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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Stolen Generation in Australia

Ukradená generace v Austrálii

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):

Louis Armand, PhD

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Zpracoval/a (author):

Zuzana Valentová

studijní obor (subject/s):

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V Praze, dne 30.5. 2012

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Thesis Abstract

The main theme of this thesis is Australia's "Stolen Generation." This term refers to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed by force from their families between the years 1909 – 1969. However, these years are only unofficial numbers and it is known that the removals took place even before and after this period. The aim of this policy was to assimilate the Aboriginal people in order to educate them in the British manner. This policy was an act of cruelty and abuse since the children were brought away from their families and put into state institutions or foster care to suppress their culture.

The aim of the thesis is to portray the development of the Aboriginal culture; beginning with the situation prior to British colonization and ending with the current situation in Australia. The thesis analyses the situation during the colonization and after it because the process of colonization caused further changes. It demonstrates the inability of the Indigenous people to assimilate to the new lifestyle. After the colonization, the Aborigines were deprived of their land and their traditional culture. The worst policies were the removals of so-called 'half-caste' children from their families, which were nothing less than forcible removals that were done without any permission from their parents.

The core of the thesis is the notion of the "Stolen Generation," which refers to the children who were forcibly taken away from their families. The majority of these children were not 'full-blooded.' They spent their lives in state institutions led by the church in order to be raised and educated in the British way. These institutions were out of their families' reach. They were physically, emotionally and sometimes even sexually abused. Consequently, they were educated to become servants in white families and 'the whitest' of them received foster care. This policy of 'breeding out the colour' was another racist issue that was made up by the British.

Another part of the thesis deals with the detailed consequences of the violent removals. These consequences were, of course, so grave that we can find their impact even today in the lives of the people. Generally speaking, these were losses, both materialistic and emotional, psychological traumas and sociological impacts on future generations. It is also important to present this phenomenon, as people understand it; therefore, the public recognition is discussed with emphasis on the process of reconciliation. The most important for the Australians was indisputably *Bringing Them Home* report that suggested an official apology by the Australian Government to the families and finally succeeded in 2008.

Abstrakt

Hlavním tématem této bakalářské práce je australská „Ukradená generace“. Tento termín se týká dětí Austrálců a obyvatel ostrovů Torres Strait, které byly v letech 1909 – 1969 násilím odtrženy od svých rodin. Toto časové rozmezí je ale pouze neoficiální, a je známo, že k těmto násilným odtržením docházelo jak před, tak i po tomto časovém období. Záměrem byla asimilace Austrálců a jejich převýchova podle britských způsobů. Tento postup byl činem krutosti a zneužití, neboť děti byli bráni od rodin a umístováni do státních ústavů nebo do pěstounské péče za účelem potlačení jejich kultury.

Záměrem této bakalářské práce je zachytit vývoj Austrálské kultury; počínaje situací před britskou kolonizací a konče současnou situací v Austrálii. Tato práce analyzuje jak situaci během kolonizace tak i po ní, protože proces kolonizace způsobil další změny. Vysvětluje neschopnost původních obyvatel přizpůsobit se novému životnímu stylu. Po kolonizaci byli Austrálci zbaveni půdy a jejich tradiční kultury. Nejhorším postupem byla odtržení takzvaných míšených dětí z jejich rodin, které nebyly ničím jiným než násilným oddělením, která byla prováděna bez jakéhokoli souhlasu jejich rodičů.

Jádrem této práce je pojem „Ukradená generace“, který odkazuje na děti násilně oddělené od svých rodin. Většina těchto dětí nebyla „čistokrevná“. Své životy trávily ve státních ústavech vedených církví za účelem jejich převýchovy a výuky v britském duchu. Tyto ústavy byly mimo dosah jejich rodin. Byly fyzicky, citově a někdy i sexuálně zneužívány. Následně byly vychovávány k životu služebnictva v bílých rodinách a ty „nejbělejší“ z nich čekala pěstounská péče. Tato taktika „breeding out the colour,“ nebo-li eliminace míšenců a původních obyvatel, byla jen další z rasistických problematik vymyšlených Brity.

Další část práce se zabývá detailními důsledky násilných odtržení. Tyto důsledky byly samozřejmě tak závažné, že jejich dopad na lidské životy můžeme vidět i dnes. Obecně vzato byly tyto ztráty jak materiální, tak citové, vedly k psychologickým traumatům a sociologickým dopadům na budoucí generace. Je také důležité představit tento fenomén tak, jak mu rozumějí lidé a dále jej prodiskutovat v souvislosti s procesem usmíření. Nejdůležitější byla pro Australany beze sporu zpráva *Bringing Them Home*, která navrhla oficiální omluvu od australské vlády rodinám, což se nakonec v roce 2008 povedlo.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate the origin of the “Stolen Generation” issue and depict the process of assimilation of the Indigenous people into the British society. The point of this policy was smoother integration of 'half-caste'¹ children. Since the Indigenous people were considered savage, unclean and dull, the general opinion was to solve this problem of a ‘third race’ by cutting them off their native environment in order to re-educate them.

Moreover, this process of re-education and consequent assimilation took place in specialized state institutions that were run by the church. This policy was legal as it was an order of the federal and state government, so it was illegal to help the Aborigines, in fact. These forcible removals started at as youngest age as possible in order to guarantee that the child will get rid of his or her native language and therefore, it will make easier for him or her to integrate into the white society.

Even today, the official numbers of Indigenous children, who were taken away from their families, are not precise. The estimate number of them is around 100,000 until the end of 1960's.² The precise year is not given either as it is impossible to say the exact date when this policy came to an end, exactly; that is, of course, due to the whole country's vastness and great numbers of the children. Officially, the children could be taken away from their families under the *Half-Caste Act* that passed in Victoria and Western Australia in 1886.³ Nevertheless, this issue has consequences for the modern generations as the children fostered in the institutions grow old and still bear their horrible experience with them. They suffer from bad physical and mental health. Moreover, they have great troubles with raising their own children as they were not raised by their own families and in their own community. They are unable to

1 Half-caste meaning to be mixed race, mainly half black/white people.

2 “Stolen Generations Fact Sheet,” *Reconciliation Network*, 28 Jul.2007, 5 Sept.2011
<<http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/education-kit/stolen-generations/>>.

3 “Aboriginal Protection Act 1869,” National Archives of Australia, 20 Nov. 2011
<<http://foundingdocs.gov.au/item-did-86.html>>.

apply any parental skills because they were raised with other children without having any experience of a parental model. Additionally to this, members of the Stolen Generation are also incapable of passing their cultural heritage as they do not know their native language and they were forbidden to practice any of the traditional customs.

The first chapters describe the state of the Aboriginal culture during the British colonization and the time of the first inter-cultural clashes. These first chapters provide wider perspective on the situation of the Indigenous people and the beginnings of the great problems. It is necessary to understand how the Aboriginal society was influenced by the colonization therefore; the relevant details about their culture are also a part of the thesis. The third chapter presents an insight to the consequential changes happened after the colonization. The changes affected wide range of Aboriginal communities like its structure, the social position or everyday life habits. The Indigenous people could no longer live in harmony with the nature as the natural resource started to be controlled by the officials and often ended up exhausted. Aborigines were expelled from the society, they had no respect, and they were not understood as equals. Every one of all the changes contributed to the destruction of Aboriginal society, their only functioning system of rules.

The core theme of the Stolen Generation is introduced and described. The first steps towards the racial policies of the government are further discussed in connection with the 'half-caste' children and their forcible removals. Aborigines started to be systematically assimilated and the policy of 'breeding out the colour' was launched in order to prevent their community from growing. Children were forcibly taken away from their families and thereafter were put into the government institutions. The evidence from the people who experienced this process of re-education supports the thesis along with the legal documents

and acts that were pivotal in the development of the situation. Additionally, thesis is supported by the films that were made to portray the removals policy and they show the cold-hearted officers who had no mercy while taking away the children and breaking the family.

The last chapters provide the background to the disastrous consequences of the removals and government attempts to assimilate the Indigenous people. People, who experienced the racial policies, suffer from severe trauma and depression. Their both mental and physical health is so bad that they more often tend to drug and alcohol abuse. At first, they do not have any sense of identity as they do not know their families or they even do not know that they are of Aboriginal descent and therefore, they have problems to integrate into the society. Due to the mental and physical problems that were caused by the isolation and unhappy childhood, the survivors of the forcible removals are incapable to have their own families. They do not have any parental models and it is hard for them to be natural authority without previous experience with any. So they pass this psychological trauma and other problems to the next generations, which causes even more troubles. The cultural heritage cannot be passed and Aborigines are still considered as social renegades.

Public awareness is also important to mention because it spreads the facts and history of the Stolen Generation it plays an important role in the modern life of Aborigines. The process of reconciliation applies still today, so as the reunions that connect the divided families decades ago. All the steps towards reconciliation started thank to the *Bringing Them Home* report, which suggested specific recommendations including the official apology, reconciliation and finally, compensation. Official apology was launched four years ago and the issue is still discussed in Australia. Every stage of the promises given by the government takes some time, so it is important to further inform the public about the issues, to promote

them and to find sufficient funding for supportive programmes. The next important stage of reconciliation process is reunion. Reunions also need more finances to be faster and more effective. Some examples of the successful reunions are given and the thesis is further enriched with Aboriginal literature, namely Kath Walker and her poem “Song of Hope.”

2. The Time of British Colonization

The first colony was established in Sydney in January 1788. The British settlers had a task to become friends with the Natives and to gain as much information as possible. In fact, this was impossible, given the language barrier. The problem was exacerbated when the settlers misunderstood the local rules. The Indigenous people did not consider the land as property; they consider the land, mother earth to be something they share with animals and plants, so they can't own it, they are part of it. According to W. Stanner⁴ "to part an Aboriginal from his clan country is to wrest his soul from his body." This idea was completely incomprehensible for the British. The Aborigines were savages for them; nomads that travelled the land with no fixed laws or rules. In addition to this, there were no fences throughout the land so there was no proper evidence that it was someone's property. Therefore, the settlers made a case to the Crown that the land was not occupied; they claimed it "terra nullius"⁵ and consequently, they started to settle the country all over. The British acted really fast; in fact, they decided to occupy the land of no one for their own profit they used the spiritual position of the Aborigines against them.

[..] if a tract of country were inhabited by isolated individuals who were not united for political action, so that there was no sovereignty to exercise there, such a tract would be *territorium nullius* ... As the facts presented themselves at the time, there appeared to be no political society to be dealt with; and in such conditions, whatever 'rudiments of a regular government' subsequent research may have revealed among the Australian tribes, occupation was the appropriate method of acquisition.⁶

The seizure of the land took the Aborigines unawares; their tribes had certain rule in moving across the country. Each tribe belonged to a certain location and lived off its resources. This was the first clash between the two nations and it had to be solved quickly. The settlers were convinced that the land belongs to no one so they can simply take it.

4 W. E. H. Stanner was an Australian anthropologist, who focused on Indigenous Australians.

5 "Terra nullius" is a Latin expression for "no man's land." This doctrine proclaims that Indigenous Australians could not sell, assign or acquire land other than through distribution of the Crown.

6 M.F.Lindley, *The Acquisition and Government of Backward Territory in International Law: Being a Treatise on the Law and Practice Relating to Colonial Expansion* (London: Longmans Green, 1926)23.

Nevertheless, the Aborigines did not agree with this, as the land was part of their culture, part of themselves. They became convinced that

[..] the white man was driving him away from all the best food-gathering areas into more barren places and at the same time committing sacrilege against those trees and animals that had been sacrosanct for his people since time immemorial, he began the long, unequal struggle of fighting the white man [..]⁷

These removals were disastrous for the whole tribes; they were dispossessed of their land, their livelihood. As the settlers were gradually getting through the fertile land, the Aborigines were pushed away behind the boundaries of the settlements, to the Outback, which was a desert, in fact. This geographical shift caused starvation as the barren places had not much to offer. Unfortunately, the Natives could not offend themselves much as the land was not fenced, precisely restricted. Moreover, the bigger groups of people in the settlements were troublesome as the continuing and rapid expansion of settlement of Australia also attacked their physical health through the presence of foreign diseases and infections. The combination of malnutrition and completely new diseases were in many cases fatal for the Australian Aborigines.

Additional great problems appeared with the Aboriginal population as the white settlers introduced alcohol into their diet, a completely foreign substance to the Indigenous people that produced disastrous and irreversible social problems. This 'invention of the modern world' completely destroyed the unspoiled and pure lives of the Natives. The diet and bodies of the Aboriginal people were not prepared for the toxic introduction of alcohol. Subsequently, many of them became alcoholics and even worse; they were accustomed to do anything the white man ordered them for a bottle of rum. The clash between the two nations brought other grave social issues, in particular sexual abuse of young Aboriginal women. Of course, the whole history of colonization is connected with violence; both physical and

⁷ Clark Manning, *A Short History of Australia* (Penguin Group Australia, 2006) 32.

spiritual. Evidence of such abuse can be found in the following witness account.

[..] On Vitriol River stations, a witness observed that on many stations 'there are no white women at all. On these the Aboriginal women are usually at the mercy of anybody, from the proprietor or Manager, to the stockmen, cook, rouseabout and jacked.'⁸

The documented practise of sexual abuse upon Aboriginal women by male white settlers produced a larger social problem, the birth of 'half-caste' children. The growing numbers of 'half-caste' births could arguably be the catalyst for the beginning of the "Stolen Generation". These were the children removed from their families, who had no future contact with their families. Therefore, they were "stolen."

8 Henry Reynolds, *With the White People* (Victoria: Penguin Books, 1990)207.

3. Changes in Aboriginal Culture after Colonization

The history of the Aboriginal culture dates back to approximately 40,000 to 45,000 years ago. Traditionally, the term 'Aboriginal' referred to the inhabitants of mainland Australia, Tasmania and other small groups of islands near the Australian mainland. Originally, the Aborigines were nomads who migrated across the country to the far-away places. They were mostly hunters and gatherers, who had deep respect for the environment and lived in harmony with nature. They nurtured the natural resources of the land they occupied and made use of it. Unfortunately, it also meant that they were dependent on the water and food supplies, and had to be careful about choosing a new location. Moreover, in the minds and culture of the Aboriginal people, the land of Australia was not a property they could possess so their migration was not controlled by any institutional means.

In January 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet established the first colony at Botany Bay.⁹ With the British colonization, Aborigines experienced great changes in their everyday lives. Not only were they no longer independent, but also the British colonizers now largely ruled their lives. The first of the events that led to the creation of the “Stolen Generation” was the removal of the Aborigines from their homes. This cut them off from their traditional access to natural food and water resources. This step was followed with increasing restrictions and controls designed to curtail the independence of the Aborigines. As a result of these further restrictions, the Aborigines were not allowed to possess any property, especially land, their job opportunities were severely limited, and they had to receive permission from the authorities before they could congregate together. Thus were their independence lost and the land taken from them. It was not until the 1970’s that they were allowed to apply for citizenship in their ancestral homeland.

⁹ “European Discovery and the Colonisation of Australia,” Australian Government, 11 Jan. 2008, 30 Sept.2011 <<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/european-discovery-and-colonisation>> .

Social changes generally have a great influence on the whole of society. Moreover, social position is profoundly connected with people's dignity and self-confidence. The lower an individual's status in a social group, the lower the individual's self-confidence and sense of self will be. Social status and acceptance is thus closely linked with self-esteem.¹⁰ This relationship colours the cultural change experienced by the Aborigines as a result of the colonization. Originally, the Aborigines were all equal. They did not have a system of hierarchical division or written law that codified their lives. Each person contributed to the society in different ways. There was one exception to the equality of the Aborigines: the Elders. The Elders formed the backbone of the Aboriginal tribes; they were the old shamans with spiritual powers and life experience. The basic cultural norms were conveyed through the mythological foundation stories known as the 'Dreamtime Legends.' The 'Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming' also refer to an individual's dreaming or the dreaming of the whole community.¹¹ These legends, which consist of several parts, also provide the Aborigines with answers to fundamental existential questions about the creation of the universe and human beings, and the role human beings have in the universe.

The principal idea of this mythology lies in ancient 'Ancestor Spirits' who came to Earth as humans, and then later as other forms, and gave the forms to the animals and plants. Not only the forms, but also the relations between them were established. As the spirits crossed the land, many stories were made up about the places they have visited or created. For the Indigenous people these spirits never left the land as they simply transformed to other objects or animals; their existence and power are omnipresent. These legends are not only a part of the past, but of the present and the future too; they are preserved from generation to

10 Jeff Greenberg, et al., eds. *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004) 116.

11 "Indigenous Australia, Spirituality," Australian Museum, 24 Dec.2009, 5 Dec.2011
<<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia-Spirituality>>.

generation and are a part of the 'Dreaming.' This notion differs from the 'Dreamtime' as the 'Dreaming' refers more to the set of an individual's beliefs. The 'Dreamtime Legends' interconnect the Aboriginal traditions, their spirituality and religion at the same time. According to these legends, every Australian is equal. These practises had not changed much for thousands of years and they serve as a part of the cultural heritage of the Aborigines.¹²

The spirituality of the Aborigines was bound to the plants and animals because their beliefs originated in nature. Each tribe had its own totem made of wood or shells. The totem was in majority of cases represented by animals like turtles, crocodiles or birds.¹³ To belong to one specific tribe one had to be in the same bloodline or to be related through the totem. No additional structural division was necessary; everyone had their own role within the tribe and that were passed down from generation to generation. Each tribe was originally bound to a certain location. The tribes were not allowed to trespass the boundaries, because that was considered crime without any prior permission. The consequential punishment was often mortal. The tribes were not co-operating with each other as they subsisted on the natural resources in their 'homeland'.

In addition to the legends, there were certain rules that had to be obeyed. These rules concerned the basic customs for marriages, family discipline and accepted behaviour. Even trespassing other's tribe area had its specific rules and people were severely punished for not respecting the trespassing rules. Because the Aborigines' sense of responsibility and respect was profound enough, there was no need of having any other set of rules. The lack of written evidence was, unfortunately, a contributing factor to the failure of the British to understand

12 "The Dreaming," Australian Government, 6 Mar. 2008, 1 Sept.2011
<<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/dreaming>>.

13 "Language, Totems, and Stories," ReefED, 10 Dec. 2011
<http://www.reefed.edu.au/home/explorer/hot_topics/gbr_traditional_owners/language_totems_and_stories>.

and respect Aboriginal culture. In fact, the British considered the Aborigines to be savages. This lack of respect led to estrangement and conflict between the two cultures, with the result that the Aborigines quickly lost their standing, and after the 'terra nullius' policy their land.

The settlers were not happy about the Aborigines occupying the land and moreover, they did not want to allow further development of what they deemed to be savage culture. After the abuses of the Aboriginal race, the situation was aggravated by the existence of 'half-caste' children. These children were 'cross-breeds,' which is why they were removed from their families. The concept of 'breeding out the colour' worked on the simple basis of taking the half-blooded children into white families. The government's idea was that after five generations, this 'cross-breeding' would cause the Aborigines to die out completely. These were the beginnings of racism and prejudices against the Indigenous people, which remained till now. The contemporary situation of the Aboriginal race is either living in the traditional way or in the poorest conditions. The second option is more common; people living at the edge of society, in great poverty, majority of them is addicted to drugs or alcohol.

As previously mentioned, the Indigenous people used to live like nomads, and consequently, their habits changed throughout the years. It is absolutely necessary to know the former habits and structural division of the Aboriginal society to better understand the complications that appeared with the arrival of the British. Formerly, the Aborigines inhabited the fertile land in central and northern Australia, mostly along the rivers and sea coasts. The Aboriginal population prior to colonization is estimated to have numbered between 250,000 and 500,000. Originally, the Aborigines were clustered in tribes; there were about 500 to 600 tribes, which were further divided into moieties, and finally, clans. The tribes were socially unique because each of them had their own song, totem and language. Historians estimate that

there were between 250 and 300 unique languages among Aborigines, and each language in turn had several dialects. All told, the number of linguistic variants exceeded 600. As there were so many languages, many Aborigines knew numerous languages as to communicate with neighbouring tribes.

As there were no chiefs or clear leaders who could speak authoritatively with a single voice for the disparate tribes, the colonizers chose the ones who they considered the most respectable and tried to make agreements with these few individuals that would concern all Aborigines. However, as the Aborigines did not have any particular system of owning property so this made situation even more complicated. The settlers also found that the Aboriginal social system was completely new to them and they had a very difficult time understanding it, as it did not correspond to the social structures with which they were familiar. For instance, there was no master-servant power dynamic; there was no individual land-ownership. The Aborigines did not know the principle of invasion either as they were respecting the traditional borders of their tribes; the British concepts of wealth and materialism were non-existent too. These facts meant that the most frequent causes of war in Europe, control of land and resources, were irrelevant in Aboriginal Australia. Thus, while the Aborigines gave the impression of being uncivilized on the one hand, on the other, their value system was, in many ways superior to that of the British.

It must be said that the structural division and independence of the Aborigines was completely distorted after the colonization. First of all, the removal of the Aborigines from their homeland to uninhabited barren places, contributed to their decline. The removal of the Aborigines caused that both the Aboriginal culture and population were destroyed. The conditions in which they had to begin their lives were horrible and the effects were

destructive. The tribes fell apart and the ones who survived this transition had to face another problem: all 'half-caste' children, majority of them result of unwanted sexual abuse, had to be removed from the Aboriginal families in order to be re-educated and assimilated with the colonial population. As they were all forced to forget their culture; they could not speak their native language and they could not pass the traditions on the following generations, their cultural heritage was lost.

After loosing their former nomadic way of life, the Aborigines were expelled from their homeland living on the reserves, as their new 'homes' did not extend on the fertile land. Further problems followed including the removals of the children from their families and the disruption of the structure within the tribe. These factors have contributed to the fact that modern Aboriginal society still endures serious physical and psychological problems. Indeed, many Aborigines today suffer from poor health as they are having problems with drug addiction and alcoholism. Their problematic past is deep-rooted, and together with racism and prejudices against Aborigines, fosters a vicious circle from which it is difficult to escape. The result is a huge gap between them and the rest of the community. And this gap is getting bigger. Of course, the Australian government has taken certain steps to mitigate the problems facing Aborigines, and the emergence of pro-Aboriginal politics has helped somewhat to improve their situation. But the Aboriginal community still has the highest crime rates in the country, and sadly enough, the highest youth suicide rate as well. Past may continue to be prologue for the future of the Aborigines.

4. Stolen Generation

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was marked by the removals of 'half-caste' children. These children of mixed race started to outnumber the 'full-blooded' Aborigines, which was mainly due to the raping of young Aboriginal women by white settlers. Nevertheless, the white population started to worry about these numbers and figured out the new policy. The situation was getting serious; the British were afraid of a so-called 'third race' that would be ethnically unacceptable for them. The generation of a mixed race would outnumber the white one and the British did not want to risk the loss of their superiority. Therefore, they started to fight for the racial purity of Australia and due to that, the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1869* was signed in Victoria.

This act gave powers to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines which subsequently developed into an extraordinary level of control of people's lives including regulation of residence, employment, marriage, social life and other aspects of daily life.¹⁴

After recognition of this act, the forced removals became legal and happened on everyday basis in every state in Australia. The officials had permission to take the children away from their families regardless of their age. In general, the removals were thought to be the best way of getting rid of the Aborigines. Moreover, the rest of the tribe would be left out on the reserves till it run out of them. This policy of segregation should have dissociated the Aboriginal families from the 'half-caste' children in order to reduce the numbers of the reserves and consequently re-educate the children. This cruel policy lasted till the late 1960's and nobody can say the exact numbers of the children who were taken from their families in order to be assimilated.

The term 'half-caste' can be understood derogative today; there is no single term for

¹⁴ "Aboriginal Protection Act 1869," National Archives of Australia, 20 Nov. 2011
<<http://findingdocs.gov.au/item-did-86.html>>.

this as the society still has problems with identifying the extent to which somebody is black or white. There are various options to express the term; however, today's proper name for this term may be for instance 'child with mixed descent.' As it was already mentioned, these children were taken away from their families because the officials thought they could stop the increasing size of the mixed generation. In order to do so, they deprived the Aboriginal families of their children and they wanted them to be raised separately.

In 1905, when it was apparent that the Noongar people were not reducing in number but rather were increasing, the state government became concerned about 'inter race mixing' and new legislative measures were enacted to counter this through the 1905 Aborigines Act. The act made any marriage between a Noongar and a non-Noongar person illegal unless it had been approved by the Chief Protector of Aborigines.¹⁵

In addition to this, any child up to the age of 16 could have been taken away 'under protection' of the Chief Protector. Of course, such policy was not legal only in south-western Australia but throughout the whole country except for Tasmania in the following years.

The general thought was that the blacker the skin was, the more savage the Aborigines were. The removals were considered good steps for their future. They had to lose contact with the Aboriginal families to further develop their personalities and culture in British manner. They would forget their original culture and adopt a new one. Moreover, the Aborigines were considered completely irresponsible and incapable of any level of integration. Nevertheless, it was due to the British pressure on them and the differences between the two nations. "Lesser cultures, it was believed, could not survive contact with higher civilisations."¹⁶ Therefore, one culture had to become almost extinct so as another could come and co-exist. Although the children were supposed to be re-educated, the majority of them got just a basic education where the girls ended up like servants and boys like workmen. Even such conditions were

15 "History of the Noongar People," *South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council*, 12 Dec.2011 <<http://www.noongar.org.au/noongar-people-history.php>>.

16 Robert Manne, "The Stolen Generations," *Tim-Richardson*, 14 Sept. 2010, 5 Sept. 2011 <<http://www.tim-richardson.net/joomla15/article-list-personalmenu-72/29-the-stolen-generations-robert-manne.html>>.

regarded as better than those of the Aboriginal community would have had.

Another notion that contributed to the segregation of the Aborigines was the Social Darwinism. This sociological theory states that:

[..] sociocultural advance is the product of intergroup conflict and competition and the socially elite classes (as those possessing wealth and power) possess biological superiority in the struggle for existence.¹⁷

In Australia, this was represented by the forcible removals of the mixed race children who were often subjected to the physical and sexual abuse in the state institutions or even in foster families. Nevertheless, according to the Social Darwinism these mixed race children will not be able to overcome the genetic dispositions effectively, in order to assimilate. Even the lowest social level of the white society was more accepted than any of the Aboriginal social castes.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s two of the three most important administrators of Aboriginal affairs, the Protectors in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, Dr Cecil Cook and A. O. Neville, the enthusiastic converts to the program of constructive miscegenation, and [they] both devoted a part of their energies to the creation of a blueprint for the implementation of a policy for the breeding out of mixed descent population under their control.¹⁸

Basically, this was a system of controlled reproduction when the 'half-caste' children had to be assimilated with someone with lighter skin. Robert Manne¹⁹ dislikes terms like 'breed out' or 'die out' as they imply certain intent. This policy of assimilation was, actually, genocide in disguise. Biologically, these 'cross-breeds' were "half-castes"(half Aboriginal), "quadroons"(one-quarter) and "octoroons"(one-eighth). Neville himself was deeply persuaded that biological absorption was necessary in order to maintain 'racial purity' in Australia. He

17 Definition from Merriam-Webster Dictionary

18 Robert Manne, "The Stolen Generations," *Tim-Richardson*, 14 Sept. 2010, 5 Sept. 2011 <<http://www.tim-richardson.net/joomla15/article-list-personalmenu-72/29-the-stolen-generations-robert-manne.html>>.

19 Robert Manne is a professor at La Trobe University, and it is involved in Australian political culture. He has written several books concerning the Australian history and political essays. His recent work deals with the repatriation of refugees from Australia.

defended the policies of forcible removals by saying that

[..] they have to be protected against themselves whether they like it or not. They cannot remain as they are. The sore spot requires the application of the surgeon's knife for the good of the patient, and probably against the patient's will.²⁰

From Cook's point of view the situation was practically the same. At the first national conference on indigenous affairs he stated the following:

Generally by the fifth and invariably by the sixth generation, all native characteristics of the Australian Aborigine are eradicated. The problem of our half-castes will quickly be eliminated by the complete disappearance of the black race, and the swift submergence of their progeny in the white.²¹

After passing new *Native Administration Act 1936*, the Native Commissioner had legal power to remove any child up to the age of twenty-one from his or her family without any further permission. This racial out-breeding was connected to other alarming practices. For instance, young girls, raised and educated in institutional care, were sent away to the white families to work at adolescence. Nevertheless, if they came back pregnant, it was perfectly all right as it was one of the options which should have prevented them from marrying 'full-bloods.' The institutions then took care of her at least for two years while her child was removed from her the time it was born.

Primarily, this act defined legal marriage; before the *Native Administration Act 1936*, only Aborigines with 'mixed blood' could marry the white people in order to become even 'whiter.' It was believed that Aborigine married to somebody with lighter skin would have descendant with lighter skin. After few generation of such practice, the Aboriginal race would merge into the white one or rather disappears. 'Full-bloods' could not marry whites in any case. After the legalization, no person of Aboriginal origin, not even the one of half descent,

20 Simon Longstaff, "The Significance of Saying Sorry," *Living Ethics*, 2008, 12 Sept. 2011
<<http://www.ethics.org.au/living-ethics/significance-saying-sorry>>.

21 "Bringing Them Home, the History," Australian Human Rights Commission, 7 Sept. 2011
<www.humanrights.gov.au/education/bringing_them_home/8_historyNT.html>.

could marry white person. Cohabitation of the two races was also prohibited. When Neville retired in 1939, the biological assimilation was replaced with a new programme of cultural assimilation. New federal Minister for the Interior John McEwan introduced the 'New Deal' concept and it was based on assimilation through education and employment.

However, new name of the politics did not bring greater changes. Although this new concept had bigger and more ethical ambitions to change the sociological situation and at the same time was supported with higher finances than the Neville's office, it did sustain the principal idea. It was similar form of replacement of the traditional values of Aboriginal people with the British ones. The only change consisted in letting the children from the state institutions to go home for holiday. Even though the number of lucky children was not so big as their families had to be regarded as 'suitable;' so there were again limitations of their rights. Another change happened in 1962 by the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* that amended to give the right to vote to Aboriginal people in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

In addition to this, the Commonwealth 1967 Referendum proposed to include Aboriginal people in the census, in other words, to give them citizenship. It also empowered the federal government to make laws for Aboriginal people allowing sharing responsibility for Aboriginal affairs with state governments. All states except Queensland abandoned laws and policies that discriminate against Aboriginal people. According to Charles Dixon, Manager of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, referendum introduced several crucial points for Aboriginal community. Dixon, Aborigine himself, considered the results positive as the government finally accepted the Aboriginal people as 'human beings.' Secondly, he appreciated the fact that the government made steps forward the harmony between the nations

by making special laws that would benefit the Aboriginal community. He also felt that there is a great need of unified law as each of the state had different laws and own regulations.²² The referendum did not prohibit the removals of Aboriginal children, this officially continued until 1969 when the Aborigines Welfare Board was abolished in New South Wales. No exact number of removed children was given, although the estimate number is over 100,000.

“[A] ‘half-caste, who possesses few of the virtues and nearly all of the vices of whites, grows up to be a mischievous and very immoral subject ... it may appear to be a cruel thing to tear an Aborigine child from its mother, but it is necessary in some cases to be cruel to be kind.’ ”²³

Removals of Aboriginal children started as soon as the situation with the ‘half-caste’ children started to be grave. Aboriginal members were taken as uncivilized and unclean, therefore the colonizers started to realize steps in order to cut the community off the society and to re-educate the mixed race children. Another reason why they should be removed from their families was a general opinion, which stated that the nature is dangerous enough for children and therefore, removals are indispensable step towards slowing down the process of Aboriginal extinction. Moreover, the removed half-Aboriginal children were considered more intelligent than their Aboriginal relatives and therefore, they had to be isolated and trained for the domestic labour. Children were taken away from their families with an assumption that they were either neglected or the family did not have enough resources to accommodate them sufficiently. Parents were sometimes forced to consent to the removal when their children were defined as neglected or uncontrollable. These definitions were mentioned in *Child Welfare Act* and they were widely used in practise. The word *neglect* was often used in connection with poverty, whereas *uncontrollable* children were the ones, who did not attend schools.

22 “Referendum 1967,” *Creative Spirits*, 31 May 2007, 22 Oct.2011

<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/referendum-1967.html>>.

23 “Western Australia,” Australian Human Rights Commission, 20 Nov.2011

<http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/report/ch7.html>.

A majority of these removals were involuntary and forcible. The survivors declare that the removals were in fact the acts of kidnapping. A very naturalistic image of such an act can be seen in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*²⁴. The scene portrays the removal of three Aboriginal girls, Daisy, Molly and Gracie, who are taken away from their mothers very violently. The police officers show no mercy while haunting them and taking the children away. They put them into a big truck without a word, behaving like they treat cattle. Immediately, the children are removed far away to the Moore River Settlement, where they are going to be educated and given a fresh start. The officers are leaving their mothers with no hope seeing their children ever again. Such situations were happening on an everyday basis and Aboriginal families were scared to death that their family would be divided. For that reason, children were taught to run and hide any time some foreign vehicle reached their homes and to wait there until they are safe again. Because there were regular patrols in the reserves, Aboriginal mothers had the habit to blacken the skin of their children; therefore, children appeared to be darker than they really were. The lighter the skin was, the higher possibility of the removal existed there, too.

Children could be taken any time; however, the age at which children could be taken was subsequently revised downwards to three months²⁵ and it was never given back to its mother. Nevertheless, it was not rare when the children were taken even older than the age of ten. The general idea was “the sooner, the better,” as it was essential to take as young children as possible to educate them faster and more easily. All of the Native or ‘half-caste’ children were then kept in the government institutions or foster families until the age of eighteen.²⁶ The devastating effects on the Stolen Generation were stated in the report *Bringing Them Home, Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders*

24 *Rabbit Proof Fence*, dir., prod. Phillip Noyce, Miramax Films, 2002, 94 min.

25 “Bringing Them Home Report,” Australian Human Rights Commission, 4 Oct.2011
<http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf> 123.

26 “Stolen Generations,” *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>.

Children from Their Families in full title, established by the federal Attorney-General Michael Lavarch in 1997. This inquiry consists of recommendations, an official apology proposal, and records of hearings that took place in every capital along with the 777 submissions. The BTH report declares the forced removals were highly unacceptable and were a grave violation of human rights, which continued after Australia had undertaken an international human rights commitment.

By the early 20th century, the government and missionary institutions were established. There were several of them, but the most famous settlements were: Moore River Native Settlement in Western Australia, Doomadgee Aboriginal Mission in Queensland and Wellington Valley Mission in New South Wales.²⁷ As the church ran some of the institutions, mostly nuns and priests were the ones who took care of the children and led their education. For instance, Neville was in contact with Kate Clutterbuck, Sister Kate, with whom he established an institution for light-skinned mixed race children. It was located in the suburbs of Perth.²⁸ In their correspondence, Clutterbuck mentioned that it would have been possible to decrease the number of children in institutions, as not all of the children were orphans and their mothers were able to raise them, in fact. However, she obeyed the authority of the Chief Protector and he had never accepted her proposals.

They followed her through the slushy compound to a wooden building. As they approached they noticed that the door was locked with chains and padlocks. Molly saw that the uninviting weatherboard and latticed dormitory had bars on the windows as well. Just like a gaol, she thought, and she didn't like it one bit. [...] "Eh, I nearly forgot to tell you about the lavatory. Use one of those buckets in the bathroom."²⁹

Such were the first impressions that the children shared when they finally got to

27 "Stolen Generations," *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept. 2011

<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>

28 Robert Manne, "The Stolen Generations," *Tim-Richardson*, 14 Sept. 2010, 5 Sept. 2011

<<http://www.tim-richardson.net/joomla15/article-list-personalmenu-72/29-the-stolen-generations-robert-manne.html>>.

29 Doris Pilkington, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (University of Queensland Press, 2002) 63.

institutional care. The conditions were really poor, due to minimal funding; especially the sanitary conditions were really bad. Hence the children suffered from severe illnesses that were spreading fast like fire. Moreover, the institution often did not have much money to afford wood and blankets, so the buildings were very cold and sometimes even uninhabitable. All of the institutions were strictly separated according to the sexes. Instantly after the children were put into the community with the others, they were forbidden to speak their native language. These institutions were supposed to accommodate and educate Aboriginal infants, who were later sent out to work at age of adolescence. Children did not have any contact with their families and were mostly educated by the non-Indigenous members of church community. They were encouraged to speak English, to 'live and think' white. This was the most traumatic experience as we get to know from the testimony of the survivors and it also led to the disastrous loss of Aboriginal heritage.

According to the *Bringing Them Home* report, majority of the half-Aboriginal children in the institutions were girls; they represented over 80% of all the children.³⁰ Girls were sent to work when they reached age of 14. Predominantly, they were trained and then employed as domestic servants in the houses in the middle class white society. Some of the children received no education at all.

[...] On top of that you were lucky not to be sexually, physically and mentally abused, and all for a lousy sixpence that you didn't get to see anyway. Also, when the girls fell pregnant, their babies were taken from them and adopted out to white families, they never saw them again.³¹

Therefore, the girls were educated in order to go work for the white families where they were sexually abused and the whole circle started again. An alternative to a life in an institution was foster care. Nevertheless, even foster care was not exactly a sufficient replacement of a loving

³⁰ *Bringing Them Home* report, 37.

³¹ *Bringing Them Home* report, 37.

family and not many witnesses claim that this was the happy part of their childhood.³² Boys, on the other hand, were educated to become agricultural labourers or manual workers. The children were given simple clothes, sometimes even with numbers.

We were each handed a pair of pyjamas with a number Mr Borland, the manager, had given us earlier printed on the pocket, and a shirt and pair of shorts also. I was number 33. Not Bill. Not even Simon. Just number 33.

—Bill Simon, taken away aged 10.³³

Generally, the members of Aboriginal community who had experienced removals and consequent education in missionaries or institutions do not have good memories. The separation and further isolation caused serious social and psychological problems. Children were dispossessed of their cultural heritage, including language and traditions. The lack of maternal love also caused severe sociological problems as the survivors still have problems with raising their own children. They also suffer from severe depression.

³² Damien Short, *Reconciliation and Colonial Power: Indigenous Rights in Australia* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008) 96.

³³ Robert Manne, "The Stolen Generations," *Tim-Richardson*, 14 Sept. 2010, 5 Sept. 2011 <<http://www.tim-richardson.net/joomla15/article-list-personalmenu-72/29-the-stolen-generations-robert-manne.html>>.

5. Consequences

All of the practises mentioned above were grave enough to influence one culture for least than a century. Children were violently taken away from their families; majority had never seen each other ever again. Moreover, some of the survivors do not remember or even know that they actually are members of the Stolen Generation. After they had to overcome the detachment from their family members, they started to live in isolation from government institutions, where they were considered even more alien. Children could be put either to the institution or in an alternative foster care; however, both environments were not ideal as the conditions were usually very harsh and unfriendly. These two variants should have changed and improve lives of half-Aboriginal children; however, the isolation and re-education, if there was any, were mostly the factors that even complicated their future lives. They were physically, emotionally and sometimes even sexually abused and they had nobody who could have helped them in any way. In the following poem, a witness of the removals, Paul Buttigieg, depicts the feelings of loneliness and confusion.

Someone
Turns out the last light
A Blackout
And
A dormitory full of black kids sigh

Unknowing

Waiting for parents to return
A shallow promise from government guardians
If you sleep

A white education waits
If you wake
And
Forgive

The theft of your black soul
And
The destruction of your family³⁴

34 Paul Buttigieg, "The Stolen Generation," *Paolo's Poems*, 21 Oct. 2007, 10 Sept.2011
<<http://www.paolospoems.com/aboriginal-poems/the-stolen-generation/>>.

The fact, that they spent their childhood without parents, made their lives more complicated. They did not have any example of how the family should have worked and how they supposed to behave within their own relatives. This negative experience caused consequential problems concerning their future situation. Traumatic memories have great effects on their mental and physical health. Even nowadays, they suffer from trauma, as they do not have functional family to share their terrible experience with. This trauma began with the violent removals from their own families, continued with their lonesome childhood in sterile institutions and it will proceed with further inconvenience of the future generations. The effect of the forcible removals and other racial anti-Aboriginal policies is unfavourable especially for the Aboriginal culture. Not only the children lost their families, their natural human bonds, but also, they suffer from great loss of their own identity. Neville Austin, survivor, stated: "I didn't know I was Aboriginal for a long while, I thought I was Maltese or Italian. I lived the identity I was told to be."³⁵

The culture has been destroyed due to the policies; consequently, after they were forbidden to speak their native language, children got rid of it completely. The removed children were cut off their families, the traditional background and habits, too. The institutionalised lives they led supposed to help them integrate into the white society. Nevertheless, this concept never worked for them and it caused even worse problems with integration of the Aboriginal people into the society.

I grew up feeling alone, a black girl in a white world, and I resented them for trying to make me white but they couldn't wash away thousands of years of dreaming.³⁶
—Aunty Rhonda Collard, member of the Stolen Generations

35 "Stolen Generations," *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>.

36 "Stolen Generations," *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>.

Majority of the members of the Stolen Generation had problems concerning their own identity. They were removed from their families at early age and therefore they did not have the opportunity to build the relationships and to cultivate them. This detachment was very serious for them; children had not only strong ties with their parents, but also with the whole community. Furthermore, indigenous education stresses the ties between the child and its environment, child learns by observation and practice.³⁷ Therefore, they did not know anything about their ancestors, anything about who they really were. This deprivation of family bonds resulted in loss of cultural knowledge and identity.

We didn't have any sense of identity. Didn't even know what we were. We were just kids from Sister Kate's. Our identity was – we were 'Home kids', and anybody else was an 'outside kid'. We did not identify with Aboriginal people, because if we went to east Perth, to go to the dentist, say, for example ... our instructions were very clear: 'Get your teeth done ... then race across the park – catch whatever-time train home, and do not talk to the natives.' As it turned out, a lot of the [park] people who used to yell out actually knew some of those kids, because of facial features. But we were not allowed to talk to them, because they were the natives, and: 'They'll try to pinch you.'³⁸

Furthermore, Aboriginal identity is not defined by skin colour but by relationships within the community, and relation between the people and their native land. The precise definition of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander consists of three parts; it is a matter of descent, self-identification and community. One has to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, he has to identify as Aboriginal and he has to be accepted by his community as Aboriginal.³⁹ Unfortunately, it is still the white authority that defines 'Aboriginality,' so the mentioned definitions are objected to small changes in any case. Moreover, Aboriginals identify themselves by location, which is the name of their country or their ancestors, or they can even identify by two names if they travelled from one place to another. One of the ways

37 "Indigenous Australia, Family," Australian Museum, 24 Dec.2009, 5 Dec.2011
<<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia-Family>>.

38 Robert Holden and Jack Bedson, *The Endless Playground: Celebrating Australian Childhood* (Canberra: National Library Australia, 2000)159.

39 "Legal Definitions of Aboriginality," Australian Law Reform Commission, 2 Jan. 2012
<<http://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/36-kinship-and-identity/legal-definitions-aboriginality>>.

to name Aboriginal members is by the boundaries, like Nyoongar⁴⁰ in Western Australia, or Koori in New South Wales and Tasmania.

So the bonds to the family and the land were very important to the Aborigines, therefore, the brand new attitude and thinking caused gradual loss of all means of preserving their Aboriginal culture. They were forbidden to speak native language, so the first layer of the heritage was lost, immediately. Secondly, they were living in artificial environment, in institutions built for their ‘assimilation,’ therefore the natural bond to nature was lost completely. The third important feature was loss of the family, as the sense of an individual’s identity is closely connected with the people who surround you. And at last, after they left the institutions that were obliged to educate them and to help them to integrate, they were confused. As they already lost the sense of own identity, it was impossible to return to the Aboriginal community in the first place, and usually, they did not know where their roots laid. Secondly, the white community rejected them; they were often insulted for dark skin. They were lonely, again, standing on the edge of society.

The second gravest effect on people who experienced lives in institutions is psychological trauma. Besides the loss of identity, this traumatic experience resulted both in physical and mental disorders. All of the problems originated in the stressful childhood that the children spent in institutions. It is hard to imagine someone’s life without any family background, support, memories or relationships. When the children were violently removed from their relatives, they were given no other option. Only the other members of Aboriginal community in the institutions substituted them at least some form of sense of belonging, certain support in hard days. At the same time, children did not have any contact with their

⁴⁰ Rosemary Van Den Berg, *Nyoongar People of Australia: Perspectives on Racism and Multiculturalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 6.

families; sometimes they were told they were rejected or that the family members are already dead. Mostly, none of these statements were true.⁴¹ Therefore, children suffered from rejection, which was very traumatic.

In the institutions, there were certain substitutions of family bonds, for instance, the older children were looking after the younger ones. They had friends among the others; sometimes they were placed in the institutions with their own siblings. However, these relationships and intimate friendships could not replace parental love and care. Moreover, children often did not stay at one institution, so even though they usually had close relationships; they were very often divided, anyway. This multiple replacement even intensified children's traumatic experience. The lack of maternal love and intimate relationships in connection with hostile environment was stressful enough to cause serious psychological problems. Also the emotional, physical and sexual abuses resulted in psychological damage and developed certain inability of the survivors to learn basic social skills in their real lives.

If people have been traumatised and are still suffering from the effects of that trauma, they are re-traumatised every time something reminds them of the trauma, even people who have made some degree of recovery. And that is the case in any situation where there is a post traumatic stress disorder. Things that remind people of the trauma will bring back memories of the trauma and severe distress.⁴²

--Dr Jane McKendrick, Victorian Aboriginal Mental Health Network, evidence 310

Of course, the effects are different for each individual; nevertheless, the problems are so complex that it is impossible to simply overcome them. The trauma is deeply rooted in people's minds and hearts, and inevitably influences their lives. The ongoing impacts and their effects even profound the damaging cycle and people are not able to escape without any aid. As they are unable to exist in the world full of racism and insults, they suffer from low

41 Bringing Them Home report, 161.

42 Bringing Them Home report, 16.

education achievement, consequent unemployment and poverty.⁴³ Such results subsequently lead to further complications like higher criminality, alcoholism, violence or substance abuse. The Inquiry declares the fact that the girls often stay in abusive relationships due to their helpless situation, low self-confidence and vulnerability. On the other hand, apart from girls boys more often tend to delinquency. Testimonies that are part of the Inquiry put it straight forward; all of the witnesses suffer from social alienation and other mental disorders; most likely depression. Lots of them have problems concerning commitments and relationships, like anonymous man from New South Wales who was removed at 8 years in the 1970's and suffered sexual abuse in both the orphanage and foster homes organised by the church.

There's still a lot of unresolved issues within me. One of the biggest ones is I cannot really love anyone no more. I'm sick of being hurt. Every time I used to get close to anyone they were just taken away from me. The other fact is, if I did meet someone, I don't want to have children, cos I'm frightened the welfare system would come back and take my children.

*Confidential evidence 528*⁴⁴

It is obvious that such experience continues to influence the lives of survivors; they carry it like a burden. On top of that, it will interfere in the lives of future generations as well. The combination of unhappy and stressful childhood, loss of identity, low self-esteem, and depression along with their new lives issues in inter-generational trauma. The inevitable problem appears in a new form of trans-generational issues. For the members of the Stolen Generation is very hard to lead normal lives with trivial troubles or rather without any troubles. They had never experienced ordinary lives with their families; sometimes they had never created close ties to anyone. The fact is that they suffer from lack of parenting skills nowadays. It very complicated to become an authority although you were always humiliated. It is impossible to become a good parent without any model, any previous experience and memories. On one hand, this should be new chance for those who had never had functional

43 Bringing Them Home report, 153.

44 Bringing Them Home report, 161.

families. On the other hand, having experienced institutional care and abuse seems not a good start for the new generations.

Moreover, this traumatic experience is passed on other members, on other generation. This burden is like a curse; it makes a perfect cornerstone for the new Stolen Generation. This concept still applies on Aboriginal children; they continue to be taken away from their families if they are ‘at risk of significant harm.’⁴⁵

There’s things in my life that I haven’t dealt with and I’ve passed them on to my children.... I know for a fact if you go and knock at their door they run and hide. I look at my son today who had to be taken away because he was going to commit suicide because he can’t handle it; he just can’t take any more of the anxiety attacks that he and Karen have ...

*Confidential evidence 284, South Australia.*⁴⁶

The new generation has trouble defining what is wrong or right. Their own parents lack parental skills and therefore, their process of growing up is very difficult and stressful, too. Parents should be natural authorities; however, this situation is a complete opposite. They do not know how to interact, they cannot teach their children discipline. Their institutionalised lives among other children did not prepare them for their future lives full of responsibility. It is very hard for the members of the Stolen Generation to show their emotions or to share feelings; therefore it is also very hard for them to raise a child without ability to show any affection. Many of them are unable to have functional relationship with their own children. Thus the traumatic experience is shared, and majority of the new Stolen Generation is having same trouble like their parents. They will soon have the same problems with substance abuse, alcoholism or unemployment; unless they are not having them already. Without any positive prospect, it is likely that the new generation will be as self-destructive as the authorities that raised their parents were.

45 “Risk of Significant Harm,” New South Wales Government, 20 Jan.2012
<<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/initiatives/kts/rosh.asp>>.

46 Bringing Them Home report, 193.

6. Reconciliation and Public Recognition

Australian society was aware of what was going on, nevertheless, nobody could do anything to change it and due to general understanding that the Indigenous people are threat and that their assimilation into white society is inevitable, the rest of the non-Aboriginal society were only silent witnesses. Aborigines got more public around 1930's when individuals and action groups of Aborigines and humanitarians had been urging to display leadership on Aboriginal affairs.⁴⁷ The crucial turn came in the second half of the 20th century; 1967 Referendum in Canberra. This referendum proposed to include Aboriginal people in the census, and to legislate for Aboriginal people. By the time of referendum, majority of the states, except for Queensland, repealed the laws discriminating against Aborigines; moreover, the Indigenous people had the right to vote since 1962. Although the referendum failed politically, historically it was 'a triumph of the human spirit that continues to inspire generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.'⁴⁸

The issues started to proceed and in 1994, Going Home Conference was held in Darwin, where over 600 Aborigines, who were removed as children, discussed access to archives, possibilities of compensation, rights to land and social justice. As a response to this meeting, *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* was established on 11th May 1995. This Inquiry examined the effects of removals, discussed the options of reconciliation, and of finding justification for any compensation.⁴⁹ This Inquiry received 777 submissions and collected evidence from 535 people, majority of them Aboriginal, after holding hearings all over the Australia during the years 1995 to 1996. On 26 May 1997, the evidence was put together in *Report Into the Separation*

47 Bringing Them Home report, 29.

48 "Stolen Generations Timeline," *Creative Spirits*, 21 Aug. 2009, 1 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-timeline.html>>.

49 "Stolen Generations Timeline," *Creative Spirits*, 21 Aug. 2009, 1 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-timeline.html>>.

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, commonly known as *Bringing Them Home* report, consisting of 700 pages.

The results of the hearings were alarming; up to 33% of the Aboriginal children were removed from their families between 1910 and 1970. These children suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse without any attempts of being helped. This violent act of removals was compared to the act of genocide. It was racially discriminatory as it applied only to Aboriginal children. The report made 54 recommendations, including opening of records, family tracing and reunion services and the need for reparation. The major recommendation was reparation that should further consist of acknowledgement and apology, guarantees against repetition, measure of institution and rehabilitation and monetary compensation. Others were concerned with social justice, commemoration and self-determination.⁵⁰ The most discussed was the formal apology to Indigenous peoples; six states apologized the same year the report was published, though the last one, Northern Territory, made a statement of ‘acknowledgement.’ Yet the Prime Minister John Howard refused to apologize on national level because:

In facing the realities of the past, [...] we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism [...] such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of Australians who are proud of what this country has achieved although inevitably acknowledging the blemishes in its past history.⁵¹

As a response to *Bringing Them Home* report, the first National Sorry Day was launched year after. This day is marked by hundreds of activities around the whole country supporting the acknowledgement of the impact of forcible removals; however, without participation of the federal government. ‘Sorry Books’ campaign was launched, too. Whoever could sign the book

50 Damien Short, *Reconciliation and Colonial Power: Indigenous Rights in Australia* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008.) 98.

51 “Stolen Generations Timeline,” *Creative Spirits*, 21 Aug. 2009, 1 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations-timeline.html>>.

whether he did not agree with the government refusal to make formal apology; over one million signatures were collected in thousands of 'Sorry Books.'⁵² These books were presented to the representatives of the Indigenous communities. The National Sorry Day takes place every year, when the marches, speeches and presentations are held through the whole country.

The public started to be more curious; therefore, this led to the more frequent discussion about the Indigenous people and their culture, but also it led to the public trials about compensation. Bruce Trevorrow, was the first member of the Stolen Generation in history, who was awarded compensation in 2007.⁵³ According to him, his life was marked by loss of identity, depression, and alcoholism. Moreover, his siblings, who stayed with his family, now lead successful lives. The important result of the trial was the recognition and knowledge that such policy existed. This trial started thousands of other ones, the members of the Stolen Generation found new power to fight for their lives, for their culture. Lots of them knew, who they were, and they wanted either compensation or reunion with their families. The other ones discovered that the Stolen Generation concerns them too and they also wanted to reconcile and reunite with their relatives. The compensation scheme itself was established in Tasmania in 2006 and Tasmanian Government allocated 5 million dollars to Aboriginal people.⁵⁴

The official apology to the Stolen Generations came in 2008, on 13th February, when the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said 'sorry' to Aboriginal people who were taken away from

52 "Sorry Day and the Stolen Generations," Australian Government, 22 Oct.2009, 1 Sept.2011
<<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/sorry-day-stolen-generations>>.

53 Agence France-Presse, "\$450,000 for 'Stolen' Aborigine," *The New York Times*, 2 Aug, 2007, 30 Nov. 2011
<www.nytimes.com/2007/08/02/world/asia/02australiabrf.html?ex=1343793600&en=7c73ab2fdaaacca3&ei=5124&partner=permalink&exprod=permalink>.

54 "Stolen Generations," *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>.

their families from 1900 to the 1970's. He apologised for

[..] the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. [...] We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again. [...] A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.⁵⁵

Later that year, the Stolen Generation Compensation Bill and the Stolen Generations Reparations Tribunal Bill were introduced into the Senate. The first, rejected bill called for ex gratia⁵⁶ payments and the second one for implementation of the reparations proposed in *Bringing Them Home* report. After one year, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation was established to work on 'healing' programme for the people, who experienced the trauma of the Stolen Generation. This foundation educates social workers and communities and tries to find the best way towards reparation of the community.

The official process of reconciliation, officially proposed later in *Bringing Them Home* report, started in 1991, when the Commonwealth Parliament passed the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991*, the *CAR Act*. This act instituted a formal ten-year process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The ten-year period was deliberately chosen to end the process at the time of centenary of the foundation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 2001. The *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation*, the CAR, guaranteed the promotion and guidance of the whole process. The reconciliation process had three main goals: to educate wider Australian community about the reconciliation process and indi-

⁵⁵ Kevin Rudd, "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples," Parliament House, Canberra, 13 Feb. 2008, 18 Oct. 2011

<<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>>.

⁵⁶ Ex-gratia, from Latin, meaning without any liability or legal obligation.

genous issues, to foster national commitment to address indigenous socio-economic disadvantage and to investigate the desirability of developing some form of document of reconciliation.⁵⁷ The educational part was greatly accepted by the public; CAR produced great number of resources for educational purposes including leaflets, newspapers and magazines, additional projects like radio promotion etc.

Although CAR had ten years to accomplish the mission, the given promises were not fulfilled by 2001. However, the first two goals at least brought some improvement, mostly on the social level. People got to know more details about the indigenous issue and started to be involved in pro-Aboriginal activities. Limited success of the educational goal was influenced by several factors that turned focus away from the important ones. For instance, the government did not develop the manner of establishment of the reconciliation process properly. It did not discuss the issues relevant for the Aboriginal people and was more interested in major enthusiasm on the non-Aboriginal part of the society. Also, none of the proposals fully addressed the demands for recognition of their rights. Nationalism was another negative element, because after decades, the Aboriginal people were treated badly, obtaining minimum sympathies, living on the edge of the society. Nevertheless, according to the reconciliation discourse they should be ‘united’ and ‘walk together’ through history. Several crucial subjects like sovereignty, land rights and treaties were marginalized and therefore, the educational goal failed.

In 2000, Car was replaced with a new private body, Reconciliation Australia, which is now the most prominent national organisation building that promotes reconciliation between the two communities in Australia. Later that year, Corroboree 2000 was held in Sydney. This

⁵⁷ “About the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation,“ The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 10 Jan. 2012 <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/council/about.htm>>.

was a landmark for the process of reconciliation as it celebrated the achievements and made the day of 28th May traditional for this purpose. More than 250,000 people that day marched over the Sydney Harbour Bridge in support of Indigenous people, highlighting the lack of an official apology. From that time on, the Australian National Reconciliation Week is held every year around this date to unite Australia, to pass on the information and to make difference in understanding equality.

The week is a time for everyone in your community to come together and to support reconciliation. It is a time to explore and acknowledge shared experiences of living in your community, to discover a shared heritage, to understand and respect the local indigenous people's culture, and to make your community a better place to live.⁵⁸

58 "What is Corroboree 2000?" *National Reconciliation Week, Corroboree 2000*, 5 Jan.2012
<<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/orgs/car/m2000/1.htm>>.

7. Conclusion

Australia's Stolen Generation belongs to the list of the most discussed topics on a sociological level. Although it resembles both the Canadian and the American example of assimilation too, there are many controversial and unacceptable issues discussed even today. However the causes are so complex, that it is necessary to know the broader background information and to understand basic changes in Aboriginal community that have been disastrous. The beginnings of this issue date back to the end of 19th century when the British colonization had begun. The Indigenous people were not respected and although they were the Natives, they were slowly pushed away from the new society. Due to language barriers and differing systems of hierarchy, the British started to occupy the land without any hesitation and negotiation. Aboriginal people were considered savage, unclean and aggressive, their social structure and position was endangered and they had to undergo great changes.

The 'half-caste' population started to enlarge and the colonizers felt to be threatened, again. They presented a legal way of 'breeding out the colour' in order to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal members and after the situation began to be uncontrollable, they resorted to forced removals of 'half-caste' children. Aboriginal culture started to be dismantled piece by piece, when the Stolen Generation was forced into living in government institutions and they were forbidden from speaking their native languages. They were separated from their families, isolated in the institutions, unable to resist any of the abuses and punishments. It was impossible to pass any of cultural tradition and heritage, as the children were taught to 'live and think white.' The violent removals decimated their culture and brought more problems than was expected.

The consequences were so grave that they influenced the lives not only of the

witnesses, but also of following generations. Other results included the inability to have a family, to raise children, to have parental skills. Members of the Stolen Generation also had problems concerning their identities, as they did not often know who they were. They lost any sense of belonging and this caused a loss of cultural heritage; people were unable to pass any of the cultural habits like language and traditions moreover, they sometimes did not know that they were part of the Aboriginal community. They also often suffer from depression and psychological trauma. Instead of a happy childhood, they spent the most joyful years in isolation with white people, who were showing detachment and disdain for those children. Children were raised without maternal love, any warm words or human touch. As it was already mentioned, they took over such negative experience and lack of skills on their own children.

By the end of the 20th century, the Aboriginal community became more courageous and it started negotiations on legal fields. After the Bringing Them Home Conference in 1994, *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* was founded in order to conduct hearings and collect the evidence from the whole country. In 1997, the *Bringing Them Home* report introduced official statements, stories of the witnesses and alarming numbers regarding the Stolen Generation. The public was astounded by the violent practices of the government institutions and cruelty with which the children were taken away from their relatives. Although an official apology was released recently, from that time on, the pro-Aboriginal policy started to be applied. Resources for education and detailed background information became easily accessible, so as was many of other materials like the newspaper, biographies, documentaries or even films. The testimonies brought back memories of many people; furthermore, people expressed their needs to reunite with their families and to reclaim the cultural heritage, at last. This was also a perfect situation

to begin the process of reconciliation.

The process of reconciliation officially began in 1998 by the National Sorry Day. Besides reconciliation and the healing programme, members of the Aboriginal community expressed the wish to reunite with their relatives and to show the public how complicated it was to be so oppressed, racially discriminated against and perceived as outcast. Consequent compensation was the next logical step towards the reconciliation process. Some of the examples of successful trials were given; however sometimes, people were not satisfied with the compensation, as it cannot replace the lost years. Nevertheless, an official apology from 2008 brought great satisfaction into the Australian Aboriginal community. It was the first instance of an official recognition of the troubles. However, these troubles were fictional according to the people, who did not agree with the apology. According to them, the Stolen Generation is just a myth, the children were never taken away and they want some more proofs. The others agree that the Stolen Generation existed; however, the children were not taken away but rescued.⁵⁹ They were given a chance, in fact, as the environment was unfriendly, full of abuse and bad living conditions.

Recently, there are many organisations in Australia, which are helping people from the Stolen Generation. The most important are National Sorry Day Committee (NSDC), whose supporters help the Indigenous people and members of the Stolen Generation to achieve the 54 recommendations given in the Inquiry. A second organisation is the Stolen Generations Alliance (SGA), which provides advocacy and lobbying in the government to help the members of the Stolen Generation. The last group of organisations is so-called Link-Up. These ones strive to track down the relatives of the Stolen Generation. This organisation has

⁵⁹ "Stolen Generations," *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>.

offices in almost every state in Australia and it mediated over 160 reunions.⁶⁰ These Link-Up organisations are the principal ones in the lives of the Stolen Generation, as they connect people after decades and without external aid these reunions would not have happened, at all. Yet these organisations still need more money because they are not still sufficiently funded. The reunions take too long to be organised and are not effective enough in finding the families in time. Belinda Dann's reunion was successful.

By coincidence one of Belinda's grandsons mentioned her Aboriginal name in a conversation with an Aboriginal girl who had heard of Belinda and was connected to her people. A 100-year-long search was over. Belinda met her people and, incredibly, started speaking in her native Aboriginal language again. Four months later she died.⁶¹

Kath Walker's poem includes all of the feelings that the members of the Stolen Generation share. It depicts the most relevant moments of their lives. Moreover, it expresses the hope and better future for the Australian Aborigines.

Look up, my people,
The dawn is breaking
The world is waking
To a bright new day
When none defame us
No restriction tame us
Nor colour shame us
Nor sneer dismay.

Now brood no more
On the years behind you
The hope assigned you
Shall the past replace
When a juster justice
Grown wise and stronger
Points the bone no longer
At a darker race.

So long we waited
Bound and frustrated
Till hate be hated

60 "Stolen Generations," *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>.

61 "Stolen Generations," *Creative Spirits*, March 2001, 18 Sept.2011
<<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/stolen-generations.html>>.

And caste deposed
Now light shall guide us
No goal denied us
And all doors open
That long were closed.

See plain the promise
Dark freedom-lover!
Night's nearly over
And though long the climb
New rights will greet us
New mateship meet us
And joy complete us
In our new Dream Time.

To our fathers' fathers
The paid, the sorrow;
To our children's children
the glad tomorrow.⁶²

⁶² Kath Walker, *My People: A Kath Walked Collection*(Milton: The Jacaranda Press, 1981) 40.

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