus expectations from doctors/friends/media in Australia?

USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA
5) How important are technology and social media to you, in terms of managing being a mother away from home?
   - Time spent / frequency of use of online communication tools
   - What sort of tools or platforms do you use for this?

[GROUP]
9) Do you remember how you first came across the group?
   - When did you join (date, and also where it fits in their migration and motherhood timelines)?
   - Why? What inspired you to join the group? Was it important to you that the group was just for mothers? Just for people from the same/similar background? Local to your area of Sydney? Why?
   - What did you hope would happen when you joined the group? What were you looking for?
   - What were your first impressions of the group? How did you feel about the posts you saw?
   - Did you post straight away? Read through posts? What did you think about the posts you read? How did they make you feel?
   - How have you used the group since you’ve been a member?
     - Have you ever posted? Post regularly? Why/why not?
- If you have, what sort of things have you posted about?
  - Do you respond to other people’s posts? Why/why not?
  - If you have, what sort of posts do you tend to reply to? Why?
- How do you access the group? Laptop/smartphone etc? How often do you see posts (come up in feed all the time, or check specifically on occasion, only look when want to find info/post)?
- Talking about the group more generally, what sort of topics are discussed in it? Which topics come up most often? Which topics gain the most passionate responses?
- I’ve noticed in some other groups that at certain times of the year there are more posts, or more emotional posts – is that the case in your group? Have you experienced that personally?
- Have there been any tensions in the group? Caused by?
- Do you know if the group has explicit (written) rules/guidelines? If not, are there implicit rules? Can you think of any kinds of posts or behaviour that would not be allowed?
- What do you most like about the group? Anything you don’t like?
- Why do you think other people use the group? What do they use it for?
- As we mentioned before, it is just a group for mothers, not fathers, what do you think about that? How would you feel if there were dads in the group? Would you expect the group to be consulted if dads were going to be able to join?
- Why do you think [group] mums want to join a group like this?
- Addressing migration and motherhood challenges through the group
  - You mentioned X, Y, and Z were challenges you faced – has the group helped you deal with any of these challenges? How?
- Impact in / interaction with offline world?
  - Have you ever made a decision (big or small) based on information or opinions offered by the group? Or have you been influenced by opinions on the group?
  - Have you met up with anyone who you met for the first time in this online group?
  - What difference would you notice in your life if the group disappeared forever overnight?
  - What does your partner/other friends/family think about the group (if at all)?
- How does it feel to be connected to other local [group] mums in this way?
- Does it affect how you feel about your local community here in Sydney?
- Does it affect how you feel about your links with home, or the [group] community (here or more broadly in the world)?
- Do you think it has changed your experience of motherhood, (for yourself, how you feel, how you identify OR for how you raise your kids)?

END INTERVIEW
- Any other questions?
  - Can you tell me why you volunteered to be interviewed?
  - maybe go back to issue of transcript?
Appendix I: Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

Research Integrity
Human Research Ethics Committee

Wednesday, 14 October 2015

Assoc Prof Catriona Elder
Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Email: catriona.elder@sydney.edu.au

Dear Catriona,

I am pleased to inform you that the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved your project entitled "Migrant mothers' use of diasporic online communities".

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2015/724
Approval Date: 9 October 2015
First Annual Report Due: 9 October 2016
Authorised Personnel: Elder Catriona; Williams Vaezey Leah;

Documents Approved:

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<td>Questionnaires/Surveys</td>
<td>Final questionnaire with PIS and PCF</td>
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<td>Participant Info Statement</td>
<td>Revised PIS (single)</td>
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<td>Participant Info Statement</td>
<td>Participant info statement - key informants</td>
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<td>Participant Information Statement - Survey</td>
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<td>Participant info statement - paired interviewees</td>
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<td>Participant consent for - paired interviewees</td>
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<td>Recruitment Letter/Email</td>
<td>Message of invitation to key informants</td>
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<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Interview schedule for participant interviews</td>
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HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the approval date stated in this letter and is granted pending the following conditions being met:

Special Condition/s of Approval

Research Integrity
Research Portfolio
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