The Stolen Generation
Bachelor’s Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this dissertation independently, using only the sources listed in the bibliography.
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Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, theories of European racial superiority justified European colonization around the world. The colonization was inevitably accompanied by the dispossession of indigenous peoples, their cultures, religions and languages. Australia was not an exception. Australia’s history since the beginning of colonization in 1788 has been marked by intercultural clashes, struggles and misunderstandings of the European colonizers and Australia’s indigenous inhabitants, the Aborigines.

From the beginning of colonization of Australia, the integration of the Aborigines into the new society of predominantly Anglo-Saxon Europeans has been problematic. The attempts at integration have been varied. Probably the most appalling attempt was the removal of “half-caste” children from their Aboriginal families. These children were taken because it was federal and state government policy that children of mixed Aboriginal and European race, should be removed from their parents in order to be assimilated into Australia’s dominant white society. The government’s intended aim was to remove “half-caste” children from their Aboriginal families at as young an age as possible, cutting them off from their families, language, and customs and to re-educate them in one of the specialized government institutions. There they would be taught the European way of life, converted to Christianity and schooled in domestic and manual labour. From the late 19th century until the 1970s over a hundred thousand “half-caste” children were forcibly removed from their families and put into institutions. These children are known as the Stolen Generation.

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1 The term “half-caste” is used to describe people of mixed Aboriginal and European race.
The separation from their families and the hardships endured by the “half-caste” children in the institutions seriously affected both their physical and mental well-being. The loss of culture and family, and the abuse experienced in the institutions has had many consequences on the future lives of the members of the Stolen Generation and many of them were unable to properly function as parents and members of the society.

In my thesis I will deal with the phenomenon of the Stolen Generation and with the child removal policy of the Australian government. I will especially focus on the consequences that this policy had on the members of the Stolen Generation and also on the future generations of Aborigines. The first part of my thesis is an introduction to the Aboriginal people and to their way of life prior to European invasion. The next chapter shows the clashes of the two cultures and the impact of European settlement on the Aboriginal community. These chapters form a wide basis for the discussion about the Stolen Generation. The following chapters deal with the Stolen Generation, including the government attempts at assimilating the Aborigines into the dominant white society, the child removal policy, the experiences of the children who were removed from their families and the consequences of the child removal policy on the Aboriginal community in Australia.

The discussion on the Stolen Generation is supplemented by available evidence, stories and experiences of the children who had been removed from their families. My aim is to illustrate the suffering of Aboriginal people and to show that the government actions and attempts to assimilate the Aborigines into the white community have lead to the breakdown of the Aboriginal community and are for a large part responsible for the troubled lives of Australia’s Aborigines today.
1 Australia’s Aborigines Prior to European Invasion

Archaeological evidence suggests that Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for over 50,000 years and they have settled throughout the entire continent (McGrath 9). Aboriginal people traditionally lived as hunters-gatherers in small family groups, hunting, fishing, and collecting various plant foods. Most groups were nomadic and moved from place to place in search of new food and water sources. Hundreds of Aboriginal groups were spread throughout the whole Australian continent. (‘Aboriginal Australians’) The Aborigines in Australia had a deep understanding of the environment in which they lived and this connection to the land, and to its animals and plants, was present in every aspect of Aboriginal life and culture. Their belief systems, art and their way of life were strongly tied to the natural world; therefore, the Aborigines greatly respected the Nature and lived in harmony with it (‘The Land’).

Unlike the European society, the Aboriginal society was not based on personal ownership; therefore, land was not something to be bought or sold. The only possessions the Aborigines owned personally were their hunting, gathering, fishing and fighting tools as a necessity for their survival (‘The Land’). Except for these few items everything else, including the land, was public property. The life of each Aboriginal group was dependant on the land to provide food and fresh water. Although sources of food occurring naturally in their area were limited, the Aborigines knew precisely how to find everything they needed. Throughout the year they moved from one place to another, in order to secure enough food for their survival (Clarke 13).

Prior to European invasion, the Australian Aborigines lived a content life of hunting, gathering plants, and wandering across the land which they had occupied for
thousands of years. Until the arrival of European settlers, they had maintained their characteristic way of life and cultural practices.

2 European Colonization and Intercultural Clashes

When European settlers first arrived in Australia in 1788 they declared it “terra nullius”, even though at that time Australia had already been inhabited by Aborigines for thousands of years (Hatt 21). “Population figures are estimated at 750,000 in 1788, with the densest populations in New South Wales and Victoria, along the coast and rich water sources” (McGrath 10). Nevertheless, European settlers practically denied any Aboriginal existence and began to establish settlements on the basis of the “terra nullius” doctrine. When the settlers discovered that Aborigines did not demark or cultivate the land, British possession was thought to be rightful (Hatt 21). The settlers did not see any “evidence of agricultural, social or religious structure like their own, and therefore incorrectly concluded that Indigenous people did not own the land but simply roamed it” (“The Land”). It was true that the Aborigines did not “mark out their lands in ways that were obvious to Europeans. There were no fences or barriers as in the traditional European way of marking land ownership” (“Introduction,” Indigenous Australia). Thus, the colonizers assumed that they could take the land for their own use. They were convinced that they were not dispossessing the Aboriginal people but only making economic use of the wasted land (Wiersma).

Although Aboriginal Australians did not parcel up the land, each area was reserved for the exclusive use of a certain tribe. Each tribe resided on a specific designated area of land and utilised the available natural resources from that particular

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2 “Terra nullius” is a Latin expression meaning “land belonging to no one”, i.e. “empty land.” During the era of European colonialism the doctrine gave legal force to the claiming and settlement of lands occupied by its indigenous people, where no system of laws or ownership of property existed.
area. The Aborigines did not see any advantages of agriculture simply because the
natural environment provided everything they needed for their survival. The Aboriginal speaker Paul Gordon describes the Aboriginal relationship to land as follows:

A lot of people say Aboriginal people never farmed the land. [...] We never had to. Our mother, the earth, she gave herself freely to us. And because we respected her and loved her, we never had to go and do all the other things. That would have been harming our mother. So we just took what she gave us. (“The Land”)

Unlike the Europeans, the Aborigines were inseparably connected with their land. The land was sacred to them and it was not surprising that they did not want to give it up to the settlers and willingly move elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the practically non-existent ownership system in the Aboriginal society brought about many misunderstandings between the two cultures. The European settlers divided up all fertile land between themselves without recognising any land rights of the Aborigines. There were no treaties or agreements to regulate the movement of the settlers onto the land. As new towns and farms were being built, Aboriginal tribes were pushed into the parched deserts of Australia. As a result, Aboriginal people necessarily lost their hunting grounds, sources of water and their distinct way of life (Foster 60). Many typical food plants became extinct due to the expansion of settlement. Inevitably, the Aborigines began to suffer from malnutrition and starvation (Fesl 74).

The dispossession had a devastating effect on the whole Aboriginal society. Not only were the Aborigines deprived of their land, but as a result of the frequent contact with the settlers, they also encountered European diseases to which they had no immunity. Diseases “such as tuberculosis, smallpox, influenza and veneral disease” played a substantial role in the breakdown of Aboriginal societies and have been
suggested as the primary cause of premature death of many Aboriginal people (Toussaint 247).

Furthermore, the Aborigines suffered from the effects of alcohol which was introduced to them by the European invaders, and also from frequent fighting with the settlers over land. The whites claimed that fighting occurred because Aborigines enjoyed fighting, but this claim was not true. Aborigines were usually very peaceful and fighting among them was not customary. They did not know anything about the devastating wars which were usual among European people. What is more, the Aborigines were not equipped with firearms and their own weapons were not sufficient to defend them in fighting with the settlers. Necessarily, the clashes ended in the taking of Aboriginal land, dispersion of Aboriginal people, and also in their death (Ward 96-97). Sometimes, to facilitate the theft of land, it was not unusual for the whites to kill whole Aboriginal families by poisoning them or flogging them (Fesl 60).

Another form of brutal assault on the Aboriginal community was “sexual brutality” (Fesl 60). Aboriginal women and even children would be imprisoned and chained all day to be available for sexual amusement of the settlers. If they survived the rapes, the women were often seriously hurt or infected by sexually transmitted diseases (Fesl 60).

In addition, the basis of Aboriginal life was impaired by the whites’ desire to educate and convert the Aborigines. Missionaries throughout Australia “came as ‘messengers of the Good News of Christian civilisation and Western culture’ […] ‘to humanise the remnants of the unfortunate and tribes of stone-age’” (Tatz 86). As attempts were made to replace it with their own culture, Aboriginal cultural heritage was degraded.
With the gradual spread of white settlement after 1788, the Aborigines “suffered alienation, widespread violence and often fatal illnesses” (Toussaint 246). As a result, the population of Aboriginal people rapidly began to decrease. Although “disease proved to be the main factor responsible for Aboriginal deaths, susceptibility was enhanced by the trauma of dispossession, unavailability of traditional food and water supplies, bans on traditional weapons, the unhygienic results of being required to wear European-style clothing” (McGrath 20).

3 Solutions to the “Aboriginal Problem”

The process of colonization resulted in the gradual disintegration of many Aboriginal communities in Australia. “Forced off their land to the edges of the white settlement […] suffering from malnutrition and disease, their presence was embarrassing to the non-Indigenous people” (“National Overview”). The whites did not want to associate with the devastated Aborigines; they wanted them out of their sight. From the latter half of the nineteenth century, governments across Australia had established a complex system of administration and legislation dealing with the “Aboriginal problem”. The first legislations were primarily aimed at segregating the Aborigines from the white population on government run reserves. In 1860 a Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) was established with the function of “protecting” the lives of the Aborigines (“Board for the Protection of Aborigines”); however, in reality the Board was used more for restricting Aboriginal lives than for their protection. The board had the power to decide: where Aborigines could live, whom they could associate with, which jobs were suitable for them, what property they could own, and where they were allowed to travel (“Social Justice”). Moreover, the Protection Board determined where and how Aboriginal children could be brought up (“Social Justice”).
Until 1969, the Aboriginal Protection Board and later on the Welfare Boards controlled the lives of Aboriginal Australians.

Among the most important aims of the Board was overseeing the displacement of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands onto reserves where they would be kept out of the way of white people. Such reserves were delimited areas administered by white officials where Aborigines were not allowed to lead independent lives. There the Aborigines were forced to live in makeshift houses and to work on cattle and sheep stations (“Aboriginal Australians”). If there was not enough work, the Aborigines had to depend on government rations to survive. Moreover, the reserve administrators forbade the Aborigines to maintain their culture. Instead, Christian education was enforced on the reserves and Aboriginal cultural traditions were banned in order to “civilize” the Aborigines and to teach them the European way of life (“Board for the Protection of Aborigines”). On reserves throughout Australia, the lives of Aborigines were heavily controlled by white officials. Aboriginal people were denied the right to live their own lives. “They were deprived of decision-making powers over their lives and those of their families. They were denied management of many aspects of their own affairs, including their bank accounts, their children’s schooling” (McGrath 43). They were not allowed to marry whom they chose, live where they chose or speak to certain people. Furthermore, on the reserves Aborigines were unable to secure their own sources of food the way they were accustomed. Consequently, many Aborigines were made dependant on rations of food and clothing provided by the reserve administrators. For generations, these reserves regulated the lives of Aboriginal people denying them the right to determine their own future.
4 “A Dying Out Race”

As a result of the restricting government policies, lack of food, inadequate living conditions on the reserves, and insufficient health care, the Aboriginal population declined steadily. Most whites thought it was only a matter of time before the whole race of Aboriginal people would die out. Therefore, the Board’s goal became “the eventual ‘withering away’ of Aboriginal communities altogether” (Goodall 77).

From the late nineteenth century, the notion that the Aborigines were a “dying out” race were supported by the theory of “Social Darwinism,” popularized in Europe of the time by Herbert Spencer (Fesl 72). This theory was based on Charles Darwin’s book, *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859. Spencer’s “Social Darwinism” theory divided mankind into a civilisational hierarchy. It was believed that in such a hierarchy the strongest or fittest would survive and thrive in society, while the weak and unfit would perish. According to the natural law of “the survival of the fittest”, the European was considered to be at the top of the social hierarchy while the Aborigines and indigenous people of other colonized countries were weak and therefore doomed to extinction. (McGregor 14) Fittness was determined “in terms of ability to conquer and accumulate property” (Fesl 72). The whole Social Darwinism theory seemed to advocate the ill-treatment of indigenous peoples in colonized countries. According to Richard White:

Darwin’s ideas seemed to justify precisely what happened when the British expanded their empire, populated new lands and dispossessed native races. […] his ideas […] provided a conforming, seemingly scientific explanation for the actual destruction of Aboriginal society. Previously, Europeans had been convinced of the inferiority of the Aborigines, but that did not justify their extinction. Social Darwinism did (69-70).
The theory of “Social Darwinism” became the underlying basis for implementing both official and unofficial government and local policies in Australia. The Australian government responded to the Social Darwinist world-view by designating land where the Aboriginal people would be allowed to reside and assigning responsibility for their welfare to a Chief Protector or Protection Board (Dafler). It was believed that the Aboriginal problem could easily be solved if Aborigines were segregated on reserves where they would be left to die out. The plan was to make passing of the Aborigines as peaceful as possible, to “smooth the dying pillow” (Touissaint 252).

5 The Stolen Generation

By the second half of the nineteenth century it was evident that although the “full-blooded” Aboriginal population was declining, the numbers of “half-castes,” or people of mixed Aboriginal race, were growing. This was mainly due to the rape of young Aboriginal women by white men (Fesl 72). The fear of miscegenation soon began to cause public concern among white Australians as the growing “half-caste” population was threatening racial purity in Australia. “Almost invariably the Australian settlers in the first half of the twentieth-century thought of these mixed descent children, and of the descendants of these children – whom they labelled, almost zoologically, as half-castes or crossbreeds, as quadroons and octoroos – as a growing, fearful social problem” (Manne, “Stolen Generations”). The greatest fear of the white Australians was that if the problem of the “half-castes” was not tackled immediately, there was a danger that three races would develop in Australia: white, black and a third race which would be neither (Manne, “Stolen Generations”). Supported by the belief that racial purity was the key to national prosperity, securing racial unity became the greatest concern to white Australians. It was believed that if “half-castes” was left uncontrolled, the “White
Australia ideal, the most powerful consensual political value, [...] would be fatally compromised” (Manne, “Until the Last Drop of Good Blood” 227).

Many solutions were posed to deal with the problem of the growing “half-caste” population. One of the first legal attempts to deal with the issue was the passing of the Aborigines Protection Act of 1869 in the colony of Victoria (“Aborigines Protection Act 1869”). By 1875 the Board for the Protection of Aborigines proposed the removal of children from those Aboriginal parents who continued to live independent lives, outside the control of the reserves (“Aborigines Protection Act 1869”). This measure followed the general opinion that the best way to solve the Aboriginal problem would be to keep the “full-blooded” Aboriginal people on the reserves, where they would eventually die out and to segregate them from the growing “half-caste” population. The “half-castes” would then conform to the white society and over a period of time they would attain European cultural habits and values.

The practice was further encouraged by the subsequent Aboriginal Protection Act of 1886, which is often referred to as the “Half-Caste Act”. This act defined categories of Aboriginal Australians and gave the government power to remove any Aboriginal person from a reserve who was under the age of thirty-four and was categorised as less than “full blood” (“Aboriginal Protection Act 1886”). The aim of this law was to assist in the removal of “half-castes” from Aboriginal reserves to make them useful members of the white society. It was believed that the removals would lead to the decline in the population of the reserves and subsequently in their closure (Chesterman and Douglas).

The enactment of the Acts of 1869 and 1886 were the first steps in legal segregation of Aboriginal people based on whether they were “full-bloods” or “half-castes.” The implementation of these two acts eventually led to the forcible removal of
part-Aboriginal children from their “full-blooded” Aboriginal families in every Australian state from the late nineteenth century until the practice was officially ended in 1969. The children who were forcibly removed from their Aboriginal families and communities are commonly referred to as “The Stolen Generation.”

5.1 Dealing with the “half-castes”

The policy of removing “half-caste” children from their families became a particularly important part of the assimilation process in the first half of the twentieth century. White Australians began to fear that in a few years they could be out-numbered by the “half-caste” population and they were not willing to let this happen.

In 1904, a royal commission appointed by the Governor-General of Australia investigated growing concerns about the “half-caste” problem (Dafler). The head of that commission, Dr. E.W. Roth, summarized the opinions of the Commission as follows: “If the ‘half-castes’ are left to their own devices under the present state of the law, their future will be one of vagabondism and harlotry [...] and they will spend their lives in gaol or as prostitutes if nothing is done with them” (Dafler). This Commission became the advocate of government intervention to protect “half-caste” children from their own “bad breeding” (Dafler). The views of the Commission were integrated into the 1905 Aborigines Act which made the Chief Protector the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and “half caste” child up to the age of 16 or 21 (“The Noongar People”). This meant that the government had the power to take children from their Aboriginal families and place them in institutional care anywhere in the state without the need of parental consent. (“The Noongar People”) Within the next decade, all states and territories with the exception of Tasmania had passed similar legislations. The removal of “half-caste”
children became the most important solution to the so-called “Aboriginal problem” until the late 1960s.

Children of mixed-race were seen as more evolved than their Aboriginal parents. According to Tatz the common opinion was: “the fuller the blood, the darker the skin, the closer to barbarianism, savagery, heathenness, ‘myallness’, ‘bushness’: the consequence of which is that the less full blood, the lighter the skin, the nearer one stands on the scale of civility, civilisation and enlightenment” (Tatz 77). Thus, government officials believed it was the right thing to do to protect “half-caste” children from their less evolved, “full-blooded” Aboriginal families. They believed it was in their best interest if “half-caste” children were separated from all contact with Aboriginal culture and raised as “whites.” This would ensure they would eventually forget their “uncivilized” ways and adopt the “civilized” European way of life. A Native Welfare official argued that “nomadic habits and tendencies must be eliminated if the child is to be given a sense of responsibility sufficient to take its place in the community both economically and in all other respects” (Toussaint 257) Although the whites supposed that “half-castes” would not be able to overcome their alleged genetic inferiority to succeed in the white society, they believed that even a life in the lowest strata of the white society was better than the Aboriginal environment (“The Noongar People”). The Protection Board’s aim was to “save” as many children as possible by removing them from the Aboriginal community, training them as domestic laborers, and, most importantly, teaching them to forget their Aboriginal families. The children were never allowed to return to their Aboriginal homes. During the 1920s and 1930s, the pace of removals highly increased.
5.2 The New Plan: “Breeding out the Color”

In the 1920s and early 1930s administrators throughout Australia began to advocate as their solution to the problem of the “half-caste” population a policy of “breeding out the colour,” also known as “the policy of biological assimilation or absorption” (Manne, “Stolen Generations”). It was believed that once “half-castes” were more white in colour, they would also attain qualities of the white people. The biological basis of the policy became a scheme of controlled “breeding out the color” within a few generations by a system of controlled reproduction. Two of the most important administrators of Aboriginal affairs, the Protectors in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, Dr. Cecil Cook and A. O. Neville, were supporters of this scheme, and both devoted their careers to the implementation of a policy for the “breeding out” of mixed descent population (“The History: Northern Territory”). Chief Protector Cook expressed his vision as follows:

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 (Manne, “Stolen Generations”).

A.O. Neville’s views on the “breeding out the colour” were consistent with those of Dr. Cook. In a speech to the Moseley Royal Commission, which investigated the administration of Aborigines in 1934, he defended the policies of forced removal of “half-caste” children from Aboriginal parents, arguing: “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” (“A. O. Neville”, Wikipedia). In 1936 he managed
to pass the Native Administration Act which allowed him to implement his “breeding out” policy. This legislation re-classified Aboriginal people according to the degree of their Aboriginal blood. The classifications such as “half-caste” (half Aboriginal blood) “quadroon” (one quarter), “octaroon” (one eighth) began to be commonly used by government officials (Paisley). This classification of part-Aboriginal people made it possible to enact the policy of “breeding out the color.” The core of this radical policy was the encouragement of racial outbreeding. Only people of certain skin color were allowed to marry. Usually, one member of the proposed partnership was required to have lighter skin color than the other. That way, the skin color of their children would be lighter. In a few generations of such breeding, the Aboriginal race would disappear. Neville envisioned total “absorption” of the “half-caste” population into the white population. At a conference Neville posed the following question: “Are we going to have a population of one million blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were any Aborigines in Australia?” (Chesterman and Douglas)

Removing part-Aboriginal children from their mothers and families was, of course, another vital part for “breeding-out the color”. The commissioner was given guardianship rights over all Aborigines up to the age of twenty-one, allowing him to remove all children, from the bad influence of their Aboriginal families.

When Neville retired in 1940, the government slowly began to move away from Neville’s “breeding out” policy. The reliance on racial whiteness was replaced by a less race related approach. From this time on, Aborigines would be assimilated culturally into the Australian society. Although the new assimilation policy was viewed by its supporters as completely different from the former policies, the intent remained similar: the elimination of Aboriginal way of life, and its replacement with European values,
education and training, to make Aborigines useful tools of the Australian economy (Fesl 125). From the 1950s attempts were made to accept Aboriginal children into state schools. Unfortunately, objections from parents of the white children had prevented them from being admitted (Fesl 125). The children had no other choice than to continue living in institutions where the emphasis of their education remained on training for domestic labor. One positive change to the previous policy was that the children were given an opportunity to visit their families during holidays if they had a “suitable” home to go to. In many cases, however, their parents’ homes were not considered “suitable” and most children were not permitted to see their families. (“The History: Western Australia”)

Even though the Commissioner’s power to remove children was abolished by the Native Welfare Act in 1954, Aboriginal children continued to be removed under the Child Welfare Act of 1947 (“The History: Western Australia”). While the law required a court’s approval for removing children, the requirement made almost no difference to the numbers removed in reality. Usually, the removals from this time on were justified by alleged neglect of the children and the inability of their parents to provide for them. Between 1958 and 1961, the number of Indigenous children committed to institutions more than doubled. (“The History: Western Australia”)

Although in 1967 a national referendum granted the Aborigines citizenship rights and entitled them to the same rights as other Australian citizens, the policy of child removal did not officially end until 1969 when the Aborigines Welfare Board was abolished in New South Wales. However, evidence suggested that child removal continued even in the 1970s. (“Social Justice”)

As most records were lost or destroyed, it is not known exactly how many babies and children were removed between the late nineteenth-century and the late 1960s;
however, it is estimated that more than 100,000 “half-caste” children were taken from their homes in an attempt to “assimilate” them into the broader white population (“Aboriginal Reconciliation”).

5.3 The Removal Policy in Practice

Although in some cases the removal of children was voluntary, as some mothers in difficult life situations gave consent to the removal believing that their children would be given a better life, the majority of evidence proved that most cases of child removal were involuntary. A high number of child removals were justified by the neglect of the children; however, “there were varying definitions of what ‘neglected’ meant. There was a general assumption that Aboriginal people were uncivilized and/or unclean and therefore incapable of rearing their children” ("Stolen Generations," Koorie Heritage Trust). Nevertheless, a considerable amount of gathered evidence indicated that in most cases children were literally kidnapped from their parents. No parental permission was required to remove the children because they were all legal wards of the state. In general the practice was to remove children as young as possible, in some cases children were removed a few hours after being born. Usually, the parents were not told where their children had been taken, and often children and parents never saw each other again (Bringing Them Home 7).

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families, which was evaluated in the “Bringing Them Home” report observed that in many cases gross violations of human rights occurred. Most Aboriginal parents did not freely give up their children. “Where removals occurred for reasons of ‘education’ or ‘betterment,’ offers were presented in such a way families could not refuse them” ("Bringing Them Home” 7). The “Bringing them Home
Report” also collected evidence of false accusation and deception. For example, caring and able parents were accused of neglecting their children and not being able to properly provide for them, however, in reality this was not the case. In a number of cases children were even removed from families “because their parents had gone to work to support them, ignoring the fact that grandparents or aunties and uncles were caring for them (“Stolen Generations,” Koorie Heritage Trust).

Evidence gathered indicated that brutality was also used as a means to remove the children. In some cases the police literally kidnapped “half-caste” children from their parents. “White welfare officers, often supported by police, would descend on Aboriginal camps, round up all the children, separate the ones with light-colored skin, bundle them into trucks and take them away” (Knightley). If their parents protested, they were detained by the police. According to Knightley, the authorities sometimes “resorted to subterfuge in order to avoid harrowing scenes of parents clinging to the sides of the trucks, and to frustrate attempts to hide the children when the trucks drove into the camp” (Knightley).

They would fit out the back of a truck with a wire cage and a spring door -- like an animal trap. Then they would park the truck a short distance from the camp and lure the children into the cage with sweets scattered on its door. When enough children were in the cage, they would spring the trap door and drive rapidly away (Knightley).

Aboriginal mothers attempted to save their children in all ways possible. Sometimes they would blacken their child’s skin to disguise their mixed-race. A witness told the National Inquiry “every morning, our people would crush charcoal and mix that with animal fat and smother it all over us, so that when the police came they could see only black children in the distance” (Knightley). The children were also taught to “run and
Hidé when they saw a government vehicle or whites approaching” (Fesl 112). Aboriginal mothers had to stay alert all the time so that they would be able to hide their children in case the police came. The removal policy affected the lives of all Aboriginal people as whole families lived in constant fear of their children being taken away.

5.4 Life in the Institutions and Children’s Experiences

Government or missionary institutions were established to take care of the removed “half-caste” children. Where the children were taken depended on their age and the degree of their skin color. One of the official institutions for implementing the child removal policies was Sister Kate’s Children’s Home, originally known as the Quarter Caste Children’s Home for nearly white children (“The Noongar People”). “In 1933 it reflected its eugenic function in ‘rescuing nearly white’ children and preparing them for absorption into the white community. Children who were considered too ‘dark’ to be absorbed were left at Moore River Settlement” (“The Noongar People”).

In the institutions “the children were given every opportunity to ‘outgrow their heredity.’ The intention was that children should be ‘encouraged to live white, think white and to marry, if possible, into the white race, or failing that, with each other’ (“Northern Territory” 280). The children were taught to despise their Aboriginality. Usually, they were even brought up without knowing of their Aboriginal heritage. They were sent to work as domestic servants in hope that they would eventually assimilate into the white society and marry out. An alternative to placing part-Aboriginal children into institutions was foster care. A significant number, particularly females, were placed into foster care. The conditions in foster homes were not better than in the institutions. In many cases foster care was indistinguishable from domestic servitude. All the removals were done as an attempt to break the cultural ties between the children of
mixed descent and their Aboriginal families and cultures and “to drag the children out of the world of the native settlements and camps and prepare them for a place in the lower strata of European society” (Manne, “Stolen Generations”).

While the procedures for removing children from their families varied, the experiences of children were often similar. Life in the institutions was difficult and depressing. In A Hundred Years War, Peter Read writes that “the mental anguish of a sudden transition from family and community to an institutional life which reiterated daily worthlessness of blacks was a burden which some found impossible to bear” (67). The children were denied any contact with their family members. “They would be told that their parents were dead or had rejected them. Family members were unable to contact the children, or even to know where they had gone. Letters to and from the children and their true families were suppressed by the authorities” (Bird).

Doris Pilkington’s book Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence deals with the theme of the Stolen Generation and portrays graphically the life of Aboriginal children in the institutions. It tells the story of three Aboriginal girls of mixed descent who were removed from their families in 1930. A policeman forcibly removes the girls from their mother at Jigalong in the north-west of the Australian continent. They are conveyed under brutal conditions to the Moore River Native Settlement. Here the girls would be re-educated and trained in domestic labour. Pilkington compares the institution to a concentration camp. As soon as the girls arrived at the Moore River Native Settlement, Molly and her relatives Gracie and Daisy were forbidden to speak their native language. The other wards warned the girls: “You girls can’t talk blackafulla language here” […] “You gotta forget it and talk English all the time” (Pilkington 72). The children were forced to abandon their language and heritage, and taught to be culturally white. Herded into “over crowded” dormitories, they were subjected to strict rules, and if they broke the
rules, they were severely punished. “It was more like a concentration camp, than a residential school for aboriginal children” (Pilkington 72). It had bars over windows, locked doors and punishment for disobedience and escape attempts. The children were locked in dormitories for most of the day, having to remain in silence with nothing to do because this saved the administrators labour and money. “Compared to the boys, girls suffered the worst as they were given more responsibilities and duties, greater restrictions on their movement and fewer gratifications. As a result, girls ran away more often than boys” (Bullimore).

The infrastructure of missions, government institutions and children’s homes was often very poor and resources were insufficient to keep the children adequately clothed, fed and sheltered. Peter Read in A Hundred Year’s War also mentions the distressing conditions of the institutions. He mentions a teacher in one of the institutions who complained to the Department of Education that they did not have enough firewood in the institution, that the room was unlined and that the roof leaked. As a result of the inadequate housing conditions the children were constantly ill. The teacher further described the situation: “the children had colds and earache and cried with pains in the head or face in the middle of lessons. The children go deaf, dull, and seem too cold, too dull, half-fed, badly clothed living in tents and falling down houses” (Read, A Hundred Years War 74). This evidence shows that the children in institutions were extremely neglected and they were certainly not better off than in their Aboriginal community.

In addition to various illnesses, many of the institutionalised children were “the objects of psychological, physical and sexual abuse” (Bird). For girls in particular the risk of sexual assault in foster placement was extremely high.
The cases of bullying among the inmates were also not uncommon. Arthur Corunna in Sally Morgan’s story recounts his experience as follows: “We soon found out that there were bullies at the mission. […] There was one bully there, he had everyone bluffed except me.” (Morgan 183).

Moreover, the children had to face the degrading of their origin. The “half-caste” children raised in the institutions would be taught to despise their Aboriginal heritage and to be ashamed of their skin color, race, culture and families.

“After leaving for apprenticeships at the age of fifteen they were placed as far as possible away from the other blacks. They were warned, above all, not to return to their communities: soon they would become hopeless drunks, the girls barefoot and pregnant, the boys wandering purposeless. The life of their community and family was painted as an evil from which they had been saved; to return would be to undo the good work of the Board, to sink back in the mire” (Read, A Hundred Years War 126).

They were made to believe that the way of life of other Aboriginal people was deplorable and that they had been rescued from leading such a life. The children leaving the institutions had to face the fact that although they were taught to be superior to other Aborigines, they were, however, inferior to the whites.

Being raised apart from other Aborigines, many children only suspected that they were of Aboriginal origin, others were unaware of the fact and learned of their Aboriginal origin much later in the future.

6 Consequences of the Child Removal Policy

The effects of the forcible removal of “half-caste” children were devastating and they are still evident even in today’s Aboriginal society. The loss, grief and trauma experienced by Aboriginal people as a result of the separation laws, policies and
practices can never be adequately compensated. The children were denied the love and affection of their parents and family members. They were forced to live among white adults who despised their Aboriginal race and constantly reminded them of their inferiority. The conditions in the institutions and foster homes were inadequate and often very harsh. The children were often the objects of psychological, physical and sexual abuse. The trauma resulting from these experiences have produced lifelong effects, both for the survivors and for their children and even for the future generations.

The members of the Stolen Generation lost their families, identity, language and culture. In their adulthood, many suffered various mental and health problems due to the trauma they experienced in childhood. In addition, the institutions on the whole did not prepare the children for future life. According to one witness, the institutions: “never prepared us for the fact that we had to one day leave the home and go into the outside world and deal with the fact we were Aboriginal and how we would communicate with our own families and with the white community as Aboriginals” (Buti, “Taken Away” 7). In fact, the institutions taught the children to hate their Aboriginality, but it did not prepare them for dealing with their Aboriginal origin in the racist white society. Furthermore, the paternalistic approach of the institutions did not allow the children to learn to live their lives on their own. Subsequently, the children had problems integrating into the new stressful environment.

6.1 Loss of Aboriginal Identity and Disruption of Cultural Heritage

As a result of being removed from their families at a very young age, many of the children not only lost contact with their families but they also lost all memories and knowledge of them. Most family records were either lost or destroyed and many children were unable to find out who they were and where they came from. In other
words, the children were deprived of their identities. Needless to say, destroying the Aboriginal identity and cultural ties was the aim of government assimilation policies. The children were prevented from acquiring Aboriginal traditions and customs and they were forbidden to speak their language. The intended aim of the removals was to prevent Aboriginal children from cultivating any Aboriginal cultural identity at all. It is known that family and culture are necessary for developing one’s personal identity. Both family and culture strengthen a person’s sense of belonging (“The Effects Across Generations”). The children, who were removed, had their family and culture replaced with European culture which was alien to them. Therefore, they were not enabled to form their own identities. Some of the members of the Stolen Generation were even denied knowledge of their Aboriginality, believing their whole life that they were white. Finding this out years later many had problems accepting the fact that they were of Aboriginal origin.

I cannot openly say, “Yes, I am an Aboriginal person.” Throughout my childhood, my upbringing in a white society taught me to have this type of attitude as a fairer child, regardless of my Aboriginality. This was the English teaching that was introduced to enable fair-skinned Aboriginal people to forget their identity and forget about their own families. [...] Now when anyone asks me where I come from, I just say “Australia,” and leave it at that (Terszak 24).

Although the primary aim of the child removal policies was to assimilate Aboriginal children into the white society, in reality, the outcome was different. After leaving the institutions, the children were faced with continuous racial discrimination and many had problems to find their place in the society (“The Effects Across Generations”). It was usually not possible for them to return to the Aboriginal community, nor were they allowed to live in the white community. They were caught
somewhere between the two societies. In *My Place*, Sally Morgan’s grandmother describes her own feeling of not belonging as follows: “There I was, stuck in the middle. Too black for the whites and too white for the blacks” (Morgan 336). Another victim of the child removal policy said: “I find it difficult to associate with white people […] I am caught in a cultural trap” (Buti, “Taken Away” 1).

### 6.2 Psychological Consequences

Evidence submitted to the Inquiry revealed that most Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and put into institutions very early in their childhood. The majority of the institutions for Aboriginal children was overcrowded. There were not enough staff members to properly care for the children. Gladys Corunna in Sally Morgan’s *My Place* recounts her experience:

The older Aboriginal girls always gave us black babies an extra kiss and cuddle. That gave me a wonderful feeling of security, I’ll always be grateful for that time. You see, even though we weren’t related, there were strong ties between us black kids. […] House mothers weren’t like real mothers, they just bossed us around, they never gave you a kiss or a cuddle (Morgan 241-242).

Although the older inmates of the dormitories looked after the younger ones, the parent’s role in the child’s life was never replaced after the child had been removed. This lack of care and love in childhood had profound effects on the children’s psychological development.

Furthermore, many children were often moved from one institution to another, or from an institution to a foster home. “More than half the people who gave evidence to the Inquiry had experienced multiple placements following the removal” (Bringing Them Home 14). This unstable environment was very stressful for the children. Being
constantly on the move, they were unable to develop and maintain relationships with other people ("The Effects Across Generations").

Separation from parents at a young age, the lack of bonds with other people and the constant moving between institutions had quite severe effects on both the mental and physical health of the children. In many cases, those removed experienced psychological problems leading to self-destructive behaviour, substance abuse, delinquency, violence, and poor health. A lot of the evidence to the *Inquiry* suggested there were links between the high numbers of Aboriginal people in the crime statistics and the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. A survey led by Dr. Elizabeth Sommerland in 1997 revealed that “a large majority of clients seeking legal aid for criminal offences have also had a history of being in institutions or non-Indigenous foster care” ("The Effects Across Generations"). Again, many of the children carried these problems with them into their adult lives. According to the Sydney Aboriginal Mental Health Unit:

This tragic experience, across several generations, has resulted in incalculable trauma, depression and major mental health problems for Aboriginals. This was heightened in cases where physical and sexual abuse occurred. The duration of separation and constant relocations caused an “emotional numbing”. Where abuse occurs regularly over a significant period of time, children learn to blunt their emotions and stop outwardly responding to abuse. Often that develops into a pattern in adult life that is difficult to overcome and affects relationships with others. ("The Effects Across Generations")

For individual Aborigines, the experience of being removed at a young age from their families and suffering abuse from the authorities has permanently scarred their
lives. Their traumatic experience continues to affect not only their children but also the future generations of Aborigines.

6.3 Inter-generational Effects

The impacts of the child removal policy continue to be passed on to the children of the members of the Stolen Generation and in many cases on their children’s children. According to the National Inquiry:

The trauma of separation and attempts at assimilation have damaged their self-esteem and well-being, and impaired their parenting and relationships. In turn their children suffer. There’s a cycle of damage people find difficult to escape unaided. […] It has been argued that the early loss of mother or prolonged separation from her before age 11 is conducive to subsequent depression, choice of an inappropriate partner, and difficulties in parenting the next generation. (Bringing Them Home 18).

The experience of such historic trauma and inter-generational grief can be described as “psychological baggage being passed from parents to children along with the trauma and grief experienced in an individual’s lifetime” (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolenski).

One of the most damaging intergenerational effects is the lack of parenting skills. The absence of parental guidance and role models in childhood caused that many of the removed children did not know how to bring up their own children (Hartley and McKee 87). “Experts told the Inquiry that this was the most significant of all the major consequences of the removal policies” (Hartley and McKee 87). The children growing up in institutions were denied the experience of being brought up by a caring parent and as a result, their skills of bringing up their own children were very limited. Having grown up in hostile institutional care, many were unable to establish close family
relationships with their own children (“The Effects Across Generations”). One of the confidential witnesses told the Inquiry:

There’s things in my life that I haven’t dealt with and I’ve passed them on to my children. Gone to pieces. Anxiety attacks. I’ve passed this on to my kids. 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. I have passed that on to my kids because I haven’t dealt with it. How do you deal with it? How do you sit down and go through all those years of abuse? Somehow I’m passing down negativity to my kids (“Intergenerational Effects”).

Many Aboriginal parents had little idea of how to interact with their babies and how to discipline their older children. As a result of the lack of parental skills, a high number of members of the Stolen Generation have children who suffer from various social dysfunctions (“The Effects Across Generations”). It was discovered that many adolescents of the second generation suffer from depression, personality disorders, substance abuse, inclination to self harm and suicide (“The Effects Across Generations”). There is a significant risk that these problematic second generation children will end up in prison. The unfortunate situation “continues as a result of poor social circumstances and disadvantage of contemporary Aboriginal societies” (Bringing Them Home 18).

Psychologists working with the problematic second generation children agreed that “the ‘present’ Aboriginal communities are a direct legacy of their traumatic ‘past’” (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski). The family separations are largely to blame for the troubled lives of many Aboriginal Australians today. Most of them are
“underprivileged and of a very low socio economic class” (Bird). Many are unable to find jobs, subsequently taking refuge in alcohol or drugs. Most Aboriginal people today “live in their adult lives in Third World conditions in one of the First World’s most affluent nations. They suffer from poor health and housing standards; high rates of infant mortality; low life expectancy; poor education; unemployment and poverty” (Shaffer and Smith 95). Thousands of Aboriginal family lives were destroyed as a result of the assimilation policies and many continue to struggle with the heritage, trying to find their place in the society.

7 Public awareness and recognition

Widespread awareness of the Stolen Generation, and the policies which created it began to enter the public attention only in the late 1970s when the awareness of Aboriginal identity started through the efforts of Aboriginal and white activists, artists and musicians. The affected Aboriginal people “let go of the shame they were taught” and began to speak out more openly about their experiences (McGrath 9). One of the milestones which brought light to the Stolen Generation was the publication of Sally Morgan’s book *My Place*. Soon after, other stories concerning the Stolen Generation were published. As a result of the social changes in the society, numerous Aboriginal associations and agencies were set up to help the victims of the child removal policy. (“Stolen Generation,” Wikipedia)

One of the most important projects was the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* commenced in May 1995. During the 17 months following its commencement, the *National Inquiry* visited every state and Territory in Australia and “a total of 777 people and organizations provided evidence or a submission; 535 were Indigenous people who gave evidence about their experiences
of forcible removal. Most had been removed as children; others were parents, siblings or children of removed children” (Bringing Them Home 4). The results of the Inquiry were given in April 1997 by a publication of the “Bringing Them Home Report”. The National Inquiry formally investigated the devastating and persisting effects of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children. The report claimed the following:

Nationally we can conclude with confidence that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970. In certain regions and in certain periods the figure was undoubtedly much greater than one in ten. In that time not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects of forcible removal (confirmed by representatives of the Queensland and WA Governments in evidence to the Inquiry). Most families have been affected, in one or more generations, by the forcible removal of one or more children. (“National Overview”)

The report is an acknowledgement of the struggles and hardships that thousands of Aborigines had to endure due to the enforced child removal. The removal policy was regarded as an act of genocide. “Article II of the Genocide Convention defines genocide as: Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole are in part, any national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: […] (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (Buti, “Removal From Families – Legal Options” 6).

The report made various recommendations, including the need for a public apology to the affected families and for financial compensation. “By the end of 1997, seven of the nine Australian parliaments had passed motions of apology, with only the federal and Northern Territory governments declining to do so” (“Healing the Pain”).
The Prime Minister, John Howard, refused to apologise to the Aborigines arguing that it would imply guilt on the part of the present generation. Howard said: “Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies” (“Stolen Generations.” Wikipedia). Although Howard did not apologize on behalf of the Parliament, formal apologies were passed in the parliaments of South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, and even in the parliament of the Northern Territory.

Since 1996, A “National Reconciliation Week” is held every year to bring attention to the past actions committed against the Aborigines. It “aims to give people across Australia the opportunity to focus on reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It is a time to ‘reflect on achievements so far and on what must still be done to achieve reconciliation’” (“Reconciliation”).

On 26 May 1998 the first “National Sorry Day” was held to further acknowledge the maltreatment of Aborigines in Australia. “Sorry Books, in which people could record their personal feelings, were presented to representatives of the Indigenous communities” (“Sorry Day and Stolen Generations”). In 2005, the “National Sorry Day” was renamed “National Day of Healing,” to focus on the healing process required throughout Australian society to achieve reconciliation between the Aboriginal and white people (“Sorry Day and Stolen Generations”).

The Stolen Generation has been discussed at various conferences in relation to the possibilities of compensation, reparation, apology and chances of reuniting the Aboriginal families again. Link-Up agencies were established to help the victims of the removals find their family members (“Sorry Day and Stolen Generations”). Thanks to these activities, the sources of information about the individual children are becoming available to those who need them.
In 2001, Pope John Paul II issued an apology on behalf of the Vatican to the families affected by the child removal policy, for the actions of all Catholic authorities connected with the Stolen Generation (“Stolen Generation Timeline”). Disregarding all the expressed apologies, Aboriginal people still felt that they needed the Prime Minister and the Parliament to say the word “Sorry”. The newly elected Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, finally apologized on behalf of the Australian Parliament on 13 February 2008.

“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.” (Rudd)

Rudd went on to say: “The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so move forward with confidence to the future” (Rudd). In the speech, Kevin Rudd also called for the closure of the gap between the Aborigines and other Australians in life expectancy, education and economic opportunity. Hopefully, his apology will serve as a catalyst for reparations for which Aboriginal Australians have waited so long and enforce the process of reconciliation.

8 Conclusion

The Stolen Generation is without doubt one of the saddest chapters in Australia’s history. The policy of forcible removal of “half-caste” children from their parents in order to assimilate them into the non-Aboriginal mainstream society was a violation of human rights. The policy disregarded the fate of the Aboriginal people and their culture, which was viewed as subordinate to the culture introduced by the European settlers in 1788. The separation from their families and the hardships endured
by the “half-caste” children in the institutions can never be compensated. The loss of
culture and family, and the abuse experienced in the institutions has had many
consequences on the lives of the members of the Stolen Generation, their children and
even their children’s children. More than two centuries after the first contact with the
European culture, Australia’s Aboriginal people are still struggling with the
consequences of the oppressing and racist policies that were imposed on them by the
Europeans.

At present, Australia is a country that has one of the highest standards of living
in the world; nevertheless, out of all the ethnic minorities that live in Australia the
Aborigines are both socially and culturally the most disadvantaged. They occupy the
lowest position in nearly every aspect of the society including: health, living conditions,
education and employment. Representing only two percent of Australia’s population,
the Aborigines suffer alarmingly high rates of depression, self-harm, suicide, substance
abuse and violence. The child removal policy has caused a cycle of damaging
consequences which is very difficult to escape. If the Aboriginal people are left unaided,
it is hard to say if they will ever escape the unfortunate state to which they had been
reduced.
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