

BA Thesis Report:
Zuzana Valentová, "Stolen Generation in Australia"

Ms Valentová has chosen an important topic for her BA thesis work, for which she has undertaken substantial research. The thesis is more sociological than literary critical in its orientation, and focuses upon describing the conditions of Australian aborigines in a broad manner in relation to British colonial, and subsequently Australian federal and state governmental treatment of aboriginal communities – in particular the policy of removing "half-caste" children from their aboriginal mothers and the restriction of civil rights built around this policy. What the thesis presently lacks is a framework within which the treatment of primary documents could be framed more critically, whether from an ethno-anthropological point of view, a juridical point of view, or a politico-historical point of view, with a theoretical foundation that could further elucidate the logic and rationale of colonial/governmental actions described in the thesis and the diverse cultural impact these have had upon aboriginal communities widely distributed across the continental landmass and adjacent island. The thesis would benefit from less homogenization of the aboriginal/colonial dichotomy: over 200 distinct tribal groups, differing in language and geographical situation, as well as degree of exposure to colonial practices (on a local, state or federal level) existed at the time of first contact with Europeans. Changes in political ideology affected the ways emerging political parties addressed indigenous affairs at different levels of government, just as changes in media coverage affected public awareness, above all catalyzed by broad-sweeping social change in the 1960s. External pressures concerning the exploitation of natural resources also had a major impact on how policy towards aborigines was directed, both formally and informally. In any case, a more nuanced treatment of the shifting contextual framework of the "Stolen Generation" would have helped to avoid the reductive character of much of the thesis when it is not treating specific testimonies.

As a point for discussion I would ask how Ms Valentová might further consider the issues she addresses in her thesis in relation to contemporary film, music, art and writing by aborigines? How has aboriginal activism and advocacy changed within and as a result of the culture industry? Can Ms Valentová discuss this with respect to specific writers/artists etc.?

In keeping with the grade I have already awarded for Ms Valentová's thesis work, based upon the first chapter, I would suggest that the thesis overall is deserving of a 3, although this is provisional—her defence may warrant a revised grade. I duly note that during the revision of the thesis Ms Valentová made significant improvements to the quality of the language.

Dr Louis Armand, Supervisor
11 June, 2012