

**Women and Constructing Re-membering:  
Identity Formation in the Stolen Generations**

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### **Statement of Originality**

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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(Stephanie Gilbert)

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The first acknowledgement and heartfelt thanks must go to all those who contributed their life stories to this thesis. Whether mentioned specifically within this thesis or not, they have all played an absolutely crucial role to the development of the theory created, the evidence provided and my own development. I have cried a river of tears for everyone through this process and at times thought my heart would shatter witnessing what I had to for this story to be told. Thankfully, I have been walked beside, held up, carried and loved by so many through this process as I processed my life, my pain, my suffering and my triumph.

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Finally, thanks go to my families. As reflected in what comes in this thesis, what I mean by family is difficult, painful and far more complex than anyone should have to deal with. Everyone in my families help make me who I am: my father's 'Brown Skin Baby'.<sup>1</sup>

To my love, thank you. You raise me up ...

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Uncle Bob Randall for his immensely moving song that helps bind my father and I.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is the examination of stories of women taken from their families of origin as part of an assimilation process carried out in Australia. What is unique about the women's stories in this thesis is the identification of a process of disturbance deliberately enacted upon them with the goal of shifting their identity away from what it would have been if they had been able to stay within their family of origin. It is the main premise in this thesis that there was a deliberate process of disturbing the body, minds or psyche as well as the lived culture of these women. Hence, through body, mind as well as cultural dysphoria, Stolen Generations are challenged to construct an identity.



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### List of Abbreviations

AAL	Australian Aborigines League (Victoria)
AAPA	Australian Aborigines Progressive Association
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AICCA's	Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies
APA	Aborigines Progressive Association (New South Wales)
APL	Aborigines Protection League (South Australia)
BNIM	Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method
BTHOHC	Bringing Them Home Oral History Collection
CACR	Committee for Aboriginal Citizen Rights
DOCS	Department of Community Services
GINs	General incident narratives
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NSW	New South Wales

NLA	National Library of Australia
NT	Northern Territory
OPAL	One People for Australia League
PIAC	Public Interest Advocacy Centre
PIN	Particular Incident Narrative
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
SQUIN	Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative
TAFE	Technical and Further Education College
<i>Inquiry</i>	Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families
WA	Western Australia

**PART ONE: POSITIONING THE STUDY—METHOD AND THEORY**

**STOLEN BODIES/STOLEN VOICES**

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

This thesis is a story of journeys. It is also a story of people who were targeted for intervention through biological imperatives. This story, while based in Australia, is a story that draws comparison with other sites throughout the world. More specifically, this thesis explores the results of enforced programs of social policy in Australian states and territories that resulted in the removal of children from their Aboriginal families of origin. This story particularly focuses on the effects as articulated by the now grown up women.

This thesis started as a journey the day I myself, was removed from my family. Over my life, I have been interested more particularly in the journeys of those, like myself, who were adopted or fostered into family homes spending predominantly most of their childhood with families. This thesis has taken a slighter wider focus though to also incorporate those who were institutionalised in both places specifically for Aboriginal children such as Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls in New South Wales (NSW) and general children's institutions like Marsden Boys Home in Queensland (QLD).<sup>1</sup>

One of the major underpinning beliefs this thesis is based upon is that the lives examined within this thesis have been politicised. They, as Stolen Generations lives, are politicised because Aboriginality in this country has been politicised through its management via legislation, public debate and actions defining who are Aborigines and what lives they could live. This has had a flow-on effect to the lives of the Stolen Generations due to the symbiotic relationship between the two groups. This thesis seeks to examine what is intimated at within its title *Re-membering the Stolen Generations*. Can the Stolen Generations rejoin the Aboriginal communities from whence they came or are their removal of body and spirit so complete that this return can never occur? Or indeed is that an irrelevant question?

This thesis will use the terms 'Stolen Generations' and 'removed children' or 'removed individuals'. As will be further discussed in Chapter 5, in the Australian context, we more commonly understand that the Stolen Generations or Stolen Children are children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were removed from their families by the Australian and state government agencies and church missions, under acts of their respective parliaments. The terms 'Stolen Generations' and 'Stolen Children' are contested in the Australian political terrain. What is undeniable though is that there has been legislation to enact Aboriginal child removals from at least 1869 and certainly establishments like the Parramatta

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity, such institutions will be called 'Homes' in the remainder of the thesis.

Native Institution set up in 1814 had as their goals to impact upon the structure of Aboriginal families.<sup>23</sup>

### **Hypothesis/Argument Construction**

The identity of those removed under the policies of state and territory governments and how they speak of it is a complex terrain. Not only are people potentially biologically mixed, they were also removed from living within Aboriginal cultures. This raises a number of questions for both the Aboriginal communities from whence children came, but also for the wider Australian community. Can children removed from their biological family return to them as a member with full membership rights and obligations and can people live a life that is recognised as 'Aboriginal' if they want to? Do they want to? This complexity came to the fore in the interviews in the *Bringing Them Home Collection* and in this thesis is further examined.<sup>4</sup> Stanford Friedman tells us:

I remain much influenced by Edward Said's 'Traveling Theory' (1983) and 'Travelling Theory Reconsidered' (1994), which emphasize the need to understand how theories change as they are used in different places and for different purposes. As Said reflects, the transplanted theory often becomes more transgressive and powerful, not diluted, in its new environs.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis examines and utilises many theories generated by other histories, in other places and from within other cultures but as Said argued, they are transportable, transgressive and powerful. This body of theory is used to examine the situation of these lives and the construction of removal identities in those examined within this thesis.

The thesis itself is premised upon the belief that, as so clearly stated by Gaita, 'the genocide against the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders was against humanity perpetrated on the body of those people'.<sup>6</sup> There must be an awareness of the physicality of these removals as well as the psychological component that has resulted in the minds of those removed children. It is the body of Aboriginal people that was a problem in the minds of the Australian assimilationists as much as it was the lived Aboriginal cultures. The removal of the physical bodies of thousands of children also included the intervention into culture and hence their minds were targeted for

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<sup>2</sup> National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (Australia) 1997, hereafter referred to as the *Inquiry*.

<sup>3</sup> NSW Government, *Social History Overview, Upper Parramatta River Catchment Education Resource Kit* (2002), C8.2.

<sup>4</sup> As discussed later in the thesis, the National Inquiry recommended the creation of the Bringing Them Home collection in the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>5</sup> S. S. Friedman, 'Theory', in *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*, ed. S. Ross (New York: Routledge, 2009), 239.

<sup>6</sup> R. Gaita, 'Turnings of Attention: Genocide and Pedantry', *Quadrant* July–August (1997a): 44.

assimilationist education or re-education. This process it is argued in this thesis has resulted in body and cultural dysphoria in varying degrees for all 'removed' individuals.

It is the core contention of this thesis that if Stolen Generations people attempt to reclaim themselves from their physical and mental removal, they carry out a political act. Aboriginal identity in Australia since the late 1800s has been, and continues to be, a site for political debate, acts of resistance, and controversy. Hence, it is argued in this thesis that re-membering for Stolen Generations individuals includes a process of defining themselves in terms of Indigeneity or Aboriginality or whatever other identity position they choose, if at all, as well as self-determining how they live their lives. Both self-definition and self-determination of body and mind were the targets of the removal and control of Aboriginal children and remain an intrinsic part to the reclamation process of re-membering. Re-joining the Aboriginal community from whence they came maybe undesirable or unattainable in the same ilk as if they had never been taken. As will be examined in the thesis, re-membering will always be a potential site for problems because of the bodily and cultural dysphoria created by the removals processes themselves. Due to the dualisms and limitations of identity constructions under colonisation, all Australian identities remain in construction and hence must allow for plurality of voice and cultures.

The theory discussion and analysis that occurs within this thesis is grounded within my own identity construction. I am both the researcher and author of this material but also a participant at all levels. I was removed, adopted, fostered and institutionalised. I have the physical and mental legacy of those experiences. While contributing to the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* as an expert, I also decided to share and contribute some of my life story to the *Bringing Them Home Collection* held in the National Library of Australia. This personal history constructs the order in which this thesis is examined. It, in totality, reflects an incredibly personal and deeply informed construction of theory both in regard to the research methodology employed and then the explorations and explanations of Stolen Generations lives and identities carried out within.

### **Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of three parts under which sit 11 chapters. *Part One: Positioning The Study* includes Chapter 1 through to Chapter 5. *Chapter 1: Introduction* sets out some of the arguments posited in the thesis and the way the thesis is set out to elaborate the arguments and evidence for the conclusions proffered. Chapter 2 outlines the methodological processes used in the thesis. The material in this thesis has been gathered from a wide range of sources including archive material and collected personal narratives. The challenges of utilising this wide range of

material as well as the ideological underpinnings to how the collection occurred and the ways in which it is used are examined thoroughly in this chapter. The chapter is entitled *Listening with Heart* to reflect the particular interests of Indigenous research methodologies. It is situated as Chapter 2 because the situating of the author is so crucial to the construction of the whole thesis. This thesis topic as carefully described in Chapter 2 is deeply personal and the interaction between the author, the theory and the topic of Stolen Generations identities is symbiotic and even revelational. In this chapter, the idea of this thesis as a political manifesto is broached with the argument reinforced through the rest of the thesis that, as with any manifesto narrative, the aim here is to reflect a different world that brings to light narratives perhaps previously unheard and certainly marginalised at the edge of dominant identity constructs. By bringing to light this knowledge and narratives in this thesis, we may encourage a new awareness of the culturally marginalised.<sup>7</sup>

*Chapter 3: Setting The Scene: Control, Struggle and Resistance* is the first of two chapters structured to examine the relevant literature background for the rest of the thesis. In this chapter, the laws and policies that led to the actual removal of Aboriginal children leading to the existence of the group of women examined in this thesis are examined. This examination includes the struggles from both within and without Aboriginal communities that were carried out to fight against the removal of Aboriginal children from their families of origin. The *Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* held 1995–1997 including the nature of submissions and evidence, and the conclusions it reached are then examined closely.

In *Chapter 4: Setting The Scene: Theory*, the field of research into child removals is initially examined. In this section, it is argued that there has been created a body of evidence that shows that not only did removals occur but also that research shows the damage the removals create and they should have been stopped. Presenting such authors as O'Connor<sup>8</sup>, this chapter puts forward the argument that removals continue but now under slightly different rhetoric, creating a situation in which Aboriginal children are being removed from their families of origin. The chapter then moves on to examining the way that black women and, more specifically, Australian Indigenous women are constructed both internationally and within Australian studies. Part of this section focuses on why women's stories should be told and the particular way this plays out from a non-Indigenous, non-black feminist perspective and then Indigenous Australian women's perspectives. In the section concentrated on Aboriginal women's

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<sup>7</sup> Cherríe Moraga, quoted in S. Smith, 'Autobiographical Manifestos', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. S. Smith and J. Watson (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 435.

<sup>8</sup> I O'Connor, 'The New Removals: Aboriginal Youth In The Queensland Juvenile Justice System', *International Social Work*, no. 37, 1994, pp. 197-212

theorising, it is argued that the perspectives of Aboriginal women are routinely omitted or ignored. Theorists like Jackie Huggins make immense contributions to the plight of Aboriginal women by articulating these lives in print. In this section, Moreton-Robinson's work is introduced for the first time to the thesis and as later chapters, show her contribution to the theory debating identity positions for Aboriginal women is immeasurable in its value to the development of this thesis.

Chapter 5 signals the beginning exploration around the ideas of identity and removal identities relevant to this thesis occurs. This chapter is entitled *Stolen Bodies/Severed Connectedness* and proposes that removals had a number of impacts upon the people involved in them. Those people include those who were removed, those they left behind and indeed the whole of the Australian community. This chapter articulates a theoretical map to explore how each strategy of severing connections that was carried out to implement, among other agendas, the social policy agenda of assimilation. The chapter starts by describing and defining who are the 'Stolen', as understood within the Australian context. To conclude the argument of who are the Stolen Generations, it is argued that they are the individuals who in voice or in mind experienced the interference of authorities that resulted in them being taken from their family of origin and enduring a process that affected their connectedness to their Aboriginality and created in them profound and deleterious existential and identity issues.

This chapter presents one of the major contentions of this thesis, which is that the removal of Aboriginal children from their families has impacted upon four main areas: the physical body of the children themselves; their minds; those who were left behind; and the wider Australian society. These experiences might lead to body and cultural dysphoria where Stolen Generations experience a confusion or difficulty both around their own bodies and the messages and lessons they have learnt about their identity and lived culture.

*Part Two: Examining the Narratives: Lived Lives, Told Stories.* Chapter 6 starts a new section of the thesis dedicated to teasing out these ideas through narratives collected in the National Library's *Bringing Them Home Collection* and interviews collected specifically for this thesis. Chapter 6 examines removal identities in relation to the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Collection* collected by the National Library of Australia in response to a recommendation from in the *Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. In this chapter, approximately 110 interviews are examined and discussed within two broad categories of during 'care' and then post-'care'. The chapter includes discussions of how the children saw their identity was under attack during their time in care and what then transpired in their adult years. There is also a discussion of their sense of loss in relation to



cultural and family knowledge. Again, the ideas of body and cultural dysphoria are teased out through the narratives.

The other two chapters of Part Two continue the examination of removed identities. The first chapter, Chapter 7, is a close examination of Sherry, one of the interview subjects of this study. Firstly, her biological life course is mapped out. In the Biographical Narrative Research method utilised in this thesis, this is entitled 'constructing the lived life'. The lived life is the biological or date related occurrences that track through a person's life inclusive of their birth, age at which they went to school, and other pertinent dates through Sherry's life. The second part of that chapter is their told story track. The told story is the narrative that the interviewee wraps around their lived life: the aspects the individual emphasises and what they see as relevant or irrelevant to their identity construction. The final section of this chapter is an analysis of those two tracks within the themes previously identified in the thesis. Particularly using the constructions introduced by Lawthom in Chapter 2, the interviewee's story is interrogated for themes like the impact of social discourse on the understanding the individual has of their life course.<sup>9</sup> A reading of Sherry's life ought to lead us to celebrate her resilience, success and struggle, but those aspects are set against a deeply ingrained sense of loss and rejection at the processes enacted against her time and again by her removal from her family of origin.

In Chapter 8, many aspects of Beryl's life story are shared. As with Sherry, Beryl's lived life and told story tracks are identified and presented. Beryl was an older woman and unfortunately, during the writing of this thesis Beryl passed away. As with Sherry's life resilience, strength and courage are at the forefront of her personality characteristics. That being said, Beryl's removal at the age of 10 from her mother and siblings would set the course of her life and relationships for the rest of her life. Her identity was constructed within knowledge that her embeddedness, both within her culture and her family, were forever damaged by her removal. Both Sherry and Beryl and so many researched in the *Bringing Them Home Collection* and discussed in Chapter 7 reported the existence of body and cultural dysphoria: confusion in their awareness of their Aboriginality and cultural identity.

*Part Three: Reflecting on the Constructions of Stolen Identities* commences with the chapter whose job it is to pull together those narratives presented in Part Two. Chapter 9 makes the very crucial point that these narratives not only present narratives of the Stolen Generations that allow the development of the theory constructed within this thesis, but it is crucial to note that each individual discussed deserves to be recognised with honour and respect for the lives they

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<sup>9</sup> R. Lawthom in D. Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories: Method, Theory and Analyses in a Biographical Age* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2004), 118.

have been forced to lead. The public pressure for Stolen Generations to share their stories has been strong but it has not necessarily been a very affirming process.

Chapter 10 discusses how Stolen Generations can generate identities given the experiences and pressures discussed in rest of this thesis. Again, the ideas of body and cultural dysphoria are discussed but with the additional lenses of Aboriginal women's identity constructions, pain, voice and, finally, hybridity. Using a three-pronged strategy proposed by Hall, the voices of the Stolen Generations themselves are used to carry out a comprehensive discussion of appropriate narrative forms including appropriate language and hence identity constructions for the Stolen Generations adults.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis ends by noting the very distinctive and crucial contribution this study makes to identity discussions in Australia. It posits that the voice of Stolen Generations must be heard on the construction of any identity positions that concerns them. The identity of the Stolen voice, that voice that the Stolen Generations speak with, is a uniquely *embodied* voice: the fact of their Stolen bodies has meant that the voices of the Stolen are represented as hurt, pained, suffering and in need of healing. Their personal choice of identity and lived culture in the wake of the tide of assimilation-inspired acts, including the misrepresentation of their voice, must be honoured and supported.

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<sup>10</sup> S. Hall, discussed in N. Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', in *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory* (London: Continuum, 2005): 174.

## **CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY: LISTENING WITH HEART**

### **Situating the Author**

This research is about reflecting the spirit of the story of women who were taken from their families in the process of assimilation enacted upon Aboriginal people. One aim of this project is to explore the dynamics of personal story intersecting with nationhood, Indigeneity and 'otherness'. The Australian people are made up with multiple identities and the powerful in government and society try to articulate, reflect and control that process. The focus of this research is to reflect part of the journey people of Aboriginal descent have had in this process.

This project is grounded in a question I asked myself very regularly through the earlier stages of my adult life. That question is, having been adopted into a non-Aboriginal family when I was less than one year old, why would I choose to identify as Aboriginal when some might argue that I could choose not to? For me, that question speaks about the development of a cultural identity, a family identity and illuminates what seems to be a perception that there is less value attributed to living your life as an Aboriginal person.

Crucial to this project was to honour the women and their stories by hearing how they constructed their identity. This involves deconstructing this idea of 'Aboriginality' or 'Stolen Generations' or 'removed child' by presenting how those described using those words, actually see their (and indeed my own) lives. How is it that this group of women, of which I am a member, conceptualise ourselves by self-defining against those labels, tags or descriptors? The challenge of the methodology of this thesis is to identify ways to unlock the answers to at least some of those questions.

Underpinning this methodology is a belief in respectful engagement with the Aboriginal community and the Stolen Generations communities that exist in a symbiotic relationship with both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. This project is designed to tell those stories and this chapter explores the how and why of getting to those stories, presenting them and analysing what might be learnt from them. This methodology was constructed very carefully with a predominant focus on not abusing the membership held in all of these communities.

Early in the thesis process, ethics approval was sought from the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Newcastle.<sup>1</sup> At the time, they were utilising the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines on research with Aboriginal communities. This required the applicant to respond to six criteria based on values. The following represents, in summary, what was submitted in that application identifying some of the underlying values this project is based upon: spirit and integrity, reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection. As the project developed, some of the methodological approaches and content changed from what was initially proposed and is stated here, but in no way has the commitment to the values inherent in each category shifted. These values together form the framework of the *'listening with heart'* methodology.

### **Reciprocity**

Two concepts included in reciprocity are inclusion and benefit. I believe in respectful engagement with the Aboriginal community and I perceive this project as telling the story of the community of which I am a part. I am proposing this project so our story is told. At the same time, I do not want to abuse my membership of this group. As I noted above, this project comes from the question I have asked myself having been adopted to a non-Aboriginal family when I was a baby. This project encourages the articulation of like journeys even where the end result is not identification in everyday life as an Aboriginal person.

The other concept intrinsic to reciprocity is benefit to the community. Part of the benefit may include continuing the dialogue around Aboriginal identity. Over the period of colonisation, Aboriginal people have defined themselves in ways that have rarely intersected with the wider community's or the legal definition. Part of the benefit could also be given by the opportunity to tell individual perspectives on the way identity formation has occurred in their lives. It may also help validate each participant's life story as part of a larger story or larger group. This can feed in at a community and policy level to plans for caring for this group.

### **Respect**

Central to this research was always a perspective of the intrinsic honourability of this subject group. Their journey of removal and later recognition of their biological heritage is familiar to me due to my own experiences and I have a great deal of respect for others who have also gone through it. I believe in the strength of these women. However, I believe that many from other communities do not know about this path and therefore may unwittingly detract from their identity construct. What was always important in this research project has been recognising

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<sup>1</sup> Ethics project details: 'Women and the Construction of Re-Membering Identity Formation', approval number H-206-0406, approved 12 April 2006, University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee.

from the start and all throughout, that this process might result in a large variety of experiences, perspectives and feelings. That I was to ask subjects to relive experiences where their heritage was experienced as problematic was very difficult and I relived every moment with them.

A number of organisations exist to help people reconnect with birth families and track their lineage. These are both in and outside the Indigenous communities. These organisations like Link-Up and Jigsaw have standards for their interactions with their clients. In particular, these involve processes to deal with the sensitivity of the experiences of the people. The setting up of the research involved investigating these processes and utilising them to ensure respectful behaviours in the project.

At the core of this research is a desire to minimise 'difference blindness'. The experience of removals lies on a continuum. This means that how identity is perceived may be very emotive and unresolved at one end of the spectrum through to easy and unproblematic at the other. Being involved in the research causes a change in people's lives, the full nature of which is never known. There were a couple of contingency measures or plans implemented to manage this. The first is that any potential participants had as much information as they wanted about the project and had the ability to withdraw whenever they liked without any negative outcomes and without giving a reason. Secondly, it was important to consult key people before commencing the interviews to garner as many opinions as possible to discuss the best research process to use. Thirdly, other parts of the research were negotiated openly and respectfully with the participants including whether they were identified and where their transcripts, tapes or other personal material were stored.

The final part of this discussion on respect is to recognise the effect of this research on myself as researcher and being part of the researched group. Originally, in the ethics approval process for this project, I was asked to implement a care process for myself as well as for the other participants. I did this by having on 'staff' a professional counsellor who I was able to utilise when I needed. The first week of collections at the National Library was undertaken in the week before the Prime Minister's 'Apology' to Indigenous Australians in 2008. This was a very distressing week for all Stolen Generations and sitting in the National Library during that time very much highlighted the incredible impact this research and indeed the whole topic has upon me personally. I very much respected and appreciated the foresight of the Ethics Committee who required this condition to be actioned.

## **Equality**

This research asked participants to share themselves in an intimate, personal and challenging way. As such, there is risk created by participation. If they believed they were not treated well, they were asked to provide feedback either to the researcher or to the university.

Before the interviews commenced, community perspectives were sought from key people in the field of Stolen Generations counselling. This had two purposes; one was to be open to opinion on the research design. The second was to identify myself within the community but also that I had the shared value and desire to see the success of the Stolen Generations community and the Aboriginal community. I did not want to misuse my membership of these communities to work in such a way that advantaged me at the cost of the Stolen Generations community and Aboriginal communities.

## **Responsibility**

I seek to do ethical research by balancing my responsibilities to both the university and the communities in which I live. These include both the Aboriginal and Stolen Generations community. Undertaking this research meant balancing these responsibilities carefully and in a way I have not had to do before. Particularly of concern for me was to do no harm to either the Aboriginal or Stolen Generations communities. This research is premised on exploring previous acts done to create the Stolen Generations community hence the base to the community is pain and suffering. They did not need any more caused by me.

## **Survival and Protection**

This research is about articulating part of the distinctiveness created and celebrated by Aboriginal people in spite of a very deliberate attack on distinctiveness. While some of the participants may not self-identify as Aboriginal, they are part of a community in name. However, this research will not articulate or recruit with an agenda except to meet the specified criteria. This is so that people are able to assert their identity as they choose it. Both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community have asserted their ideas of how Stolen Generations people should identify and behaviour. This project does not assert a way the participants should be.

## **Reading for a Research Design**

The preparation for this thesis required a wide survey of literature. Playing a central role in shaping what was read was the identity journey that has occurred over my own life. This has included a shifting consciousness of lived Aboriginality. While growing and changing over the

adult life span, it is reasonable to say that at all times, a sense of lived Aboriginality has remained core to this process of both intellectualising and imagining.

Some of the areas of literature constructing the background to this thesis included the removal experiences as illuminated by the *Inquiry*, identity theory, and sociological and historical debates about national identity and self-determination. Exploring the dynamics of race, gender and identity development in these women lives was also crucial in the development of this thesis.

The social policy of assimilation has played a central role in the impetus to remove these women from their family. Assimilation, as it has played out in the Australia, appears to encourage the perception that there are only minimal differences between individuals when considered at a societal level. But at a societal level, Aboriginality is always and has always been contested. Each individual has experienced and still experiences the shifting subjectivities and interaction with definitions of Aboriginality and non-Aboriginality every day. Underpinning this thesis is a belief that this process continues at both societal and individual level and is potentially a feature of the interviewees' lives. It is also believed that their experience of subjectivity is gendered.

Chanfrault-Duchet's understanding that 'gender identity ... intervenes in the main structures of the narrative: the life course, the key patterns and the anecdotes, and finally, the closed meaning system, as a part of the identity conveyed and taken up by the subject, in reference to accepted models of female identity', resonated strongly.<sup>2</sup> The research design, concentrating as it did on women's stories, had to capture the nature of gender and it is playing out in the telling of the story and in the life of the subject.

Feminist autobiography, native narrative, and more generally autobiography/life story writings were read with a particular concern to honour the subjects of this research. The question was how to maintain the voice of the subject while 'simultaneously recognising the impact of the researcher'.<sup>3</sup> The vastness of feminist autobiography and its construction allows for differences in values, assumptions, methodology and process. Sandelowki states:

When you talk with me about my research, do not ask me what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data. But know that in asking you to ask me this, I am not confessing to telling any lies about

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<sup>2</sup> M. Chanfrault-Duchet, 'Textualisation of the Self in the Life-story', in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, ed. T. Cosslet, C. Lury and P. Summerfield (London: Routledge, 2000), 73.

<sup>3</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 91.

the people or events in my stories/studies. I have told the truth. The proof is in the things I have made—how they look to our mind's eye, whether they satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe them, and whether they appeal to your heart.<sup>4</sup>

This statement challenged the idea I had held of representing people's stories as they told them with no overlay of the ideas, values or experiences of the researcher. This quotation suggests that it is possible to tell these stories in a form not entirely the same as the original form and still present the truth of them. This idea helps more effectively fulfil the requirements of academia by aiding in contextualising the stories for this audience.

Initially, it was appealing to consider a 'life history' approach blended with a narrative interview approach as the theoretical focus that would be taken to collect data for this thesis. Some of the epistemological underpinnings of 'life story' research helped to further work through the dilemmas already mentioned. Some of these included that the research was more interested for instance in ideographic perspective; that is, private, individual and subjective side of life. 'Life story' emphasises more of a hermeneutic perspective operating at the level of the individual's meanings of culture or their lived life and hence is quite specific in description. It is noteworthy that the Stolen Generations are not a large group in number and thus little of the research focused on them would be generalisable to a wider population anyway. 'Life story' also values the meanings of a story as generated within a particular construction and perhaps individual language by the narrator. It is not so interested in generating a sense of the narratives validity.<sup>5</sup> This would have meant the use of less directed research interviews than questionnaires when interviewing with a goal to exploring people's life history. Each interview would have begun with the interviewer asking the interviewee to speak about their life. This method would have allowed for the interviewer to also ask open-ended questions about their childhood, schooling, paid work, family life and community work, and so on.

While 'life history' is a method that is more time consuming than are more structured approaches, it has the advantage of allowing greater control by participants. There was a hope to direct the minds to these periods of times suggested. The 'life history' interview was also expected to result in a source of rich detailed data about the lives of Aboriginal women living 'between' two cultures, the meanings that removal, adoption and Aboriginal identity have in their stories and their experience of the impact, if any, of late twentieth century social and political changes, such as reconciliation process and the *Bringing Them Home Report*. While at

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<sup>4</sup> M. Sandelowki, 1994, 121, quoted in Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 68–69.

<sup>5</sup> For further exploration of these ideas, see Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 97–98.



first the life history approach was seen as very useful, it ended up not suiting the research goals as much as was initially thought.<sup>6</sup>

The search for a research method had to include recognition of the protocols used in Aboriginal communities for going about meeting people and conducting business. These had to be considered for the purposes of entering communities, for making links with significant people to obtain advice from, and also for talking with potential interviewees themselves. For instance, in Aboriginal communities, it is considered rude to immediately start your business without identifying yourself as an Aboriginal person in your family and cultural context. After introducing yourself correctly, you need to wait for the respondents to move towards addressing the business of the project. Introducing yourself might mean giving your cultural, geographical and familial identifiers. Unfortunately, these processes of identification are very difficult for some Stolen Generations people to enact. In some cases, they do not know the answers. It is perhaps easiest to illustrate this point by explaining more about myself. If somebody asks where I come from, what do I answer? Where I was born? I have not lived there since I was removed at eight months. I met my biological parents as an adult. To reconnect with them as parents is quite difficult. I realise that when talking with siblings who have always lived with our respective mother that I call her their mother. I was adopted so I have another name. I lived in two other states as a child and then was a State Ward in another state and lived in a Home and other foster placements. How do I answer where I come from? I have foster brothers and sisters, adoptive sisters and brothers and biological siblings. They add up to 10 brothers and 13 sisters, four fathers and four mothers, step-mothers, and step-fathers. Thus, entering any space requires a great deal of consideration and contemplation.

For the potential interviewees, I needed to avoid pre-guessing how people would introduce themselves, and how they would construct their own story. The research plan was to collect biographical data about each woman but a later shift to the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) encouraged a lived life track to be developed after the interview from the record transcript rather than asking for those details specifically.<sup>7</sup> With each interview, there was a process during which I was asked questions to fill in the gaps about myself for each participant. These were always uncomfortable times for both of us and I attempted to push my usual reticence aside to become as open as I could manage. It is very difficult to change the

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<sup>6</sup> A. Cole, L. Knowles and J. Gary (ed.), *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research* (California: AltaMira Press Walnut Creek, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> T. Wengraf, *Interviewing for Life-Histories, Lived Situations and Ongoing Personal Experiencing: The Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM). Guide to BNIM Interviewing and Interpretation*, Version 8.03e, accessed 1 November 2008, available from [tom@tomwengraf.com](mailto:tom@tomwengraf.com), 2008, 55.

habits of a lifetime of shadowing, veiling and being silent. It seemed a fair trade for me to be open with the participants, given what they were prepared to share with me.

A brief read in the area of native narrative theory when searching for a research method lead to an understanding that this theory centres on the cultural practices and inherent value of story-telling.<sup>8</sup> In itself, the argument of the value of story-telling did not help in the questions of research design other than a sense that this research was creating an artificial space for this sharing of deep and personal memories and pain. The project asked people to change the nature of their relationship with the researcher from the previous private relationships that had been shared. Individuals were asked to entrust the researcher with potentially their deepest personal, most hurtful stories that they may have never told before.

King and others within native narrative literature talk about story-telling for pleasure or for learning.<sup>9</sup> For this project, this was understood as being about telling stories that came with rules, secrets, pain and trust. Due to the nature of some of the information shared in the process of interview, it may not be presented in the final product. With every interview, this belief was stated to the participants. Participants were thanked and the proper recognition was given to the gift of trust the women gave by being interviewed. Recognition of that trust being shown to me, Stephanie Gilbert; not the university; not supervisors; or my family name, was crucially important. The enormity of those gifts of trust often triggered deep emotional experiences.

As noted earlier, the BNIM showed the potential to further the goals and answer particular concerns about relationships to the interviewees and their material. One concern was being able to understand what the messages interviewees were wanting heard, as they wanted them heard. Did the interview structure and process allow those messages to dominate rather than the beliefs held by the researcher? The BNIM model seemed to hold some promise in this regard.

At the start of the project, one aim was to explore the way these women construct their identity and explore if these identity constructions were impacted on by three distinct time periods: childhood; during and after the *Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*; and finally, the present day. Over the period of the project, the material leant itself to some other themes rather than the original idea about the *Inquiry*. The focus also changed when the idea of a questionnaire was dropped after the change to the BNIM.

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<sup>8</sup> See T. King, 'The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative', in *Indigenous Americas*, ed. R. Warrior and J. Weaver (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; R. Delgado, 'Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative', *Michigan Law Review* 87 (1989): 2411–2441.

Another focus of the project was to develop accounts that incorporated historical story with personal story that explored the dynamics between identity and nation, Indigeneity, nationhood and gender. Drawing together these divergent stories holds the potential of illuminating much about our nation.

This project was constructed from a focus of Indigenous self-determining methodology. This means that while the outcomes of interviews may show that the women interviewed may not be perceived as having an active public Aboriginal identity, the project itself is informed and created from within an Indigenous or Aboriginal perspective. Part of this perspective requires what Neate and Wilkinson call 'listening with heart'.<sup>10</sup> That is, that we listen, remember what has been said, and do not challenge its veracity. That 'Indigenous history has invariably a spiritual dimension, is holistic rather than dissected into discrete fields, and that its truth is not necessarily literal and lies deeper than historical accuracy'.<sup>11</sup>

This project is not about exploring how valid the stories are nor how reliable a memory is. This project is about borders, bridges, cultures, generations and genders, knowing and not knowing.<sup>12</sup> In the end, the material used to elucidate these goals came from two main sources. The first came from the National Library's *Bringing Them Home Oral History Collection*. The second set of source material consists of oral history interviews conducted by the researcher.

This research has three important elements including how the events explored would be talked about, the text that is created from the telling, and the interpretation of those events.<sup>13</sup> It was important to address each of these points but as stated earlier, of particular concern was the interpretative phase. Postman relates:

Both a social scientist and a novelist give unique interpretations to a set of human events and support their interpretations with examples in various forms. Their interpretations cannot be proved or disproved, but will draw their appeal from the power of their language, the depth of their explanations, the relevance of their examples, and the credibility of their themes. And all this has, in both cases, an identifiable moral purpose.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A. Shnukal, 'It's All about Respect': The Etiquette of Recording Indigenous Oral History', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 20 (1998): 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>12</sup> B. Gammage, 'Crossing Borders', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 20 (1998): 4–6.

<sup>13</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 108.

<sup>14</sup> N. Postman, 1992, 154, quoted in Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 110.

Turning to Indigenous research methodologies and the BNIM held many answers for this project to honour the commitment to community and listening to the stories with heart. Bishop wrote, while discussing Kaupapa Māori research about relationships with participants, that in the projects he was discussing in his paper, the researchers ‘did not have the power to make sense of the events or experiences alone and, indeed, did not want anything from the research relationship that was not a product of the relationship’.<sup>15</sup> This struck me deeply. He went on to say that:

Researchers in Kaupapa Māori contexts are repositioned in such a way that they no longer need to seek to *give voice to others*, to *empower* others, to *emancipate* others, or to refer to others as *subjugated voices*. Instead, they are able to listen to and participate with those traditionally ‘othered’ as constructors of meanings of their own experiences and agents of knowledge. ... The joint development of new storylines is a collaborative effort. The researcher and the researched together rewrite the constitutive metaphors of the relationship. What makes it Māori is that it is done using Māori metaphor within a Māori cultural context.<sup>16</sup>

This was a very important part of the moral position reflected in this thesis. The goal was that this work should always represent the meanings and understandings of all of those involved. That is not to say the researcher’s hunches or experiences were invalid or immaterial to this story-telling but that the meanings would be constructed *together*.

Bishop warns though that all is in vain if the researcher dominates the way understandings are constructed.<sup>17</sup> This turned the search towards the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method as what became clear that if only the researcher determined the questions, then the researcher determined the nature of the whole conversation. The primary goal for any method was that it made clear how the individuals interviewed saw their identity. The initial idea of a structuring a questionnaire in the ‘life history’ modality was disposed of when BNIM was chosen and a SQUIN (Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative) was constructed in its place. While the researcher sets the general parameters, BNIM dictates that in session one, the participant answers the SQUIN. Only then, in subsequent sessions, can further clarification be sought on what they have shared. This must be carried out in a strictly regulated method (discussed further in this chapter).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> R. Bishop, ‘Freeing Ourselves from Neocolonial Domination in Research’, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edn, ed. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (London: Sage, 2005): 123.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Wengraf, *Interviewing for Life-Histories*, 55.

So it is that the goals for this project become clear. These previously unknown stories will be shared from within the feminist tradition of engaging with women and for women. These stories will be presented within the value constructions of Indigenous research methodologies so that the research reflects community agendas and not just the researcher's wants and needs. These stories will be presented as they have been shared and within the project the jointly shared meanings, values and priorities will be explored. This project respects these women's lives and will do every reasonable action to ensure their representation to the world is not within a negative paradigm of 'Stolen', 'removed' or 'lost', as if they only come from a position of disadvantage. Their morality, their strength and strength of purpose must be recognised. Hence, this agenda sits squarely within a feminist research base and honours the goals of Indigenous research methods. This research constructs its understandings and conclusions from within the terms and beliefs of the women themselves. This is playing out of feminist concept of 'situated knowledge' that says that we must recognise theory production is always embedded in culture, society and history.<sup>19</sup> That it is situated, political and partial and must be understood within the context that generated it. Part of this understanding is that the category 'Stolen Children' can only be understood with a reference to those non-'Stolen Children' We cannot understand one fully by looking at it in isolation.

### **Commencing the Research**

When the research commenced, there was a plan to interview individuals, collect autobiographies and survey the *Bringing Them Home Collection* in the National Library to construct the data for this thesis. In the end, the *Bringing Them Home Collection* in the Australian National Library and personal one-on-one interviews with two subjects and a trial subject were utilised. The *Bringing Them Home Collection* was especially valuable as a resource for this project.

### **The *Bringing Them Home* Collection**

It should be noted that while the report itself has been widely read and cited, no researchers had taken the time to read through the transcripts of the oral histories collected in the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Collection (BTHOHC)* prior to my readings of them. It is important point to note this first time reading of this *Collection* that came about as an outcome of the *National Inquiry*. My reading of this material was also unique in a number of ways worth also noting. The first is that initially I was an expert witness to the *Inquiry* due to my published work of the gendered removals of Aboriginal children from their families and my honours thesis based on the nature of the removals of Aboriginal children in the state of Queensland. I also feature in the *Bringing Them Home Collection* in the National Library having contributed an interview as a

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<sup>19</sup> R Lawthom 1991, quoted in Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 117.

removed child. This places me as researcher in an unprecedented position to share my perspectives of this body of narratives.<sup>20</sup>

In total, three trips were made to the Library. The first took place in February 2008, a week before the National Apology to the Stolen Generation. The second occurred in July 2008, and the third was in September 2009. The first trip was to gain a sense of the *Bringing Them Home Oral History Collection* and look at the Library's other collections of Stolen Generations literature. The second and third trips were specifically to read and gather information from the *BTHOHC*. In all, there were 189 female entries in this collection. It took some time to determine how many were from the Stolen Generations. The list also included some non-Indigenous children, families of people taken, and women who had worked in positions of authority with removed children.

### ***Reviewing the Library Material***

Initially, the project sought to investigate only the women who had been removed into fostering and adoption placements. It became apparent that it would become complex to weed out just that material. It also became clear that maybe this was not a useful categorisation as so many of the women, including myself, were in multiple placements including adoption, foster homes and institutions. As many as possible of the 189 records were read. Some were not available to be read due to their reader restrictions. Some were not read given the time limitations and they were left due to considerations such as that they were close friends of mine or their stories were also published autobiographies.

Each record that was read was read in full and was read with particular attention given to the themes of the research, especially around what interviewees said about their identity, the nature of their awareness of it over their life, any changes, challenges and realisations about it. The whole record was read in each case, as there was an attempt not to pre-empt what the material would speak about. To find the records that fitted this study, some records were read that did not fit. Others for instance were interviewed at the same time as their husbands, siblings or children. In some records, no information was recorded, as the interviewee did not address topics of interest to this research. Table 1 is an illustration of the form of notes taken from each record read. This is a totally fictitious record.

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<sup>20</sup> Appendix 1 explores some of these ideas in a non-referred paper that was presented to the National Archivists conference in 2010.

**Table 1: (Fictitious) Sample of Note Taking in the *BTHOHC***

Record	Transcript number	Name	Use	DOB	Relevant information from transcript?
1	5				Did not see kids in Home as Aboriginal 'didn't know what an Aboriginal looked like' p.5. Told never to mix with Aborigines p.6. They wanted us to be white. Matron was Mum, skin was light brown. Did not know skin might mean Aboriginality

When the chapter on this material was written, those themes were drawn out and addressed. The two time periods used were time actually in 'care', whether in adoption, fostering or institutions; and secondly, after their time in 'care' ended. After 'care' seemed to have two distinct time periods as well. Firstly, when young people immediately left 'care' and then later when they reflected on their lives. The broad themes within those periods were then drawn out. Wide reading on the subject, the interviews themselves, and themes, for instance those identified in the *Bringing Them Home Report*, and other documents helped create these broad themes.

## **Interviews**

### **Recruiting Subjects**

Initially, this project was very concerned to capture a group of women overlooked in previous research. The women identified were of Aboriginal heritage, and for any number of reasons had not been able to grow up in their families of origin. Particularly targeted were women who were probably removed from their Aboriginal families in 1960–1970s and were then institutionalised, fostered or adopted. They were 30–60 years of age.

This group of women were not strongly represented in the *Bringing Them Home Report*. Unlike the many children removed earlier than this group who were able to identify with each other through the commonality of being in the same institution (for example, Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls), this group have no central reference point for the development of their identities.

After commencing the survey of the *BTHOHC*, it became clear that the information available was from any woman who had been removed and that initial parameters for interviews should be widened. This made it slightly easier to recruit interviewees and, as in my own case, sometimes people were institutionalised for only very short times in institutions other than Cootamundra or Bomaderry.

The recruitment of participants met a number of obstacles. Initially, interviewees were sought through advertisements in the *Newcastle Herald*, the *Koori Mail* and the *Indigenous Times*. These only raised responses from two people. One was geographically in Brisbane so this contact was not followed up. The one in Newcastle was given the invitation to participate and the information form but did not recontact.

The Post-Adoption Research Centre in Sydney was also contacted to put up advertisements. After ringing me for clarification about the project, they were not heard from again. A letter was sent to Link-Up NSW asking them if they would be prepared to advertise the project. These organisations were not followed up on for two reasons in particular. The first is that they would probably already be bombarded with these sorts of requests for research participants. Asking in the first place was not comfortable and secondly, there was no plan in place to travel to their sites to personally address the organisations themselves.

In the end, the decision was taken and the appropriate amendment to the ethics committee application was made to utilise personal networks to disseminate the information about the project. A trial interview was conducted with a woman who had previously told her story and who was willing to assist the researcher in setting up the project. The interview was carried out to test the stimulus question and practice the interview process. That person was also met a second time to follow up the initial interview and further discuss the issues raised in the trial interviews. None of this material has been used in this thesis. The trial interviewee was approached directly but the other interviewees were found by talking about the project widely. The project was only discussed with people who were interested in that area of work and when they volunteered, they were then provided with the material describing the project, as per the university's ethical requirements. They were contacted at a later date and asked if they were still



interested. They were given the material either by mail or by the go-between party. Part way through the research, permission was sought to make more personal approaches to potential interviewees but this direct approach was avoided where possible.

There was a great deal of concern about the way these processes may bias results but at the end of the day, recruitment is very difficult into a community who do not particularly want to be named or discussed. The project of assimilation created the expectation that Stolen Generations live as ordinary Australians and thus identifying in other ways can very difficult for many of them. The ability to identify them was also made exponentially more difficult because of this as well. My earlier stated commitment to respecting their privacy and not opening them up to further scrutiny was heavy on my mind at all times of this identification process.

### **Where Were the Interviews Conducted?**

The personal interviews with self-identified Stolen Generations women were carried out in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley of NSW. The initial ethics applications suggested a donation to cover expenses could be made (\$20). This was never used. Instead, the women were brought appropriate gifts on each visit, which turned out to be usually food.

The trial interviewee was interviewed twice at her place of work in a meeting room. Other interviews were held at the interviewee's place of work also. This seemed to allow for some required emotional distance between us. One set of interviews was carried out in the home of the interviewee but only after meeting somewhere else first and being invited back to the house.

### **Contact Management and Starting**

After self-identification, potential interviewees were provided with a letter of invitation and consent form for the project as approved by the University's Human Ethics Committee. They were provided with these and given an opportunity to think about their involvement. After a period of over two weeks, they were recontacted. At the interview, they were then asked to sign a copy of the consent form for the project records. They were reminded at the initial interview that they could withdraw their involvement at any point.<sup>21</sup>

All interviews were carried out at a time and place nominated by the interviewee. The interviewees were asked to allow a paid and confidential transcription service be used to transcribe the verbal record to a physical typewritten record and they were required to sign a permission form.

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 2 for information and consent forms.

### **Support of Interviewer**

The feedback from the University's Human Ethics Committee included a suggestion that the student researcher put into place a system of support given the intense nature of the project and commonality to the interviewer's personal experience. The student researcher identified a colleague with previous experience in supporting the interviewer and a good knowledge of the issues involved with this particular project. In the end, this was utilised around the time of the apology but not with the interviews. The second interview was very difficult and emotional but the interviewer was able to debrief through a confidential meeting with the go-between who already knew the interviewee intimately. However, the interviewer did not disclose any interview material.

The second issue was the actual process of transcribing the interview recordings after the interviews were complete. The trial interview showed that the experience of interviewing was indeed harrowing and the interviewer and interviewee experienced an outpouring of emotion and a feeling of commonality. The transcribing process led the interviewer to experience this again leading to an unintentional delay in the transcribing process. To speed up the process and minimise the time involved in transcribing, a professional transcription service was employed. There were three parts of this process. The first was to gain the support of the student's supervisors. Next, application was made to the University's Human Ethics Committee for agreement on a transcription confidentiality form and use of the transcription service. The third part of the project was to seek funding from the Faculty of enrolment. All parts of this process were carried out and the services of a professional transcription service were engaged. The service was engaged to provide a non-verbatim typed transcription with the student to complete it to a verbatim level (including ums, ahhs and crying pauses). The transcription service was required to sign a confidentiality form after permission had been gained from the interviewee for the transcription service to be used.

### **Safety Considerations**

All reasonable attempts were made to enact the safety requirements of the university. All interviews were carried out in agreed upon places. The student notified her supervisors of her appointments. A mobile phone was carried at all times.

### **Strategies for the Face-to-face Interviews**

The Biographic Narrative Method is quite prescriptive about the structure of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. In the recruitment process, potential interviewees are given information about the research. After agreeing to be interviewed, the method is also

prescriptive about the nature of the process to attempt to harvest Particular Incident Narratives (PINs). The interviews undertaken in this project were commenced with a SQUIN (Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative) similar to the following:

As you know I am researching the identity development of women taken from their families and the ways they currently see their identity. Can you please tell me about the story of your life as a removed child? All the experiences and the events that were important for you, up to now. Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt. I'll take some notes in case I have any further questions for you after you've finished telling me about it all.

The interview process of BNIM is made up of two or more phases. The SQUIN triggers phase one where the interviewee speaks at length answering the SQUIN as they wish. When the interviewee finishes, they are given a chance to consider if they have anything else to say.

Phase two commences after a short break or indeed on another occasion. In phase two, the interviewee asks questions that follow a number of rules. Firstly, the interviewer must follow the order of topics as raised by the interviewee. Only questions designed to seek narratives and only on the topics raised by the interviewee themselves are asked. As Wengraf describes, 'we are attempting to work with the free associative gestalt. We want them to remain in the experience of that time'.<sup>22</sup>

The following is an example structure for the asking of questions in phase two:

You said 'XX'. Do you remember any more about that particular occasion/incident/event/moment/happening? How it all happened?<sup>23</sup>

This process is designed to seek PINs: 'PIN stands for Particular Incident Narrative, a detailed and emotionally expressive (not distanced) story of some particular set of events at one particular time and place'.<sup>24</sup> This process is designed to move from a more generalised account (we all used to go to the park) to a PIN or receiving a flat refusal to move to a PIN. A PIN is particularly discernible by there being a particular time context; a beginning and an ending to the story.

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<sup>22</sup> Wengraf, *Interviewing for Life-Histories*, 67 and 83.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 78

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 74.

### **After the Interview**

Each interview was followed up with contact to thank the women again for her interview. After the transcription process, they were sent a copy of the transcript in the manner they desired, whether by email or a hard copy via ordinary post. Interviewees were offered the option of a further meeting with the interviewer and could conceivably carry out a third interview. They were given the chance to amend their transcript, add or withdraw material.

In the case of the trial interview, the woman was met with and talked about the project initially. She was then met with for the trial interview and a further time after she had received the transcript and she wanted to discuss it further. This interviewee was interested in publishing a second edition of her life story earlier published in book form and was interested in the way BNIM had allowed her to unlock narratives she had previously not spoken of with other people. In this set of interviews, as with all of them, I was struck by the way we could be transported quite quickly to reliving that moment in time by unlocking its gestalt.

### **Reviewing the Interviews**

A digital audio copy of the interviews was made and then transcribed. The transcripts were returned to the participant for checking. They were left to reply at their leisure. If no reply was received the researcher then initiated communication.

The audio recordings and transcripts were analysed using a blend of BNIM and voice-relational methods.<sup>25</sup> Underpinning this research and the particular attraction to this research method was a desire to understand the choices around identity people make as they go through life but then, more particularly, why they tell the story of their life the way they do. Wengraf says BNIM attempts to answer two questions through its form of analysis:

Why did the person who lived their life in the way we have described, then present their life story and themselves in the interview in the way that they did?

How can we understand the consistencies and inconsistencies of inferred subjectivity between the living of the lived life and the self-presentation in the interview?<sup>26</sup>

Wengraf suggests a number of activities form the process of analysis. The first stage is that BNIM requires the collection through the interview processes of field notes written immediately during and after the interview and then added to if thoughts occur during transcription. Next

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<sup>25</sup> Lawthom in Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Wengraf, *Interviewing for Life-Histories*, 137.

involves constructing two tracks of information from the interview transcript (and other data if you have it). The two tracks are called the lived life track and the told story track. The question being answered is to identify how a person who lived their life like this could tell their story?

Constructing the lived life or biographical track means to use the material of the interview (and other sources) to construct a chronology of 'objective facts'. In doing this, the subjective attribution and causal theories proposed by the interviewee for the way life has gone for this person are stripped away. Lists of dates/ages and the incident (for example, turned 26 in 2001) were created for each interviewee.<sup>27</sup> The transcript was then also read through and personal reflections were added as comments to the transcript. Themes were also considered that stemmed from the literature review and the *Bringing Them Home Collection*.

Next, the transcript was read through and a new document created called a Text Structure Sequentialisation. In this process, a Thematic Field Analysis was carried out to identify the sequence of events. In this analysis, the text was examined for the themes relevant to the research and also the themes the interviewees see as playing out in their lives. What is it they remember and why do they want to tell us about those times and indeed, why share *those* times?<sup>28</sup>

The BNIM processes would at this stage also involve group analyses of the two tracks of narratives but while all through the design and carrying out of the interviews this was the goal, towards the end of the candidature it was decided not to use this process. Most particularly, the groups required a level of time and involvement that ended up not being available. It was also after a discussion was held with the supervisors that it was decided that the other processes of analysis including the voice-relational method described next provided a comprehensively suitable level analysis. Lawthom's voice-relational methods were used next on the original transcripts (in addition to the Text Structure Sequentialisation). These methods are split into four ways of reading and thinking about the transcript. These are briefly described below.<sup>29</sup>

*Reading 1: Reading for Plot and Our Response to the Narrative.*<sup>30</sup>

This reading focuses on the narrative, players and recurrent items like words or metaphors. At the same time, the focus is on commonalities, assumptions or responses, and the way they may influence how the narrative is experienced. For me, this reading was very important because I felt an incredibly deep connection with these stories and many chords were struck deep within

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>29</sup> Lawthom in Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 118.

me. At some of the process though, I decided not to include my own story and taking that decision meant I needed to clearly differentiate myself in and out of the text where necessary.

### *Reading 2: Reading for the Voice of 'I'*<sup>31</sup>

When reading for the 'I' we are investigating how the voice identifies in which ways the individual sees themselves in different experiences. For instance, in the BNIM method, reporting or telling parts of the narrative is known as general incident narratives (GINs) like using 'we always did it that way'.

Miller argues that using a biographical perspective is useful to highlight social structure surrounding us, and as social actors negotiating our path through 'a changing societal structure'.<sup>32</sup> Thus, in this reading, the focus is on identifying how it is that the interviewee sees their lives 'telling about the constraints and opportunities that were available in the past and how one dealt with these—circumventing (or being thwarted by) obstacles, taking advantage of (or missing) opportunities'.<sup>33</sup>

### *Reading 3: Reading for Relationships*<sup>34</sup>

In this reading, the relationships between the interviewees and the others are examined. 'There is a conscious reading for relationships that examines connections, autonomy and dependence'.<sup>35</sup>

### *Reading 4: Placing People within Cultural Contexts and Social Structures*<sup>36</sup>

This reading examines the narrative within 'broader political, cultural and structural contexts'.<sup>37</sup> All human lives range across a span of historical events and are impacted upon by them so these narratives within a process of cross-referencing between the historical occurrence and life history narrative being examined. Linkages between the two tracks and the influences each has had upon the other are sought.<sup>38</sup> This particular set of constructs for reading fits very well to the transcripts created by the BNIM methods and enables the ability to explore the transcripts from many perspectives.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>32</sup> R. L. Miller, *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories: Introducing Qualitative Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 75.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>34</sup> Lawthom in Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, *Researching Life Stories*, 75.

<sup>36</sup> Lawthom in Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, *Researching Life Stories*, 74.

## **Writing**

In structuring the thesis, the decision was made to represent strongly the words of the women whose stories were being explored. As stated earlier, there was a desire to develop the thesis together with the women involved and not just take their stories and run. At all stages of the collection of data, there has been contact with the National Library and the interviewees who have shared this work. A high level of respect has been shown to the interviewees and by the interviewer given the nature of the material gathered and knowing the particular information is collected from people who live and work in the same communities as the people carrying out the research. In order to fulfil the appropriate levels of respect and trust, the decision has been taken to return to the interviewees at the end of thesis process as much of the material about them as possible. Interviewees have at all parts of the process had the right to see material written about them and the Text Structure Sequentialisation and Biographical Text Track documents.

Towards the end of the writing process of this thesis, one of the interviewees passed away and initial feelers were put out to determine the next step of returning material to the surviving family. The interviewee had already received and discussed earlier transcripts of interviews and was satisfied with their content. An agreement had been entered into to further assist in the development of her narrative for her family's use and this will be broached with the family in an appropriate manner after a respectful amount of time has passed.

## **How to Read or Experience These Texts**

This section examines some of the arguments about how to read or experience more specifically the narratives presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. This section speaks more specifically to a methodological question of how these narratives were constructed in the first place and hence the discussion presented here follows on from the earlier discussions of research methodologies. In the development of this thesis, as earlier explored, examining feminist autobiography allowed an investigation into how to hear the stories as they were told. Feminist autobiography has been very concerned about which stories are heard, hearing the previously unheard, and how they are heard and represented. Originally, the hope was to present the stories and allow them to speak for themselves with little interpretation occurring. It was hoped to find a research design that would allow that to happen. As the thesis progressed, the need to contextualise and theorise how to read these stories became apparent.

As has already been stated, all three forms of narrative-based data were presented for this thesis. The first was the material from the *Bringing Them Home Collection* in the National Library.

This material was collected as an outcome of the *Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. The testimony collected while the *Inquiry* was being held was collected for the goals of ‘addressing public ignorance about the injustices of forcible removals and to provide a forum for healing’.<sup>39</sup> While that material is not examined here, the *Inquiry* recommended the *Bringing Them Home Collection* be constructed so that, as Gigliotti further discusses, such goals as reconciliation be met via such testimonies continuing to be collected and recorded.

The stories sought and recorded within the *collection* were constructed within the continuing of the goal of recognising that a ‘limit event’ of historical injustice occurred here in Australia to a group of the nation’s population.<sup>40</sup> It is not the purpose of this thesis to examine extensively the language and arguments that followed the *Inquiry* itself and arguments about whether or not there were generations of forced removals, or indeed whether the removals were in the best interests of the children involved or how much of the nation already ‘knew’ about the removals. It is my belief of that the collected narratives given both at the *Inquiry* and to the *collection*, function as a form of witness to the policies and processes of forcible removals. In itself, the *collection* forms a ‘testimonial narrative’<sup>41</sup> or the beginning of a collective memory to help continue the process of ‘the recovery of the denied [I]ndigenous voice’.<sup>42</sup>

While stories from the collection are not presented in their entirety in this thesis, they are analysed and major themes drawn out using two particular time periods: during their childhood, and then their later years. It should be noted that this type of analysis—that is, reading across the transcripts the of women’s stories collected for the National Library of Australia’s *Bringing Them Home Collection*—has not been attempted before.

Two chapters presented in this thesis are based on interviews conducted specifically for this thesis. The stories shared in the interviews are presented in two forms. The first is the lived life or the specific factual data of these women’s lives, for example, when they were born and lived. The second part of each of these chapters moves on to analyse the told story within the analytical constructs suggested by Goodley et al.<sup>43</sup> and outlined in the previous methodological discussion.

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<sup>39</sup> S. Gigliotti, ‘Unspeakable Pasts as Limit Events: The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Stolen Generations’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49 (2003): 170.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>43</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.



What is presented in all three chapters based on interview data could be called a form of cultural narrative. It seems appropriate to assist the reader in helping read them by understanding the form of narrative that they were constructed within. As McAdams observed:

Our stories spell out our identities. But they also speak to and for *culture*. Life stories sometimes say as much about the culture wherein they are told as they do about the teller of the story.<sup>44</sup>

Drawing on the ideas of Habermas and Bluck, McAdams relates that individuals bring together a story by ‘reconstructing the past and imagining the future as an ongoing narrative that depicts who they were, are, and will be—and how the past, present, and future are meaningfully linked’.<sup>45</sup>

The voices of those who speak within this thesis are from the margin or borderlands. Perhaps the language used to meet the requirements of this thesis encourages us to consider that the presentation of these stories somehow conforms to the dominant cultural representations but I would argue that these stories are presented in this language and in this form so that they stand more of a chance of being heard and understood by those at the ‘centre’. Caren Kaplan names as ‘out-law genres’ ‘autobiographical but eclectically errant and culturally disruptive writing practices’.<sup>46</sup> Within her category of ‘out-law genres’ sit, among others, testimonials, prison narratives, collective auto-ethnographies and manifestos.

This thesis is perhaps understood within the framework of the feminist manifesto as discussed by Smith.<sup>47</sup> Smith says:

Dictionary definitions suggest that a manifesto is a proof, a piece of evidence, a public declaration or proclamation, usually issued by ... an individual or body of individuals whose proceedings are of public importance, for the purpose of announcing past actions and explaining the reasons or motives for actions announced as forthcoming.<sup>48</sup>

In describing the political agenda of the autobiographical manifesto, Cherrie Moraga says its aim is to bring the issues of the culturally marginalised into the light.<sup>49</sup> The nature of the manifesto narrative is firmly anchored ‘in the specificities and locales of time and space, the

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<sup>44</sup> D. McAdams, ‘American Identity: The Redemptive Self’, *General Psychologist*, 43, no. 1 (2008): 21.

<sup>45</sup> McAdams, ‘American Identity’, 20–27.

<sup>46</sup> Kaplan quoted in Smith, ‘Autobiographical Manifestos’, 433.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 433.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 435.

<sup>49</sup> Moraga, quoted in Smith, ‘Autobiographical Manifestos’, 435.

discursive surround, the material ground, the provenance of histories'.<sup>50</sup> This thesis takes the position that the stories here reflect a different world, one that sits at the margins of dominant identities and brings to light previously unheard of narratives affirming the body of knowledge or as Hartsock calls it 'standpoint epistemologies' from which each speak.<sup>51</sup> In each narrative, we experience the 'specific confluences of social, psychological, economic, and political forces of oppression' we have come to know as the lives of individuals within the collective group now known as the Stolen Generations. Hartsock says the marginalised voice offers:

An account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the centre ... an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world.<sup>52</sup>

Henderson makes the slightly different point that in speaking, the objective of the marginalised is to 'remain on the borders of discourse, speaking from the vantage point of the insider/outsider' rather than the expectation others may hold that they may, as a result of speaking, move closer to the centre.<sup>53</sup> Whatever the goal is though, it is important to note, in manifesto, the narrative is constructed with a sense of hope for liberation from past constraints and oppressions. As Theresa de Lauretis says, although there is necessarily 'the critical negativity of theoretical critique, it [the manifesto] also gestures forward in the affirmative positivity of its politics to new spaces for subjectivity'.<sup>54</sup>

Through the development of personal agency, we can use these stories to help explain ourselves and make choices in the future. McAdams says we struggle to balance between our need to 'expand, defend, or express the self' and linking ourselves to 'others in bonds of love, friendship, and community'.<sup>55</sup> McAdams offers his explanations from within the field of psychology arguing there is a potential for the individualistic narratives he noted to be constructed with a dynamic of contamination versus redemption.<sup>56</sup> The contamination dynamic is set up when an individual constructs their life narrative as positive until a bad or negative event occurs leading to a negative outcome. For example, the narrative of a woman in a happy marriage with beautiful children in which the husband suddenly and unexpectedly dies. The second dynamic McAdams calls redemptive, and occurs when an unfortunate and difficult life

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<sup>50</sup> Smith, 'Autobiographical Manifestos', 436.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 436.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 436.

<sup>53</sup> M. G. Henderson, 'Speaking in Tongues', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. S. Smith and J. Watson (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 348.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, 'Autobiographical Manifestos', 438.

<sup>55</sup> McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 244.

<sup>56</sup> McAdams, 'The Redemptive Self: Narrative Identity in America Today', in *The Self and Memory*, ed. D. R. Beike, J. M. Lampien and D. A. Behrend (New York: Psychology Press, 2004), 95–115.

is changed for the better by some good and positive occurrence like in the example where the female child of drug-taking parents who are often violent marries well and has two beautiful children and a happy marriage.

McAdams suggests that, particularly in United States (US) culture, there is an expectation that the redemptive story is the dominant, but this type of redemptive narrative is likely to be influential in most contemporary industrialised countries, particularly those which are English speaking and influenced by US popular culture, like Australia. The reader or witness of any life story waits for the enlightenment to occur. The person is expected to overcome the difficulties they earlier faced. What is important for us to understand is that these are culturally conditioned ways of telling our stories. McAdams does note that more collectivist cultures will tend to structure their stories around more of a communal theme rather than the agency theme more strongly present in more individualistic cultures. As argued earlier, if the narratives presented are read with an expectation of the presence of the dynamics of contamination versus redemption for instance, this will not allow recognition of the standpoint epistemologies of those who tell the narratives.<sup>57</sup>

These narratives must also be read with a consciousness of the gendered voice and body. The body of these women must be read for within the text. The history of colonisation, removal and control has been upon the body of these women so a consciousness and recognition must be paid to their bodies as a site of persecution and hence their emotionality, but also crucially their ability to bring to consciousness, theorise and the capacity for reason recognisable in their narratives.<sup>58</sup> As Stolen Generations women, the tellers of narratives within this thesis must speak with a plurality of voices from within a multiplicity of discourses.<sup>59</sup> They may enter into any or all of the following testimonial discourses: with Aboriginal men as Aborigines; with non-Aboriginal women as women; Stolen Generations as women while also potentially entering competitive discourse with Aboriginal men as women, non-Aboriginal men as Aboriginal women and Aboriginal as Stolen Generations and so on.<sup>60</sup> As will be further argued in the next two chapters, while the experience of Aboriginal people within colonisation is a collective experience, this thesis primarily focuses on women in order to fulfil our challenge within the manifesto construction is to bring to light the unspoken or 'othered' narrative. In the next chapter, the focus turns to examine the history of removals in Australia to further elaborate the context within which this thesis is positioned.

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<sup>57</sup> McAdams, 'The Redemptive Self: Narrative Identity in America Today', in *The Self and Memory*, ed. D. R. Beike, J. M. Lampien and D. A. Behrend (New York: Psychology Press, 2004), 95–115.

<sup>58</sup> Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 36.

<sup>59</sup> M. G. Henderson, 'Speaking in Tongues', 347.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 346.

### CHAPTER 3: SETTING THE SCENE: CONTROL, STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE

It is the premise of this thesis that over the time of the colonising/invasion of what we now know as Australia, Aboriginal people have been physically moved, their lives interfered with and their children taken and/or killed. The process of ‘assimilation’ is described in the *Bringing Them Home Report* as part of the motivation for many Aboriginal child removals. It required the removal of the children from their families and communities of origin, and then their enculturation to a culture other than Aboriginal cultures.<sup>1</sup> Hence, in this chapter, both the actions of the removal of bodies and the change of cultures as two unique processes that were required to bring about the group of women will be examined.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, state authorities in all states undertook legislative programs leading to the official removal of children. In QLD, for example, that officially started with the 1865 Industrial and Reformatory Act that removed children due to an automatic finding of ‘neglect’. Section 6, part 7 says ‘Any child born of an [A]boriginal or half-caste’ mother’ is a neglected child.<sup>2</sup>

These legislative programs followed on from removals that had no legislative basis, but had, nevertheless, occurred. Stories and songs regarding ‘drover’s boys’ and other removals exist in our folklore and are increasing in autobiographical or biographical texts.<sup>3</sup> The presence of legislation did not conclude non-official removals.

In NSW, the Aborigines Protection and Amendment Acts 1909, 1915, 1918, 1936, and 1940 (all later repealed in 1969) covered the employment and locality of all Aborigines in the state including children. For many children, that meant being removed from their parents care and sent to work or to reside in institutions like Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, Bomaderry Children’s Home or Kinchella Boys Home. Some children were sent to other institutions like Bidura Children’s Home under the care of state child welfare authorities.

Many people have struggled individually and through organisations, unions and associations to fight these removals. They argued that the removals were morally wrong, ought never to have

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997a).

<sup>2</sup> A. Pain and J. L. Woolcock (ed.) ‘Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act 1865’, in *The Queensland Statutes in Five Volumes* 11 (1889), 2213–2214.

<sup>3</sup> For example, T. Egan and R. Ingpen, *The Drover’s Boy* (Port Melbourne: Lothian, 1997).

occurred, and never should again.<sup>4</sup> The explanations offered for considering removals wrong differ between people and organisations. This conflict is also in the hearts of those who live a 'removed' life as illuminated in other parts of this thesis.

### **Forces from within**

Aborigines protested against child removals in many ways. One of the first organisations to reject the process of removals was the NSW-based Australian Aborigines Progressive Association (AAPA) with Fred Maynard at its helm. The Association was officially launched in 1925 and agitated across NSW on the treatment of Aboriginal people.

In 1927, Fred Maynard, then President of the AAPA wrote to the Premier of NSW Lang (Member of the Legislative Assembly) asking:

We respectfully solicit such early alteration on the laws relating to Aborigines as will make effective the following reforms and which we most sincerely assure you will enable the Aborigines of this state to prove that they are worthy of the full privileges of citizenship:

A. That all Aborigines shall be given in fee simple sufficient good land and to maintain a family.

B. That the family life of the Aboriginal people shall be held and sacred and free from invasion and that the children shall be left in the control of their parents.<sup>5</sup>

In 1915, the NSW Protection Board had specific legislation passed enabling them to remove and indenture girls without either parental consent or a court finding of neglect. The AAPA had established 11 branches by 1925 and were in a position to hear the real stories of these removals.<sup>6</sup>

The AAPA argued removals were a strategy to control the sexuality of Aboriginal girls and provide slave labour. In 1925, Maynard is quoted as having said:

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<sup>4</sup> C. Bird (ed.), *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* (NSW: Random House, 1998); Amnesty International, *Government Silence on 'Stolen Children'*, Media Release, 4 March 1998; A. Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800–2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> C. Kendall, 'The History: Present and Future Issues Affecting Aboriginal Adults Who Were Removed as Children', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 18, no. 2 (1994): 18.

<sup>6</sup> J. Maynard, 'Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA): One God, One Aim, One Destiny', *Aboriginal History* 21 (1997): 1–13.

- ‘The objectionable practice of segregating the sexes as soon as they reach a certain age should be abolished for it meant rapid extinction!’<sup>7</sup>
- ‘Many of the black girls are taken away and trained, and then sent into domestic service, so that they have little chance of meeting and marrying the young men of their own race.’<sup>8</sup>
- ‘Girls of tender age and years are torn away from their parents ... and put to service in an environment as near to slavery as it is possible to find.’<sup>9</sup>

The 1920s and 1930s saw the development of strong new leadership within the Aboriginal community. This leadership included those tied to the NSW Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) founded by William Ferguson from Dubbo in 1937. In Victoria (VIC) in 1934, William Cooper formed the Australian Aborigines League (AAL). Other important leaders who came to the fore included Jack Patten who was associated with the APA. Some of the female leaders included Pearl Gibbs with the APA, and Margaret Tucker who was involved with the Communist Party and later elected to the Victorian Protection Board. The APA argued strongly against the removal of Aboriginal children and successfully blended their arguments together with their fight for citizenship rights. Pearl Gibbs and Bill Ferguson agitated for the creation of a non-Aboriginal, Committee for Aboriginal Citizen Rights (CACR), which would act in a supportive role to the APA. The Committee functioned between March 1938 and May 1940.<sup>10</sup>

The APA put together a publication in response to a shift in policy in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> This shift was to a wider assimilationist policy in which the Board for ‘the protection of Aborigines’ decided that all Aborigines needed to be trained to mix with the white population. This meant that reserves were expanded to house all ‘unassimilated’ Aborigines. The APA’s publication documented their perception of the treatment of Aborigines and their families, highlighting the right of the Protection Board: to apprentice any child to any master or face repercussions; and assume full control and custody of the child of any Aborigine. They said, ‘give our children the same chances as your own, and they will do as well as your children’.<sup>12</sup> This publication was used at the Day of Mourning held in 1938 by the ALA and the APA. Although the APA was able to influence the removal policy, the legislation allowing removals continued into the 1940s

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<sup>7</sup> F. Maynard, Newcastle (1925), quoted by J Maynard, ‘“The Other Fellow”: Fred Maynard and the 1920s Defence of Cultural Difference’, Assimilation Conference Presentation, University of Sydney, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> F. Maynard, *The Sun* (27 December 1924), quoted by J. Maynard, ‘The Other Fellow’.

<sup>9</sup> F. Maynard (1928), quoted by J. Maynard, ‘The Other Fellow’.

<sup>10</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*; V. Haskins, ‘The Women’s Movement and Aboriginal Citizenship, Sydney, 1937–1940’, in *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, ed. J. Damousi and K. Ellinghaus (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> J. T. Patten and W. Ferguson, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights!* (Sydney, The Publicist, 1938).

<sup>12</sup> N. Parbury, *Survival: A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales*, (NSW: Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1988), 111.

within the loose constraints of findings of neglect or uncontrollable. Unfortunately, Cooper was lost to the cause in 1941 in his seventies and Ferguson in 1950 at 68 years of age.

The 1920s saw a great deal of agitation in South Australia (SA) around the issue of child removals. A very public debate occurred between government authorities, Aborigines and their sympathisers. Point McLeay and Point Pearce Aboriginal stations had trained a new breed of Aboriginal leaders. One such man was David Unaipon, raised at Point McLeay who became well known as a 'scholar, lecturer, preacher, author and musician as well as inventor'.<sup>13</sup> He remains significant in Australian history and is given recognition via his face being on Australian \$50 note.

In 1923, the SA Government passed the *Aborigines (Training of Children) Act* with the aim to expedite the removal of Aboriginal children for educational and training purposes. Aboriginal parents argued against the Act, believing it represented potential further disadvantage for them before the law. In December 1923, three men travelled to Adelaide from Point McLeay. They were William Rankine, Leonard Campbell, and John Stanley, all long-time residents of the station. Their aim for the visit was to present the Governor with a 'memorial', demanding the repeal of the legislation causing families much heart break. In that memorial, they stated:

Poor motherhood, how are you going to retain the beauties and glorious possession of motherhood, the right, the claims, the demands of love amid such fearful intellectual bombardments as this, and seeing that you are armed with the crude and primitive weapon love, the invention of which dates back in the past eternity. It is true, we are indeed poorly equipped, and we know not how we are going to fare in this fearful struggle.<sup>14</sup>

From 1934, the Chief Protector was the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children and, in 1939, these powers transferred to the Aborigines Protection Board.<sup>15</sup> Aborigines were involved the war effort in the 1940s and the after-war recovery efforts. At that time, assimilation as a policy came to the fore and continued as policy until the 1967 Referendum, which gave Aborigines citizenship rights. Groups such as the APA were involved in the struggle for citizenship rights succeeding in getting two national referendums into Aboriginal 'conditions' held.

Initially, the question of Commonwealth legislative rights was put to the Australian public in the 1944 referendum but was unsuccessful because it was tied in with other questions that were

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<sup>13</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 412.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 318–319.

<sup>15</sup> J. Chesterman and B. Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

all defeated in the vote. In 1949, after an approach from Pastor Doug Nicholls, Kim Beazley Snr wrote to Prime Minister Chifley proposing an amendment to the constitution but again was unsuccessful. Ultimately, the question was put in a 1967 Referendum and was successful.

Aborigines staged other highly successful and historical fights in intervening years including the 1963 Yirrkala bark petition; 1968 Gurindji walkout at Wave Hill; and the 1965 Freedom Rides.<sup>16</sup>

### **The New Push against Child Removals**

From the 1960s, other organisations have been created to represent Aboriginal rights including the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League in 1958 and One People for Australia League (OPAL) based in Brisbane in the early 1960s. There was hope held by Aborigines that the over 90 per cent vote in favour of the ‘Yes’ vote in the 1967 would lead to a real improvement in their lives. This was not to be and in 1972, Aborigines set up a Tent Embassy on the lawns of old Parliament House in Canberra. The Tent Embassy served to symbolise the sense of exclusion Aborigines felt, not only from the civic life of the nation but also from their own land.<sup>17</sup>

The rise to power of the Whitlam Labor government did, however, allow Aborigines to create a number of agencies such as the Aboriginal Legal Services and Medical Services to take on the business of caring for their own people. In 1975, the Aboriginal Children’s Service was established in NSW. This was an Aboriginal community-controlled service for the care and placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and was set up by Indigenous people for Indigenous people, one of the first to be so. The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency was established in 1976 and others followed. The Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) were funded by the federal government to cater for the ‘specific needs of Aboriginal/Islander families and children, because state welfare departments were not meeting these needs’.<sup>18</sup>

Since the creation of the Aboriginal and Islander Child Cares in the early 1970s and the creation of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Cares (SNAICC) in 1981, Aborigines within these organisations have made a large number of representations to many

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, ‘Never Again...Break the Chains’ submission to the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (August 1996); H. Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin in association with Black Books, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> H. Goodall, 1996; Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Agencies, ‘Conference Paper’, *Sixth International Congress on Child Abuse* (Sydney, 11–14 August 1986), 16.



bodies and conferences on the issues of removal and its outcomes. SNAICC currently represents over one hundred AICCAs. One example of their presentations is their paper given at the sixth International Congress on Child Abuse. At that conference, the QLD AICCAs presented a paper outlining the treatment of Aboriginal children and documenting the work they were doing to look after their own community's children. They asked the conference to support recommendations aimed at stopping the removal of children from Aboriginal communities and helping to control those already taken or going to be taken. These were recommendations also posted from the 1976 First National Conference on Adoption.

Nigel D'Souza, a non-Aboriginal man, was the administrator of SNAICC until 1999 and an extremely important player in the agitation for an Inquiry. His unique position was to be one who spoke from within the Aboriginal community in spite of not being Aboriginal himself. He was instrumental in the mass production of articles and representations made on behalf of SNAICC. One of the main arguments SNAICC has put forward is the need for national Aboriginal child welfare legislation and the need to implement the Child Placement Principle. While child welfare legislation is usually at state level, SNAICC argues that the states have failed Aboriginal children. D'Souza and SNAICC have also extensively argued for the need for support for Aboriginal controlled and run services by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.<sup>19</sup>

Brian Butler held the Chairperson's position in SNAICC between 1981 and 1997 and an extremely significant player in the lead up to the *Inquiry*. He also made many representations on behalf of SNAICC and the Aboriginal children of Australia. He argues:

The Commonwealth was compelled to assume responsibly for AICCA services in the late seventies because of the inability of states and territory governments to deal with the large numbers of Aboriginal children entering the child welfare systems ... Just as importantly, was the competence of authorities and the racism of these departments in their dealings with Aboriginal children and their families. The consequences of the removal assimilationist policies were still very much in evidence in the disproportionate numbers of children being removed at that time.<sup>20</sup>

Another significant act by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was the creation of Link-Up (NSW) in 1980. The major functions of Link-Up include family tracing, reunion and support for forcibly removed children and their families. The creation of Link-Up in QLD

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<sup>19</sup> N. D'Souza, 'Aboriginal Child Welfare: Framework for a National Policy', *Family Matters* August, no. 35 (1993): 40-45; N. D'Souza, 'The Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 18, no. 1 (1994a): 27-28; N. D'Souza, 'Arguments for National Legislation and a National System of Indigenous Family and Children's Services', *SNAICC Newsletter* (September 1994b): 2-7.

<sup>20</sup> B. Butler, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: Present and Future Services and Policy', *Children Australia* 18, no. 1 (1992): 4.

followed the NSW Link-Up in 1988. Link-Up (NSW) was central in the fight to have the *Inquiry*. The key figures of Link-Up include Peter Read and Coral Edwards who originally formed the agency and others like Carol Kendall, Lola McNaughton. Carol and Lola's interest came from being removed to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls. Link-Up developed after Peter recognised that there had been a 'deliberate and systematic policy directed at Aboriginals'.<sup>21</sup>

Along with that of others, it was the hard work of SNAICC and Link-Up (NSW) that led to the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* being established. They petitioned Federal Attorney General, the Hon. Michael Lavarch MP, to respond to a growing concern among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies about the ignorance of the history of forcible removal. They argued that this led to a failure to recognise the needs of the victims and their families.<sup>22</sup>

Until official recognition is made of the fact that thousands of our children were illegally and forcibly taken away from our people, causing many of the social problems we face today, we cannot be convinced that there is a genuine desire for this society to make recompense.<sup>23</sup>

In a letter to Sir Ronald Wilson, then President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, SNAICC argued that Aboriginal removals remained a:

Blank spot in the awareness of the public, neither Federal nor state governments have yet accepted responsibility for the abuses that occurred. Consequently, the legacy of these policies remains confined to the victims.<sup>24</sup>

They argued for the establishment of a national inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal children that, given the unresolved nature of the removals, included an assessment of 'whether these government policies fall within the definition of genocide as outlined in article ii(e) of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide'.<sup>25</sup>

These arguments were squarely placed from within the Aboriginal communities and spoke about the work and reality communities were living both of having their children taken and that within the boundaries of these communities were people who personally suffered the

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<sup>21</sup> Link-Up (NSW), *In the Best Interests of the Child? The Present Effects of Separating New South Wales Aboriginal Children from Their Families and Recommendations to Redress the Ongoing Harm of Separation*, Submission to the Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (1996): 28.

<sup>22</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Butler, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children', 7.

<sup>24</sup> Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Media Release*, circa 1994.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

experiences of being taken and assimilation enacted upon them. Little consideration seems to have been given by the wider community to the fact that Stolen Generations adults lived within their communities and were suffering.

The October 1994 Going Home Conference held in Darwin, Northern Territory (NT) created a key push for the *Inquiry*. Indeed, it is said that after attending this conference, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Robert Tickner proposed the *Inquiry* be held. This conference was organised by Link-Up. Representatives from all over the country shared information on experiences and strategies and thousands of removed children were reunited with their Aboriginal families for the first time. There was a strong desire of conference attendees to make governments accountable for their actions and two civil compensation claims were the result (*Williams* in NSW and *Kruger and Bray* in the NT).

In the lead up to the *Inquiry* and in his role as the National Social Justice Commissioner based with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), Mick Dodson also publicly spoke extensively about the treatment of Aboriginal people and their children:

The attack on the [I]ndigenous family was waged at every level. Uprooting peoples from their traditional lands, separating peoples within kinship groups, eliminating traditional means of survival and sources of food, forcing adult men and women to other parts of the country to work within the colonial system, and removing children from their families are but the most obvious forms. At the grossest level, separation, starvation, massacre, rape and disease prevented families from surviving and reproducing. But even those that did were deprived of their right to live within their culture and control their own lives.<sup>26</sup>

Together SNAICC and others pushed for many years against child removals and from the 1980s for the establishment of an Inquiry. Unfortunately, it was only when law suits like *Williams versus NSW* were coming strong and fast that were they heard or responded to.

### **Pressures from outside the Aboriginal Community**

This section of the chapter describes some of the actions taken by non-Aboriginal people. Most of the actions described were undertaken in the twentieth century. This century saw many more structural activities taken by those opposed to the treatment of Aborigines in general. Unfortunately, time and time again, Aboriginal people themselves were not consulted nor invited to express their opinions.

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<sup>26</sup> M. Dodson, 'The Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the International Year of the Family', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 18, no. 4 (1994): 14.

Australia history did have a large number of people who have advocated for Aborigines. In the *Queenslander* newspaper 1883 it was said that:

The Aboriginal inhabitants are treated exactly in the same way as the wild beasts or birds the settlers may find there ... Their goods are taken, their children forcibly Stolen, their women carried away, entirely at the caprice of the white men.<sup>27</sup>

Between 1920 and 1945, there was a great deal of activism around this issue by non-Indigenous people. In SA, much public debate had occurred in the 1920s around the issue of Aboriginal child removal. In part, this had been spurred on by media recording conditions in the Bungalow, the institution for Aboriginal children in Alice Springs. The Bungalow housed approximately 50 babies and children in a galvanised iron shed big enough for 10. This encouraged some South Australians to raise objections in Federal Parliament and write to the press.

In 1925, a new organisation was created in SA, called the Aborigines Protection League (APL). The APL was one of several new humanitarian organisations originating between the wars to promote the welfare of Aborigines. They believed a solution to the problems facing Aborigines was to segregate and develop Aborigines separately to non-Aborigines. They proposed in their 'Proposed Aboriginal State' manifesto that Aborigines needed a separate state.

When it is realised what the removal of these young children means, we shall find further argument for the creation of the proposed aboriginal state. They are taken from their country, their home, their parents, from environments where they should have an opportunity of settling down and marrying and they are placed in strange surroundings ... and not permitted to marry and unable to share in the national traditions which are held to be most powerful factors in creating character. Even with the greatest kindness from those in whose charge they are placed, what sense of loneliness, of exile, even of slavery must they not constantly feel? And what temptations must beset them? What is to become of them if, under these conditions, they live until they are 21 and regain their liberty?<sup>28</sup>

In 1926, their petition was forwarded with 7,000 signatures to the House of Representatives in Canberra. J. C. Genders of the APL wrote in their magazine *Daylight* that 'there is not and never should be occasion for the children to be taken away from their parents and farmed out among white people'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> HREOC, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Who Spoke Out at the Time*, HREOC, viewed 19 May 1999, [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social\\_justice/stolen\\_children/j8\\_1\\_3.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/j8_1_3.html).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 325.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 324.

The Commonwealth Government felt pressured enough by each of these actions to make a statement in the Canberra Times in 1932. The statement was made by the Minister responsible of Aboriginal Affairs and said it was government practice to remove these children. They were taken to institutions where they were educated and trained to enter 'industrial life' in the NT and take on the full rights of citizenship. As it happens, almost all Acts passed by state and federal authorities removed any hope for Aboriginal citizenship rights.<sup>30</sup>

In 1920, Australia had assumed responsibility for the administration of New Guinea following the dissolution of the German empire following World War I. Australia had taken on responsibility for New Guinea under League of Nations supervision. This placed pressure on the Commonwealth Government over the citizenship position of Aborigines. One of the conventions designed by the League of Nations was the Slavery Convention of 1926. In 1925, Australia also became a signatory to the League of Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child. In Australia and Britain, women's organisations used both declarations to argue that Aboriginal women and children ought to be able to access citizenship rights. Women's groups in almost all states formed the Australian Federation of Women Voters to advocate for new directions in the treatment of Aboriginal people.<sup>31</sup>

Although their battle was unsuccessful, many women battled for the rights of Aboriginal women and their children.<sup>32</sup> Hindsight though, hints at a level of maternalism since many women's groups failed to consult with Aboriginal women activists like Pearl Gibbs and Margaret Tucker. The women's advocacy formed a part of their wider fight for an equal place in Australia's development and worked to attract attention to the topic of child removals. The middle-class Anglo-Australian women involved in these organisations saw their roles in part as protectors for Aboriginal women from both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal men.

Some non-Aboriginal women were known for their strength of activism. Paisley describes one of these, Mary Bennett, as a key figure in the pro-Indigenous reform movement as well in the political lives of other activist women.<sup>33</sup> Bennett was active both in Australia and England on issues regarding Australian Aborigines. In 1930, she published her book *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being*. Later in the 1930s, she gave evidence to the Western Australia (WA) Royal Commission into the Conditions of Aborigines saying, 'They [Aborigines] are

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Chesterman and Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights*; Haebich, *Broken Circles*.

<sup>32</sup> F. Paisley, *Loving Protection? Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights 1919–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

captured at all ages, as infants in arms, perhaps not until they are grown up, they are not safe until they are dead'.<sup>34</sup> By 1931, Bennett had started working on missions in northern WA. While she worked on a number of missions and she spent much of her time at Mt Margaret Mission in Central WA where she taught craft. She wrote to many activists including William Cooper, William Ferguson, many feminist activists and government officials like Auber Octavius Neville. In this, she was unique. She returned to England in 1940 to continue her education and died in 1961 in Australia.

In 1943, the Australian Federation of Women Voters held a second Charter conference after their first in 1933. Holland proposes that this might have been the first time feminist voices had spoken in support of rights and independence for Aborigines.<sup>35</sup> Bennett and others had been quite critical of women's organisations that had failed to meld feminist principles together with rights for Aboriginal women and their children. However, Paisley proposes that Rischbieth, a central figure in Australian feminism and a long-time president of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, did not fail this expectation.<sup>36</sup> Having originally formed the Federation in 1921, in 1926 she argued, 'To all who are Australia's citizens, whether white or coloured, whether European or Asiatic or Aboriginal, are due equal rights, privileges and opportunities'.<sup>37</sup> Paisley argues that Rischbieth did not like the confrontational politics of Bennett and those like her who would put their own interests ahead or at the cost of Aboriginal women.

In 1943, at the Australian Federation of Women Voters conference, resolutions included a stipulation that Aboriginal children should not be removed from their natural parents and that if that occurred, parents ought to be able to appear before a court to defend their right to care for their children.<sup>38</sup>

It is true that some of the representations made by Bennett and state-based women's organisations caused conflicts with those charged with the responsibility of 'protection' of Aborigines. There is much evidence, for instance, that Bennett and the Chief Protector of Aborigines in WA AO Neville had an ongoing feud. Much of the activism that women's organisations undertook between the World Wars ended when World War II started. Eventually, Aboriginal children and their mothers were forgotten and little more was heard.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> HREOC, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> A. Holland, 'Post-War Reformers and Aboriginal Citizenship: Rehearsing an Old Campaign?', in *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, ed. J. Damousi and K. Ellinghaus (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1999), 20–29.

<sup>36</sup> Paisley, *Loving Protection?*

<sup>37</sup> Paisley, *Loving Protection?*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> Holland, Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*.

Since that time, there have been an increasing number of Inquiries and Reports damning the treatment of Aborigines and the results of colonisation. These include the *Inquiry into Homeless Children* by the HREOC in the 1980s. They found that Aboriginal children remain grossly over-represented in child welfare and juvenile justice institutions including making up a disproportionate number of state wards.<sup>40</sup>

In a report written for the Anti-Slavery Society based in London, Julian Burger wrote, 'the notion that Australia is divided into two nations is clearly manifested in the comparative living conditions of the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal populations'.<sup>41</sup>

In 1990, Christine Choo, under the auspices of the Brotherhood of St Lawrence and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, undertook a study into Aboriginal child poverty. In that study, she argues that Aboriginal children suffer a serious disadvantage resultant from the racism deeply embedded in our community:

Not only are Aboriginal children undervalued and unrecognised by the wider Australian community as people with dignity and worth who have a right to recognition and investment of society's social, emotional and material resources, but they are undervalued by our conventional European outlook (as the bearers of unique and unrepeatable forms and culture).<sup>42</sup>

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991 also found damning statistics about child welfare and child removals. These very same statistics were also used by SNAICC in their call for the *Inquiry*: '43 out of the 99 adults who died in custody had been removed or separated from their families and been in some form of children's institution'.<sup>43</sup> All of these reports and statistics added to the growing body of evidence not only used by SNAICC but also other sympathetic groups to pressure for something to be done about this unrelenting problem.

Intrinsic to the fight Aboriginal people have staged is the support that non-Indigenous people have offered. At any time, supporters have been found within political parties, media, universities, and other spheres of Australian life. In fact, it is a study in community activism to recognise the actions of non-Aboriginal people that lay behind every right or step Aborigines have gained. These are increasingly being outlined in autobiographies and historical texts such as Jack Horner's biography on Bill Ferguson; *Invasion to Embassy* by Goodall and *Citizens*

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<sup>40</sup> Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 'Never Again...Break the Chains'.

<sup>41</sup> C. Choo, *Aboriginal Child Poverty* (Melbourne: Brotherhood of St Lawrence, sponsored by SNAICC, 1990), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>43</sup> N. D'Souza, 'Arguments for National Legislation', 2.

*without Rights* by Chesterman and Galligan. While many non-Aboriginal people have often failed to ask Aborigines what they want, good will and best interest have often been present.

### **The Inquiry**

*The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* was established in 1995 by the then Federal Attorney General, the Hon. Michael Lavarch MP. On 11 May 1995, the question of past and present practices of separation of Indigenous children from their families was referred to the HREOC. The *Inquiry* was allocated a budget of \$1.5 million over two years, reporting to the Attorney General by December 1996. On the 2 August 1995, the terms of reference were extended to include a new term of reference (c) requesting advice on principles relevant to compensation for people affected by separation. On the 24 November 1996, the reporting date was extended to 31 March 1997.<sup>44</sup>

The terms of reference required HREOC to:

- (a) trace the past laws, practices and policies which resulted in the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families by compulsion, duress or undue influence, and the effects of those laws, practices and policies;
- (b) examine the adequacy of and the need for any changes in current laws, practices and policies relating to services and procedures currently available to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were affected by the separation under compulsion, duress or undue influence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, including but not limited to current laws, practices and policies relating to access to individual and family records and to other forms of assistance towards locating and reunifying families;
- (c) examine the principles relevant to determining the justification for compensation for persons or communities affected by such separations;
- (d) examine current laws, practices and policies with respect to the placement and care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and advise on any changes required taking into account the principle of self-determination by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>45</sup>

Originally, the Federal Labor Government led by Paul Keating and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Robert Tickner, established the *Inquiry*. It was the fruition of years of lobbying effort by Aboriginal people and the attendance of Robert Tickner to the 1994 Going

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<sup>44</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, i.



Home Conference. The federal government also hoped the *Inquiry* would limit the number of personal compensation cases being brought before the courts by ‘removed Aborigines’. Some concern existed that the *Inquiry* was funded a mere \$1.5 million in comparison to the Royal Commission in Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which received \$30 million for a three-year investigation.<sup>46</sup>

The Labor Party lost the federal election in 1996 leading to a new Attorney General, Daryl Williams becoming appointed by the new Liberal/National Coalition Government. Under the new government, funding to HREOC itself was cut by around \$45 million.

The terms of reference asked that the Commission ‘consult widely among the Australian community, in particular with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with relevant non-government organisations and with relevant federal, state and territory authorities’.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, the *Inquiry* held hearings in every capital city and many regional and smaller centres. Unfortunately, due to the severe financial constraints, the *Inquiry* was unable to hold hearings in every place where Indigenous people wanted to give evidence.

In each state, the Commission appointed an Indigenous woman as a Co-Commissioner and made use of an Indigenous Advisory Council constituted from all the major regions of Australia. The Council met on seven occasions about the *Inquiry* including considering the draft report, providing comments on its recommendations. The Council members included Annette Peardon, Brian Butler, Yami Lester, Irene Stainton, Floyd Chermiside, Barbara Cummings, Grant Dradge, Carol Kendall, Lola McNaughton, Isabel Coe, Peter Rotimah, Nigel D’Souza, Maureen Abbott, Margaret Ah Kee, Bill Lowah, Matilda House, and Jim Wright.

The terms of reference (a) and (b) required the telling of many complex and unconscionable personal stories. These stories have been rarely heard before and caused a great deal of suffering and distress to the witnesses to tell. HREOC and the *Inquiry* based their actions on a belief that reconciliation between Aborigines and other Australians requires listening ‘with an open heart and mind to the stories of what has happened in the past’<sup>48</sup>. The Commission employed an Indigenous social worker during the *Inquiry* who provided support to witnesses before and during their evidence. The Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University and Link-Up offered follow-up counselling.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, i.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 3.

### ***The Bringing Them Home Report***

To address the four Terms of References the *Bringing Them Home Report* is split into six parts. Under each of the six parts of the report, there are up to eight chapters exploring that subject area. The *Inquiry* makes 54 recommendations based upon these subject areas. In order to fully respond to each of the terms of reference, the Commission was required to fully explore some of the terms used in the terms of reference document. These included the terms ‘compulsion’, ‘duress’, ‘undue influence’, ‘justification’, ‘family’, ‘effects’, ‘services’, and ‘procedures available’, as well as principles justifying compensation and current placement and care.

Part one of the report is the Introduction. In this part, a description of the *Inquiry* is made. This includes statements about the predominant themes of grief and loss in the report. The words ‘compulsion’, ‘duress’, and ‘undue influence’ are defined. They introduce the term ‘forcible removal’, which is used in the report to contrast with those removals that were ‘truly voluntary, at least on the part of parents who relinquished their children, or where the child was orphaned and there was no alternative Indigenous carer to step in’.<sup>50</sup> As with all the report, quotations from personal submissions are interspersed with the rest of the text to illustrate the findings made by the Commission.

Part two of the report is entitled Tracing the History in which alongside a national overview of removals, there are state-by-state examinations of the removal of children. Chapter 2 briefly outlines the national background and thinking behind those laws, practices and policies. This chapter also traces broad trends in policy and social thought. They conclude arguing that:

Between one in three and one in 10 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970....

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).<sup>51</sup>

Part three is entitled Consequences of Removal. This section completes the requirements of the term of reference (a). The chapters include discussions of the children’s experiences including placements concluding ‘one in 10 boys and three in 10 girls allege they were sexually abused in a foster placement or placements’.<sup>52</sup> This section includes discussion also on the effects of removal including community displacement and what ‘going home’ is like.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Part four, Reparation, is made up of Chapter 13 on ‘Grounds for Reparation’ and Chapter 14 on ‘Making Reparation’. These chapters examine the grounds for reparation, international human rights guarantees against repetition, acknowledgement, and apology. This part of the report addresses the third term of reference. They premise their debate and recommendations in this part on the premise that:

Any legal consideration of a claim of compensation there are two steps. First a wrong (or wrongs) is identified. Second the harm to the victim is identified and ‘measured’ to the best of the court’s (or other decision-maker’s) ability using established principles.<sup>53</sup>

The challenge of this part of the *Inquiry* is the portrayal of past actions and deeds done by governments and others that, while requiring examination, must not be evaluated by contemporary values. As such, the report examines the past laws, practices and policies with the view that even though there was never a singular set of values at work, there was two broad historical periods during which most removals occurred.

1. The period of segregation commencing as early as perhaps the mid-nineteenth century.
2. The second period they have identified as the assimilation period dating from circa 1937.<sup>54</sup>

As discussed earlier, both of these sections are considered in this thesis. The major data of the thesis though use the narratives of people’s experiences, particularly during the assimilation period, to talk about the content examined in Chapter 13 of the *Bringing Them Home Report*. This chapter describes colonial legal standards; deprivation of liberty; administrative removal powers; deprivation of parental rights; abuses of power, breaches of guardianship duties; and international human rights provisions. The section describing the breaches of guardianship duties includes an examination of the fiduciary relationship between the removed child and the Protector or Protection Board who held guardianship over that child. The agents or delegates of the state as well as missions, church institutions, foster carers, and ‘employers’ committed breaches of fiduciary duties.

1. They failed to provide contemporary standards of care to Indigenous children when such standards of care were provided to non-Indigenous children in similar circumstances.
2. They failed to protect the children from harm.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 250.

3. They failed to involve Indigenous parents in decision-making about their children.<sup>55</sup>

Chapter 14 is crucial to findings of the *Inquiry* because it holds recommendation four, which suggests the needs and processes for reparation, and recommendation five, which recommends that all Australian Parliaments:

1. officially acknowledge the responsibility of their predecessors for the laws, policies and practices of forcible removal
2. negotiate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission a form of words for official apologies to Indigenous individuals, families and communities and extend those apologies with wide and culturally appropriate publicity.<sup>56</sup>

Many parts of the report are important for contextualising the history of the lives of women in this thesis. While Part Five and Six will not be discussed here, it should be noted that they discuss the response of government and some possible strategies for responding to those damaged by removal. The *Inquiry* also examined the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at the time of *Inquiry* and those findings are discussed in Part Six of the Report.

### **Inquiry Submissions and Evidence**

The Commission collected evidence in a number of ways. The first was through a survey of the literature available in the areas of each of the terms of reference. The second was through hearings held in every capital city and many other centres. In these hearings, ‘public evidence was taken from Indigenous organisations and individuals, state and territory government representatives, church representatives, other non-government agencies, former mission and government employees and individual members of the community’.<sup>57</sup> Some evidence was taken in private from individuals affected by the removals whether as victims, other family members, or adoptive parents.

The third way the evidence was collected was through written submissions. In total, 777 individuals and organisations provided evidence or a submission of which 535 were Indigenous people who spoke about their experiences of the removal policies. There was also testimony gathered by organisations such as the WA Aboriginal Legal Service, who collected more than 600 testimonies. The HREOC President, Sir Ronald Wilson, and the Aboriginal and Torres

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 287.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 19.

Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, conducted the hearings with the assistance of Chris Sidoti, Federal Human Rights Commissioner.

Evidence presented before the *Inquiry* was not tested as in a courtroom because an Inquiry structure does not have that capacity. In some instances, accounts could not be supported by evidence in records or elsewhere and had to withstand scrutiny on their own:

We carefully report what we have heard so that the community generally will know the different perspectives on what has occurred. We also sought out independent sources where possible and include them in this report. We have ensured that our findings, conclusions and recommendations are supported by the overwhelming weight of the evidence.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated the backdrop to the removals that are the focus for this thesis. As it has been explored here, it is the premise of this thesis that over the time of the colonising/invasion of what we now know as Australia, Aboriginal people have been physically moved, their lives interfered with and their children taken and/or killed. The process of ‘assimilation’ required the removal of the children from their families and communities of origin.<sup>59</sup> Hence, in this chapter, both the actions of the removal of bodies and the change of cultures as two unique processes that were required to bring about the group of women were examined. However, it was shown that this was never carried out without resistance from both within and outside of the Australian Aboriginal communities. The final part of this chapter was the examination of the *Inquiry into Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* and its resulting report *Bringing Them Home*. This was presented as it is the first time the Australian Government took a long, serious look at the results of the policies of removal implemented across the Australian continent and through one of the *Inquiry*’s recommendations created the collection of Stolen Generations narratives that were accessed in the National Library of Australia for this thesis.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4: SETTING THE SCENE: THEORY

Chapter 2 examined the laws and policies that led to the removal of Aboriginal children leading to the existence of the group of women examined in this thesis. In this chapter, the focus is firstly to look at the studies of child removals carried out by social researchers before the *Inquiry* commenced and their construction of a contradictory argument to that one posited in the public debate around the *National Inquiry*, that the wider Australian peoples did not know the removals were occurring. The chapter then examines the way that black women and, more specifically, Australian Aboriginal women are constructed internationally and in Australian studies. Finally, discussions since the *Bringing Them Home Report* on listening and hearing the testimonies shared in the *Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (the *Inquiry*) are examined and theorised.<sup>1</sup>

### Studies of Child Removals

The *Inquiry* was intended to collect testimony to highlight the reality of child removals and in so doing affirming their occurrence as part of Australia's history. Some scholars argued at the time, that there was widespread ignorance that these removals had occurred.<sup>2</sup> Others, like Attwood, argued in the debate surrounding the *Inquiry* that there had been an awareness of the removals.<sup>3</sup> This section examines the discussion of removals that was beginning before the *Inquiry*. Attwood argues that writing in autobiography and historical inquiry has particularly developed the area of Stolen Generations since the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Removals were understood to sit within the core of the colonisation process and hence this understanding is central to conceptualising how identities were disrupted.

There are a number of different approaches to the examination of child removals. Some works, not covered here comprehensively, discuss removals in the context of a region's colonisation process.<sup>5</sup> All of these recognise that removals have occurred and that strategies to reduce or stop removals must occur.

Writers like O'Connor have contributed to the knowledge base about the treatment of Aboriginal children from a juvenile justice perspective. The two papers listed here look at the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> D. Mellor, 'Bringing Them Home: Point of Departure', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* no. 24 (2002): 7–10.

<sup>3</sup> S. Gigliotti, 'Unspeakable Pasts as Limit Events: The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Stolen Generations', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49 (2003): 164–181.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>5</sup> This included Summerlad 1976; Gregory 1982; Boss 1981; Lippman 1991; Collard 1991; Parbury 1999.

impact of the systems of removal in QLD.<sup>6</sup> The first item is a paper developed for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, arguing that QLD authorities have treated Aboriginal young people harshly. In the second article, O'Connor states 'Child welfare practices were a central strategy in the attempted eradication of traditional culture, and the "resocialisation" and assimilation of Aboriginal children'.<sup>7</sup> He outlines the history of child removals in QLD including the separation of children from their parents as the gendered process of splitting siblings of the opposite sex. He breaks removals into two phases. The first he suggests occurred with the removal of children from their parents 'simply because their parents were Aboriginal'.<sup>8</sup> This, he argues, led to a separate system for the welfare management of Aboriginal children particularly on missions and reserves and guardianship of Aboriginal children was predominantly held by the relevant government agency. The second phase of removals, he proposes, commenced in the 1960s, when the guardianship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was returned to their parents and the welfare of all children in the state of QLD came under new legislation and was administered by the one government agency.

O'Connor continues to argue that while some of the management processes of Aboriginal children, such as proposing the implementation of the Child Placement Principle have occurred, the outcomes for Aboriginal young people largely remain the same. O'Connor argues that those outcomes include overrepresentation in corrective order numbers, particularly in the incarceration numbers. In 1992, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth under care and control orders comprised 42.4 per cent of all youth under care and control orders although they only make up less than 4 per cent of the persons less than 17 years of age in QLD. On 31 May 1991, 59.7 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth under a juvenile corrective order for offending were under a care and control order; 40.3 per cent were under supervision. In contrast, for non-Aboriginal children, the proportions were 35.1 per cent in care and control, and 64.9 per cent on supervision.<sup>9</sup>

O'Connor concludes strongly that at the time of his article, we were experiencing the third phase of removals, the phase in which children are removed as a result of their criminality; their own behaviour. Each of the three phases has been rendered unproblematic because for each of the three phases, the dominant professional and societal discourse explained its necessity. In the first phase, the backwardness and inferiority in all ways of Aborigines themselves required

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<sup>6</sup> I. O'Connor, *The Impact of Queensland's Family and Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Legislation, Policy and Practice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Children*, research paper for Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody November (unpublished, 1990); I. O'Connor, 'The New Removals: Aboriginal Youth in the Queensland Juvenile Justice System', *International Social Work* no. 37 (1994): 197–212.

<sup>7</sup> I O'Connor, 'The New Removals', 197.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 206.

removals. In O'Connor's second phase, removals were required because children were deemed to be in neglect. Unfortunately for Aboriginal families experiencing the outcomes of colonisation including poverty and social alienation, the construction of neglect was within a value-laden framework reinforced by white middle-class concepts of appropriate living standards in form and nature and the parenting practices thus leading to the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and cultures. O'Connor argues that with the recognition of the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal families and the taking up understandings of the social and economic costs of colonisation now the Aboriginal child's behaviour itself is deemed problematic and thus the dominant discourse responds to argue that the misbehaving child must be managed to take responsibility for their misbehaviour.<sup>10</sup>

Turning to literature with a broader focus on Aborigines rather than just children, Chesterman and Galligan examine Aborigines and their relative citizenship or lack thereof and what changes have occurred.<sup>11</sup> As they describe it, they write 'the institutional story of how Aboriginal peoples were subjected to being ruled but were denied a store of citizenship rights and entitlements; how they were treated as citizens without rights in their own land'.<sup>12</sup> What is important in this text is that they, by self-definition, tell only the institutional version of this story; they do not present it as an Aboriginal story. It is a version of what other Australians did to Aboriginal Australians. This thesis serves to present the story of what this was like from the perspectives of people who had these policies implemented against them, irrespective of their own definition of Aboriginality. This is a crucial positioning taken up in this thesis. This challenges the position of assuming that all the scholars of these stories are members of the dominant population in Australia: the white people. The aim is to challenge Moreton-Robinson's 'omni-present norm of whiteness'.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Importance of Gender in the Analysis of the Stolen Generations**

The works discussed below document the gender-determined expectations, labour developments and women's role in resistance. These aspects are important in understanding the lives of the women documented in this thesis. Goodall's *Invasion to Embassy* provides us with an exemplary overview of the treatment of Aborigines in NSW. She addresses the area of land in Aboriginal politics and in a historical survey of this topic, explores the role and place of women in areas such as land responsibilities, employment, and knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 209–210.

<sup>11</sup> Chesterman and Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights*.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>13</sup> A. Moreton-Robinson, 'Troubling Business: Difference and Whiteness Within Feminism', *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, no. 33 (2000a): 343–352.

<sup>14</sup> Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*.



The area of domestic service has also received significant attention from historians.<sup>15</sup> Predominantly, these focus on the lives of female children and young women; many of whom were forcibly removed from their families. These stories are crucial to a full exposure and understanding of Aboriginal women's experiences. Sabbioni, an Aboriginal woman, described Aboriginal women's lives when working as domestics in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> This work is important to this literature review because it shows a way of looking at the lives of Aboriginal women from their viewpoint, valuing their perceptions of life. The particular value of this article is that it positions the reader as an Aborigine. Some of the stories are from the author's grandmother's life. Sabbioni concludes the article by saying that 'the shared history of Aboriginals is unparalleled by any group within Australia and has earned Aboriginal women our status as the most disadvantaged and oppressed labour earning group in Australian history'.<sup>17</sup>

The Molding of Menials was also a study that was carried out prior to the *Inquiry* being completed.<sup>18</sup> The authors argue that Aborigines were perceived to require only basic literacy and numeracy skills because the girls were training to be domestic servants and the boys to be farm labourers in the case of boys. Underlying this account is the story of differing treatment in removals and labour. Where Aborigines lived on settlements, children were forced to live in sex-segregated dormitories. Children as young as nine, were sent out to work in white-owned households and farms. The authors also address the resistance Aboriginal women carried out against their oppressors, although emphasising that such resistance came at a mighty cost to their safety and being able to raise their own children.

Haebich has contributed a number of important and comprehensive texts to the area of child removals. Prior to the *Inquiry*, she published *For Their Own Good*, discussing removals in SA. In 2000, she published *Broken Circles*, examining pressure on families between the years 1800 and 2000. Her work brings together many diverse references and ties many references that had not been drawn together before.<sup>19</sup>

While the work of these historians and other writers have been compassionate to the perspectives, except for Sabbioni, they are clearly not writing utilising Aboriginal perspectives and therefore they are limited to not speaking from that position. Their work has provided

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<sup>15</sup> Walden 1995; Hankins 1982; Haskins 1998, 1999, 2000; Murray 1999; Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', in *Aboriginal Workers. Special Issue of Labour History*, ed. K. Saunders, A. McGrath and J. Huggins 69 (Sydney, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1995): 75–101.

<sup>16</sup> J. Sabbioni, 'I Hate Working for White People', *Hecate* 19, no. 2 (1993): 7–29.

<sup>17</sup> Sabbioni, 1993, 10.

<sup>18</sup> J. Scott and R. Evans, 'The Molding of Menials: The Making of the Aboriginal Female Domestic Servant in Early Twentieth Century Queensland', *Hecate* 22, no. 1 (1996): 139–158.

<sup>19</sup> Haebich, *For Their Own Good* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1988); Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800–2000*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000.

valuable data to address the issue of child removal and labour exploitation but appear to lack the gender-specific focus so central to this thesis.

Another body of work uses the insights of the second wave feminist movement in the analysis of relationships between Aboriginal people and the wider society. This is an area of great contention and has been since the 1970s. There is an active and sometimes acrimonious debate about the relevance of feminism to Aboriginal women in Australia and black women in Britain and the US and the actual relationships between white feminists and women of colour. For instance, Paisley approaches the topic of Aboriginal child removals from the perspective of the relationship between non-Aboriginal women feminists and issues that involve Aboriginal people and their rights. Her particular interest has been the period between 1919 and 1939. She argues that non-Aboriginal women have argued that Aborigines were only different due to cultural reasons. She also suggests that non-Aboriginal feminist activists such as Mary Bennett fought extensively in the period mentioned for better conditions for Aboriginal women. However, Paisley does not linger long enough to investigate the Aboriginal women's view of those activists Paisley represents.<sup>20</sup> Holland also reinforces this focus.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1980s, Barrett and McIntosh examined the development of socialist-feminist theory in British feminism in regard to the place of black women.<sup>22</sup> They concluded that white women, privileged by their class and race, had developed much of the feminist literature in Britain. The authors argue that little had been done to re-think their own theory in ways that incorporate black women's thought. Instead, white women have supported the campaigns black women waged. Importantly, they identify that the current dominant feminist ideological construction[s] of women render black invisible. White feminists appear to assume that their opinions/theories will apply to all women: 'White feminists do not bother to say how their arguments about pensions, or pornography, or poetry, would apply to women of different ethnic origin; they do not say whether, or how, a history of racism would give a different meaning to these things'.<sup>23</sup>

Ramazanoglu went further than Barrett and McIntosh in arguing that that black women have criticised the 'crushing, institutionalised racism which is totally and deeply entrenched' ways of

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<sup>20</sup> Paisley, *Loving Protection? Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights 1919–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Paisley, 'Feminist Challenges to White Australia, 1900–1930s', in *Sex, Power and Justice: Historical Perspectives on Law in Australia*, ed. D. Kirkby (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995); Paisley, 'White Women in the Field: Feminism, Cultural Relativism and Aboriginal Rights, 1920–1937', *Journal of Australian Studies* no. 52 (1997): 113–123; Paisley, 'Race and Remembrance: Contesting Aboriginal Child Removal in the Inter-War Years', *Australian Humanities Review* no. 8 (1997–1998): 1–7, <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-November-1997/paisley.html>; Paisley, 'The Making and Unmaking of White Feminist Privilege', *JAS: Australia's Public Intellectual Forum* 68 (2001): 209–215, 243–244.

<sup>21</sup> Holland, 'Post-War Reformers', 20–29.

<sup>22</sup> M. Barrett and M. McIntosh, 'Ethnocentrism and Socialist-Feminist Theory', *Feminist Review* no. 20 (1985): 23–24.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

thinking and being.<sup>24</sup> In addition, she contends that a concept difficult for non-black feminists to understand is the real political interests that black women have in common with black men.<sup>25</sup> This point is crucial to this thesis both because colonisation happened to the whole Aboriginal community in Australia, as did the removal of Aboriginal children. Aboriginal parents, mother and fathers, lost their children and thus there are times where Aboriginal women and men will stand together, as do Stolen Generations people of both genders.

Bhavnani and Coulson argued that not only must the ideas of black women become central to feminism, and not just a peripheral concern, but gender identities must be conceptualised as non-fixed and potentially numerous in form. Sometimes this may lead to a conflict of interest between groups of women but to comprehensively consider racism and gender identity requires a transformation of feminism. Feminism ought to be a mix of political theory and practice, which fights for the freedom of all women.<sup>26</sup>

In the US, the prominent black feminist Bell hooks argued that feminism did not emerge in the US from those women most victimised by sexist oppression, that is, poor women and women of colour: 'White women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experience of women as a collective group'. She argues that feminist writings reflect white supremacy.

hooks says that some black women have attempted to be in the feminist movement but many white women have been unprepared to change their focus to include black women's priorities. Sisterhood for white feminism did not require them to surrender allegiance to race, class and sexual preference. Unfortunately, she argues, women have been denied by feminism of an existence outside that determined by sexuality. Feminism has not been able to challenge sexist oppression and in her 2000 work, she asks exactly what could equality with men mean if men themselves are not equal to each other and accept that as the status quo.<sup>27</sup>

In her 1989 work 'Black Women and Feminism', hooks continues her exploration of feminism's relevance for black women. In a situation echoing Australian race politics, hooks say that some black women had accepted a subordinate role to black men 'for the good of the

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<sup>24</sup> C. Ramazanoglu, 'Ethnocentrism and Socialist-Feminist Theory: A Response to Barrett and McIntosh', *Feminist Review* no. 22 (1986): 84.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> K. Bhavnani and M. Coulson, 'Transforming Socialist—Feminism: The Challenge of Racism', *Feminist Review* no. 23 (1986): 81–93.

<sup>27</sup> B. hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

race'.<sup>28</sup> Since the end of the civil rights movement, though, they have had to accept that the majority of black women support and accept patriarchy. Thus, many women chose to not join the feminist movement due to a lack of desire to fight sexism in the face of racism.

Hill Collins adds to the dialogue on black women and feminism. She argues that we must examine the links between sexuality and power. Those links interlock race, gender and class oppression. African-American sexuality has been caste as deviant at a person/individual level and at a societal level. Thus, their sexuality has become a 'domain of restriction and repression enacted through race, class and gender oppression'.<sup>29</sup>

Bulbeck attempts an analysis of the dialogue between white feminism and Indigenous women. Her primary aim in this paper is to show that 'white feminism can be enriched by confrontation with the experiences and claims of non-western women, there are also commonalities in the position of women, as women, across Australia and the globe'.<sup>30</sup> In discussing Aboriginal women, she argues that they have chosen to throw their lot in with Aboriginal men but to do so has meant that differences between them have been repressed and some interests take a back seat. Aboriginal women have asserted they have equality with Aboriginal men, hence there is no requirement to become part of a feminist coalition. She describes the colonisation of Australia as a history that saw some women partnered with controllers and exploiters, while others were controlled and exploited. Very often, this division was imbued with notions of colour and racism: 'Where Aboriginal women admit that male dominance has shaped their lives, all agree that racism is the key oppression'.<sup>31</sup> Two other reasons given for the alliance with Aboriginal men are the racism and irrelevance of the white women's movement and the need for the alliance with Aboriginal men. Thompson's contribution to this debate about diversity and feminism is to argue that to theorise race, some have suggested that male supremacy does not exist. She argues that feminism's primary argument must be against male supremacy. Women continue to fight for human status where women's needs come in conflict with men's interests. The point is that women 'experience male domination differently, depending on where they are situated in relation to race, class, or any other social location'.<sup>32</sup>

Thompson contends that the problem between people of colour and feminism occurs when feminist insight fails or black women accuse 'feminism' itself of racism. Feminism, to remain

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<sup>28</sup> B hooks, 'Black Women and Feminism', in *Feminist Frontiers II: Rethinking Sex, Gender, and Society*, ed. L. Richardson and V. Taylor (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989): 445.

<sup>29</sup> P. H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (London: Routledge, 1990): 3.

<sup>30</sup> C. Bulbeck, 'The Dialogue between White Feminism and Indigenous Women', *Lila 6: Women and Culture Asia-Pacific Women's Studies Journal* (1996): 38.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> D. Thompson, *Radical Feminism Today* (London: Sage Publications, 2001): 93.

alive, must develop an anti-racist political stance. This must be developed using more than a reiteration of what black women say. It must incorporate an account of male supremacy and domination. It must not just be an inclusion of black women. Middle and upper class women do not own feminism, thus it is a question of how other women want to join the political and moral struggle feminism could be.

She also addresses the struggle of Aboriginal women in *Radical Feminism Today*, saying in response to claims made by Aboriginal women against feminism being divisive, that antagonisms between Aboriginal men and women are not the consequence of feminism, but the behaviour of the men themselves: 'Aboriginal men do not refrain from violence towards women and children just because they are Aboriginal'.<sup>33</sup> Aboriginal women though argue strongly that feminism will not allow them to stand with their men against racism. Thompson contends that Aboriginal women must understand that this struggle against racism is also a struggle against male supremacy, because the colonisation of Australia was an act of white supremacy. White women may have been complicit in some of the acts that made up colonisation but they have never had the power to 'colonise and subdue power'.<sup>34</sup>

Jebb and Haebich's examination of gender relations on Australian frontiers is useful to this thesis for its perceptions around Aboriginal women and the frontier men. They describe two phases of exploitation of Aboriginal people as colonisation occurred. Phase one was the act of violent encounters with the aim of depopulating land of Aboriginal people and re-populating it with non-Aboriginal people. The second phase of exploitation is when Aboriginal people were then forced into the various primary industries requiring cheap labour. Some argue this is perhaps how Aborigines managed to survive the colonisation process.<sup>35</sup>

With the assistance of Godden (1979), Lake (1981), Grimshaw (1985), and Hunt (1986), Jebb and Haebich argue that despite common perceptions, there were women on the frontiers. In the case of Aboriginal women, they argue, they were not really perceived as women by early historians. Aborigines have only been placed in history more accurately since the 1970s. Part of the story now has been told about the sexual misuse and abuse of Aboriginal women and they are always underpinned though by stereotypes, racism, Social Darwinism, and a lack of acknowledgement of their humanity.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>35</sup> M. A. Jebb and A. Haebich, 'Chapter 2: Across the Great Divide: Gender Relations on Australian Frontiers', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. K. Saunders and R. Evans (Sydney: Harcourt, 1992): 20–41.

Jebb and Haebich argue that the Australian nation built a relationship, based on a construction of 'Aboriginal gender relations as necessarily immoral'.<sup>36</sup> Indicators such as childhood marriages, polygamy, Aboriginal men's ownership of Aboriginal women, and Aboriginal women's promiscuity were taken as measures of Aboriginal culture but more particularly of Aboriginal women themselves. Jebb and Haebich agree with Ann McGrath in arguing that work must be done to challenge the historical construction of Aboriginal women as 'inherently amoral automatons, incapable of feelings'.<sup>37</sup>

While feminism has been a contentious issue between black and white feminists, concepts of gender and feminist analysis have been important in the debate over Aboriginal women's history, experience and identity. A significant contribution in the examination of Aboriginal child removals was Heather Goodall's 1990, publication, 'Saving the Children: Gender and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Children in NSW 1788 to 1990' in the *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*. In this article, Goodall argues that systems of welfare and corrections operate in a 'gendered' way, thus differently for girls and for boys. Hence, policy for Aboriginal children became a result of interacting anxieties about race and gender, labour market needs and pre-existing administrative precedents. She argues that between the years of 1900 and 1940, Aboriginal girls appear to have 'borne the heaviest impact from interventionist policies which removed Aboriginal children from their communities'.<sup>38</sup>

Goodall argues that a proportion of the focus on young Aboriginal females was due to perceptions about the sexuality of Aboriginal and particularly 'part-Aboriginal' women. The authorities appeared to be very concerned with managing the morality of Aboriginal people. For example, in NSW in 1915, legislation was passed to reduce the Aboriginal birth rate by removing girls approaching the age of puberty from their communities: 'To 1921, 81% of the children removed were female and perhaps up to 68% were over 12 years old'.<sup>39</sup>

Goodall's 'Saving the Children' article is a continuation of her earlier analysis of the interaction between the state of NSW and Aboriginal girls/women/mothers and her argument that NSW policies were gendered policies. She argues that gendered policy occurs:

- when it seeks to impose a particular order of roles for and relations between its subjects depending on their sex
- and/or when it seeks to use gender roles and relations to achieve its aims

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Goodall, '“Saving the Children”: Gender and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Children in NSW 1788–1990', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* 2, no. 44, (1990): 6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 7.

- and/or when different methods of achieving policy goals are manifested according to whether it was being implemented on men or women.<sup>40</sup>

She argues that the public representation of Aboriginal women has always been negative, with Aboriginal women portrayed as dangerous, corrupting and needing to be overridden and controlled. Intrinsic to these beliefs were assumptions and stereotypes about Aboriginal women's sexual activity, namely that they were loose and were liable to produce a group of people nobody wanted, that is, 'half-castes'. The authorities charged with making policy to control Aboriginal people were unaware of the roles Aboriginal women had fulfilled in traditional society. This is not to say that women suffered more in the processes of Australia's colonisation than males, but that their experiences and management were at the very least, shaped by gender.

Since the *Inquiry*, there have been a number of studies that examined child removals that explore the themes of gender, labour and the construction of Aboriginal identity by others, and a number of these are represented in this section of the literature. In the feminist journal *Hecate*, Francesca Bartlett published an article entitled 'Clean, white girls: Assimilation and women's work', in which she explores the idea of cleanliness and sin. She argues, 'to be dirty was a moral, social and economic sin'.<sup>41</sup> The nub of Bartlett's analysis of assimilation is that it aimed to 'clean up' the Aboriginal people and remove all traces of their 'dirty' race. This was with a view to joining the new 'clean' race.<sup>42</sup> This argument resonates strongly with the stories told by Aboriginal women about their own relationships with their colour and the negative images give to them by others.

Haskins has focused on Aboriginal domestic servants with her article 'On the Doorstep: Aboriginal Domestic Service as a Contact'. Her major argument in this article is that the aim was of assimilation was not the "assimilation" of Aboriginal women into mainstream Australian society, as is often assumed, but rather at their containment, incarceration and consignment to oblivion'.<sup>43</sup> Haskins presents an examination of the life of 'Jane King' and raises the issue of how to accurately name both 'Jane' and her employer 'Ming'. The accurate naming of these women is important to this thesis as Haskins questions how naming and story-

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<sup>40</sup> Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', in *Aboriginal Workers. Special Issue of Labour History*, ed. K. Saunders, A. McGrath and J. Huggins 69 (Sydney: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1995): 76.

<sup>41</sup> F. Bartlett, 'Clean, White Girls: Assimilation and Women's Work', *Hecate* 25, no. 1 (1999): 10–38, (InfoTrackWeb: Expanded Academic ASAP IntlEd.): 12.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Haskins, 'On the Doorstep: Aboriginal Domestic Service as a 'Contact Zone'', *Australian Feminist Studies* 16, no. 34 (2001): 13–25.

telling reaffirms the identity created for the women by oppressors (the creators of the assimilation project or colonising project) or reveals their personal story.

This survey of the work in this area illustrates the theorising and thinking around diversity, feminism and women, which serve as the foundations of the analysis of women's lives carried out in this thesis. Aboriginal women deserve recognition and validation of their lived culture, their lives as mothers, and as the mothers of Stolen Generations children; their intellectual lives and relationships to all other Australians whether they are Aboriginal or Stolen Generations men or white women or men.

### ***After the Bringing Them Home Report***

Since 1997 when the *Bringing Them Home Report* was published, many authors have considered the value of story-telling in the *Bringing Them Home Report*. Delgado, writing from within the legal field, discusses the relevance of story-telling both to the teller and the listener. In terms of majority race listeners, Delgado argues, members of the majority race need to be challenged around their ideas of reality. Many majority race members may believe that the reality they experience is a fixed concept shared by all people. By exposure to counter stories, people can lessen that occurring: 'Listening to stories makes the adjustment to further stories easier; one acquires the ability to see the world through other's eyes'.<sup>44</sup> Story-telling has the ability to challenge 'the bundle of pre-suppositions, received wisdoms and shared understandings' we know as our mindset.<sup>45</sup> Through story-telling, people can both further their healing and come to comprehend how they came to be where they are. It also allows an understanding of 'the facts of their own historic oppression—with the violence, murder, deceit, co-optation and connivance that have caused their desperate state'.<sup>46</sup>

In 'The Making and Unmaking of White Feminist Privilege', Paisley also posits that stories can serve as important conduits via which listeners can achieve new forms of consciousness. She argues that personal stories do not exist just as words; they can serve as a way to access previously subjugated knowledge and present previously misunderstood counter-readings of dominant white discourse. They can be a way through to new links, knowledge and experience.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> R. Delgado, 'Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative', *Michigan Law Review* no. 87 (1989): 2439.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 2413.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 2437.

<sup>47</sup> Paisley, 'The Making and Unmaking of White Feminist Privilege', 209–215 and 243–244.



Gillian Whitlock's article changes the focus in this discussion slightly as she examines the relationship between the removed person's testimony and the listener/reader. The article explores that position taken by the colonisers in the colonising project, including where the individuals have not perceived themselves as colonisers. She argues the Stolen Generations narratives force upon the listener a need to reflect upon themselves, upon their personal responsibility, and any implications there are for them resulting from the traumatising events. In the end, she contends, the process of examining the removal stories will be best achieved if there is no one cast as the big, bad 'Other' responsible for all the bad experiences of the removed.<sup>48</sup>

Fundamental to the analysis of the *Bringing Them Home Report* is an examination of the way removal stories are treated. Van Toorn's article 'Tactical History Business' examines the commodification or otherwise of the Stolen Children's stories. She contends that there is a chance that certain stories could be taken as representative, thus shutting out others. Alongside this, there is some potential for witnesses to become exploited and deprived of privacy. In spite of these fears, Van Toorn argues that the stories ought to be disseminated so that the healing occurs and those individuals and their families who experienced removal, obtain the services they require.<sup>49</sup>

Sacha Gibbons also contributes to this area of discussion with her essay, 'Writing through Trauma: Ruby Langford's Bundjalung People'.<sup>50</sup> In this article, Gibbons suggests that perhaps we might call the period during the 1990s as the 'age of testimony'.<sup>51</sup> She argues that what the testimony given in the *Inquiry*, and also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, did was 'bear witness to the trauma of colonial impact'.<sup>52</sup> She particularly focuses on the way testimonial writing can be shaped by traumatic experiences, and the way in which 'testimonial writing simultaneously employs and disrupts historical and literary modalities'.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note her argument that at a micro-level the collection of unwritten, oral histories can bind together families, communities and individuals, and function when written down to contest official history. She argues these publications lead to a demand for ethical, moral and political considerations to be given to their testimony.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> G. Whitlock, 'In the Second Person: Narrative Transactions in Stolen Generations Testimony', *Biography* 24, no. 1 (2001): 197, (Expanded Academic ASAP Int'lEd, 1–12).

<sup>49</sup> P. Van Toorn, 'Tactical History Business: The Ambivalent Politics of Commodifying the Stolen Generations Stories', *Southerly* Spring–Summer (1999): 252–258, (Expanded Academic ASAP Int'lEd.): 5.

<sup>50</sup> S. Gibbons, 'Writing through Trauma: Ruby Langford's Bundjalung People', *Journal of Australian Studies* December (1999): 64–70, viewed 10 August 2001, [http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/informark/313/552/14770757w2/purl=rc1\\_EIM\\_0\\_A60130075&dyn=](http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/informark/313/552/14770757w2/purl=rc1_EIM_0_A60130075&dyn=).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

Gibbons uses a reading of Ruby Langford's *My Bundjalung People* to explore the issue of writing into text an event experienced by an individual or 'victim'. Gibbons draws our attention to the differences between *traumatic memory* and *narrative memory*. Drawing on the work of Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart she illustrates that traumatic memory functions at an individual level serving no public purpose but operating as a solitary activity, remaining relatively inflexible and invariable. Translating traumatic memory into narrative is quite difficult, but Gibbons argues it can be done through the process of creating testimonials. As Gibbons explains it, the author writes through, or journeys through, trauma. She says writing in this testimonial way helps both the sufferer and their community to work through the process of externalising the trauma so it becomes properly integrated in their lives: 'The reader is witness to a process by which traumatic material is constructed into social narrative and memory'.<sup>55</sup> As stated earlier, traumatic memory resists translation into social narratives and thus social history and in Gibbons's use of Langford's work, she highlights how Langford tussles with this journey. Gibbons highlights such themes and processes as de-familiarisation and re-familiarisation, re-personalisation and resistance to the dominant culture and its acts of colonisation in Langford's work.

Turning her attention to examining further the need to manage traumatic memory, she quotes Dori Laub, who writes that 'the traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of "normal" reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after'.<sup>56</sup> The aim then is to reintegrate this event into the life history of the individual where it has not been integrated before. As Dori Laub suggests, an individual has to be able to externalise the traumatic memory to create a narrative to ultimately be able to create for their own understanding a reading of their memories they can then reintegrate for their own comprehension.<sup>57</sup> Gibbons argues that for this process of re-familiarisation to work for the teller of the narrative, the reader/listener must accept the facts of the testimony as true. The flow-on effect from such processes is 'recovering an effaced Australian history and for reinstating a less disruptive experience of individual, group and national identity'.<sup>58</sup> Gibbons contends that *My Bundjalung People* represents an example of how it is possible to write the previously unwritten history in a way that is truthful and moves traumatic memory into social history. This social history, she advocates, can do more than disrupt our previous understandings but also act to challenge the 'discourses that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>57</sup> S. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> S. Gibbons, 'Writing Through Trauma', 69.

order these representations'.<sup>59</sup> Gibbons' work is highly relevant to this thesis that, in Chapters 7 and 8, utilises a blended oral history methodology to carry out just these tasks of converting individual traumatic memories into social narratives, and disrupting previous schema for understanding the experience of removed women by listening with heart to their stories.

Sue Stanton in 1999 in 'Time For the Truth: Speaking The Unspeakable—Genocide and Apartheid in the "lucky" Country', discusses the content of the stories included in the *Bringing Them Home Report* and Carmel Bird's 1998 book *The Stolen Children—Their Stories* (discussed separately). She questions why it is that some people believe that the personal stories told by Aboriginal people hold little authenticity. She also discusses the reactions many Australians have had to the *Report*, questioning why Australia struggles so much to cope with the information presented in it. She says that 'white Australia must, as a responsible society, share the blame and wear the shame' until it is admitted that these actions taken in the name of "protection" occurred.<sup>60</sup> The history, she argues, lives on in the lives of Indigenous Australians and requires the whole community to listen 'with an open heart and mind to the stories of what happened in the past and, having listened and understood, commits itself to reconciliation'.<sup>61</sup> She argues for an apology to be expressed at a national level to the Stolen Generations, since accomplished in February 2008.

Olubas and Greenwell contribute to this discussion asking whether there is a place for an ethics of listening and an ethic of response.<sup>62</sup> By this they mean, is there a way that people should respond to these narratives both in how they should hear them but also a way to respond? They argue that the *Bringing Them Home* asks its readers to understand the need for reconciliation aimed at healing the pains caused by removals and colonisation. This article also looks at why the removal story is told in the way it is, in the *Bringing Them Home Report*. The authors further question whether the HREOC who ran the *Inquiry* has the capacity to 'give' voice to the 'unauthorised' or 'unprivileged'.<sup>63</sup> This argument is central to this thesis being that the Federal Attorney General and HREOC clearly cannot 'give' voice properly while sitting outside the relevant community imposing their own beliefs.

In 1998, Carmel Bird produced a book in reply to the challenge put in the *Bringing Them Home Report*. She put personal stories of removals together with short commentaries from Sir Ronald

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>60</sup> S. Stanton, 'Time for the Truth: Speaking the Unspeakable—Genocide and Apartheid in the 'lucky' Country', *Australian Humanities Review* July–September, no. 16 (1999), accessed 19 December 2000, <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-July-1999/Stanton.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> B. Olubas and L. Greenwell, 'Re-membling and Taking Up an Ethics of Listening: A Response to Loss and the Maternal in 'The Stolen Children'', *Australian Humanities Review* July (1999).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 3.

Wilson, John Howard, Kim Beazley, and many other social commentators. Interestingly, Bird states in the foreword that, 'the editor hopes it [the book] will be regarded as an apology for the sorrows inflicted by white Australians upon Indigenous Australians for more than 200 years'.<sup>64</sup>

As this section has shown, since the *Inquiry*, there have been a number of articles written discussing the way personal stories of removals were represented and how they should be experienced by readers/listeners/witnesses. As the next section of this chapter will demonstrate, crucial to any reading or telling of these stories is the perspective of Aboriginal women themselves and how they would like to construct the narratives and what is shared.

### **Aboriginal Women's Theorising on Themselves**

A number of Aboriginal women writers are crucial to the development of this thesis. Jackie Huggins is the one enduring and central Aboriginal female writer important to developing this part of the literature review. Huggins has written extensively in the area of Aboriginal history and Aboriginal women's relationship with feminism. Her publications list includes major Australian feminist and historical texts and journals. Huggins has made an unquestionable contribution to this area of research and theoretical development. Through the written word, Huggins has attempted to develop an accurate picture of life surrounding Aboriginal women since colonisation and more actively from the late 1980s onwards. While it is not possible to review all of Jackie Huggins' work here, it is possible to represent some of the major arguments that permeate it.

Huggins has centred her work on the argument that Aboriginal women have contributed greatly to the creation of the 'Australian nation'. She has also strenuously argued that Aboriginal women have kept Aboriginal communities afloat in the face of colonisation and racism. She proposes that while sexism has had a place in the life of Aboriginal women, of primary concern for Aboriginal women is the experience of racism at the hands of the colonisers/invaders.

In 1987, Jackie Huggins wrote 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', arguing that the Women's Liberation movement is irrelevant to Aboriginal women because 'Aboriginal women and men are both fighting for the same thing, regardless of gender differences'.<sup>65</sup> She argued that the white power structure holds back both Aboriginal women and men: 'In other words, the main oppressor is a class society'.<sup>66</sup> Her argument is complicated because she argues patriarchal

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<sup>64</sup> C. Bird (ed.), *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* (NSW: Random House, 1998): Foreword.

<sup>65</sup> J. Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', *Hecate* 13, no. 1 (1987b): 77.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

rule dominates Australian society and that colonisation occurred on a racially imperialistic, not on a sexually imperialistic, basis.<sup>67</sup>

In “‘Firing on in the Mind” Aboriginal Women Domestic Servants in the Inter-War Years’, Huggins examines the life experiences of Aboriginal women domestics during the 1920s and 1930s. She interviews six women saying, ‘their lives depict a life of subjugation and exploitation’.<sup>68</sup> Huggins continues her argument of a racially imperialistic Australia. She contends that the major ingredient of the culture of the colonisers was male dominance and Aborigines have absorbed that orientation. What is interesting about this, and hence crucial to the development of this thesis, are her arguments centred on attention given by theorists to Aboriginal women’s sexuality. She argues historians have comprehensively described the sexual dominance of Aboriginal women by white men, but they have failed to explain the behaviour and motivation of Aboriginal women. They have also overlooked Aboriginal women’s personal and cultural power.<sup>69</sup>

Huggins emphasises the strength of Aboriginal women who continued to support their families in the face of great adversity. She quotes McGrath, saying that the stories of Aboriginal women must be told. Aboriginal women who write historical accounts have a double advantage of being able to tell stories in white and black terms: ‘For then a richer understanding of their reactions and also the mechanisms they evolved to cope with their subordination, will emerge’.<sup>70</sup>

In ‘Aboriginal Women Are Everywhere’, co-written with Heather Goodall, the argument is that in the history of Australia’s development, a eugenics movement focusing on Aboriginal women occurred. Aboriginal women were cast as morally feeble-minded, requiring segregation from non-Aborigines. Aboriginal women were used against their own communities, either by separating them forever or by trying to make them instruments of cultural indoctrination.<sup>71</sup> The emerging women’s movements of the 1970s, they argue, just invited Aboriginal women to join them and did not attempt to recognise their particular experiences particularly of racism: ‘In asking Aboriginal women to stand apart from Aboriginal men, the white women’s movement

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>68</sup> Huggins, “‘Firing on in the Mind”: Aboriginal Women Domestic Servants in the Inter-War Years’, *Hecate* 13, no. 2 (1987a): 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> McGrath, quoted in *ibid*, 22.

<sup>71</sup> Goodall and Huggins, ‘Aboriginal Woman are Everywhere: Contemporary Struggles’, in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. K. Saunders and R. Evans (Sydney: Harcourt, 1992): 399.

was, perhaps unconsciously repeating the attempts made over decades by welfare administration to separate Aboriginal women and use them against their communities'.<sup>72</sup>

Huggins and Goodall argue that governments have ignored Aboriginal women's knowledge of land care, and other parts of Aboriginal business, although Aboriginal men have consistently valued this knowledge. Bureaucracies, bastions of white male power, have been little prepared for recognising women's voices let alone those belonging to Aboriginal women. Some of these have appointed and promoted Aboriginal men even when Aboriginal women are more qualified. Aboriginal women, they thus argue, face both racism and sexism.

Huggins with Blake examines the policies that may have impacted on Aboriginal women's lives after the frontier violence receded. The policies that replaced this violence had a particularly adverse effect upon Aboriginal women and girls. In this article, they primarily focus on QLD and its policies. The creation of reserves, they argue, was with the aim of separating Aboriginal women from white men for 'eugenic, moral and hygienic reasons' largely designed to protect whites.<sup>73</sup> Dormitories created on these reserves served a number of purposes. Girls were trained for domestic service, life on the reservation and to work for males. Aboriginal boys were trained for field and property work and to expect subservience from Aboriginal women. There was no expectation that white women were available to Aboriginal men in any way.

Popular ideas of what Aboriginal women were capable of achieving vocationally were similar to single, white working class women but many other factors were not shared. Aboriginal female domestics were 'more closely policed morally and liable to be returned to a reserve or mission if they complained or "fell pregnant"'.<sup>74</sup>

They also tackle the issue of oppression of Aboriginal women by non-Aboriginal women. While various writings, they argue, have constructed 'women' as oppressed, they have not examined whether those same 'women' could be oppressors themselves. They argue that this topic requires far more attention and analysis, particularly as academic historians have not paid sufficient attention to the issue of gender relations across racial lines.

The final Huggins article to be examined here is her contribution to *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*. Her primary responsibility in this article is to analyse the relationship between Aboriginal women and the 'white women's movement'. Again, she posits

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 402.

<sup>73</sup> J. Huggins and T. Blake, 'Protection or Persecution? Gender Relations in the Era of Racial Segregation', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. K. Saunders and R. Evans (Sydney: Harcourt, 1992): 46.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 52.

that the core experience Aboriginal women have is racism and this experience continues to be misunderstood by the white women's movement. The cultural pressures and constructs that created white women's culture and privilege continue to oppress and manipulate Aboriginal women. Huggins' analysis incorporates a view from the 1950s and 1960s through to the early 1990s. She argues for recognition of the fundamental difference of needs experienced by Aboriginal women vis-à-vis white women including the non-support of Aboriginal struggles and the racism of white women themselves.<sup>75</sup> Before Huggins, nobody remained in the written debate between Aboriginal women and feminism for long. As will be discussed shortly, the use of autobiographical text by Moreton-Robinson in *Talkin' Up to the White Woman* shows us though that Aboriginal women have been presenting their stories in written text for as long as there have been publishers interested.<sup>76</sup>

Larissa Behrendt's writings signified a change in focus away from Huggins's perspective. Behrendt was prepared to see how thinking about gender privilege could have an application to some parts of Aboriginal life. As with Huggins and others, she argues racism as the primary disadvantage of Aboriginal people, but opens the door to the potential relevance in analysis of Aboriginal lives foregrounding gender discrimination. Behrendt, an Aboriginal woman trained in law, has published extensively and contributes two articles to this section. In her 1993 article, Behrendt examines the relationship between Aboriginal and white women. She contends that when anthropologists attempted to describe Aboriginal culture, they did not represent women's role accurately, but as Huggins posits, they wrongly assumed that the patriarchal nature of their own society was common to all cultures. By doing so, the power and responsibilities of Aboriginal women were not so much overlooked as being completely inconceivable to the researchers. She documents that colonisation has changed the autonomous arrangements Aboriginal men and women had had. Now, she says, sexism is rampant in Aboriginal communities. As with Huggins, Behrendt argues Aboriginal women strive for different things compared with non-Aboriginal women. They strive in particular to challenge the mythology of the 'promiscuous, oversexed black women'.<sup>77</sup>

Behrendt argues white women are racist, and have actively benefited from oppressing Aboriginal women. In response to the racism they have fought, Aboriginal people have bonded together to fight. She contends feminism has not come to terms with this and may struggle with

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<sup>75</sup> Huggins, 'A Contemporary View of Aboriginal Women's Relationship to the White Women's Movement', in *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*, ed. N. Grieve and A. Burns (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994): 70–79.

<sup>76</sup> A. Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (Queensland: University of Queensland, 2000b).

<sup>77</sup> L. Behrendt, 'Aboriginal Women and the Lies of the Feminist Movement: Implications for Aboriginal Women in Rights Discourse', *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 1 (1993): 30.

the idea that Aboriginal women have had what feminists now struggle for. Unfortunately, now Aboriginal women, due to the colonisation processes and the entrenchment of patriarchy, also struggle with the learnt misogyny of Aboriginal men. This led Behrendt to advocate for the creation of a separate Aboriginal women's movement whose goal will be to achieve their own political goals, fuelled by the strength of Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women need to tell their stories as they have been silenced for so long. Story-telling will require assistance as many suffer so much pain.<sup>78</sup>

Importantly, Behrendt proposed that an appropriate feminism for all people, including Aboriginal women, could be a collection of individual stories rather than a Grand Theory. Using other theorists such as Hooks, she argues that theory is best if fundamentally created by and linked to a process of self-discovery and healing from pain.<sup>79</sup> These ideas posited by Behrendt in this article underpin the arguments later made in this thesis on the identity quest for Stolen Generations peoples.

In 'Consent in a (Neo)Colonial Society: Aboriginal Women as Sexual and Legal "Other"', Behrendt again examines the treatment of Aboriginal women on the frontier. She explores the idea that Aboriginal women were seen as low-class prostitutes. They were afforded little if no protection under colonial law from the sexual abuse of white men. Sometimes the relationships between Aboriginal women and white men served some purpose for the women, but were always set against a background of frontier and sexual violence. She contends though, that the stereotypes of Aboriginal women have not been left in the past but have been used to create contemporary forms and legacies.<sup>80</sup> She challenges the idea that Aboriginal men have suffered more through colonisation than Aboriginal women, arguing that, for example, Aboriginal women continue to be over-represented in homicide statistics, most likely at their partner's hands. She contends that sexual violence and racist violence are used in combination against Aboriginal women. The institutions and people expected to assist the victims of racist violence in fact perpetuate racist attitudes and, in some cases, promoting direct violence and intimidation against Aboriginal people.<sup>81</sup>

Behrendt maintains that little attention is paid to the construction of Aboriginal women's sexuality as demeaned, devalued and degraded, whereas Aboriginal men's behaviour is often contextualised within the colonising project. After colonisation, Aboriginal men also took up

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Behrendt, 'Consent in a (Neo)Colonial Society: Aboriginal Women as Sexual and Legal "Other"', *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, no. 33 (2000): 360.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 362.



misogyny, hence denying Aboriginal women the same status as they had enjoyed prior to colonisation. In conclusion, she argues that Aboriginal women have fallen to the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder due to the double taint of race and gender. She makes two crucial points important to the argument in this thesis. The first is that in spite of the adaptability and agency that Aboriginal women have shown, including the contribution they have made to the Australian nation, they have been neither recognised nor valued. The second point is that Aboriginal women were never freely able to consent to either sexual liaisons or employment. Colonial powers and hierarchies have always shaped how Aboriginal women could negotiate their lives.

Moreton-Robinson is the new cornerstone of this debate over Aboriginal women and feminism. While more of her work will be examined later in the thesis, there are two pieces of her work to be covered in this literature review. Both works were published in 2000 and focus on the interrelated topic of whiteness, Indigenous women and feminism. Moreton-Robinson's work makes a crucial contribution to this thesis both due to its examination of the treatment of Aboriginal women's voices by feminism and others, but as a potential blueprint for valuing Aboriginal women's voices.

Moreton-Robinson's first article, 'Troubling Business: Difference and Whiteness within Feminism', examines the challenge difference presents to feminists who, she argues, have failed to theorise their own position and privilege in their feminism.<sup>82</sup> She contends that in feminist theory, the category of woman has been created in the image of white women, but constitutes both Aborigines and Asian as genderless. Whiteness as an identity, she asserts, is not debated when feminism theorises identity formation. This has led to a state in which whiteness as 'difference, privilege and identity is not marked, named or challenged'.<sup>83</sup> Thus, she argues that whiteness becomes the 'invisible omnipresent norm' from which all 'Others' are located racially.<sup>84</sup>

The crucial central task of the Moreton-Robinson's book *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, she argues, is to represent 'an Indigenous standpoint within Australian feminism'. Moreton-Robinson explores the subjectivity of Aboriginal women by taking up the debate over the binary representations of Indigenous women as living either a 'contemporary' or 'traditional' lifestyle. She also talks about the way Aboriginal women

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<sup>82</sup> Moreton-Robinson, 'Troubling Business: Difference and Whiteness within Feminism', *Australian Feminist Studies* 15, no. 33 (2000a): 343–352.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 347.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 348.

perform acts of translation and self-presentation when negotiating Indigenous, non-Indigenous and blended spaces.<sup>85</sup>

Moreton-Robinson argues clear historical differences exist in the subjectivity and experiences of Indigenous women to non-Indigenous women, and hence, to construct these subjectivities and experiences as similar in nature or desire to middle-class feminism is unreasonable. The challenge she identifies for feminism, is that 'whiteness as difference, privilege and identity is not marked, named, or challenged'.<sup>86</sup> Whiteness dominates, Moreton-Robinson argues, from a position of power and privilege as an invisible and unchallenged practice. This omni-presence, or as O'Connor named it, dominant discourse, presents a challenge for the *Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* holding the capacity to shape and dominate its structure, process, and outcomes to suit the dominant white population rather than articulate those in ways more sympathetic to the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Conclusion

This chapter has captured the literature in a number of areas to create the foundation upon which the next sections of this thesis are firmly situated. A further crucial section of the literature will be examined in Chapter 5 when the issue of identity, whether hybrid, essentialised or 'Aboriginal' will be addressed. What remains clear from the literature presented here though is that Australians knew about the removal of Aboriginal children, and although many debates were held before, during and after the *Inquiry* that examined the removals process and effects, what remained was just the beginning of a body of material yet to be explored. The material presented by the Stolen Generations individuals at the *Inquiry* was testimony but experienced much more akin to evidence. It is not available to the public and is only presented in the *Bringing Them Home Report* with minimal descriptors of the individual speaking. This has left a field open for the recording of testimony created by traumatic memory in the lives of Stolen Generations peoples and, more particularly, for this thesis, the lives of women taken from their families on the basis of their Aboriginality. In particular, their voices are central to a more nuanced understanding of the ongoing pain and suffering caused by removal where personal identity formation occurred within *both* Aboriginal and white contexts. As stated in earlier chapters and examined within the theory here, Aboriginal women's stories must be told. They must be told, as all the Aboriginal women writers state here, because they are different. They are different to particularly Aboriginal men because colonisation worked differently on them. As Goodall relates, the policy that removed children in the very first place was gendered and

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<sup>85</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 347.

every other part of the colonising project has been as well. Differences are apparent in what priority to give to which struggle but in the end, the struggles for Aboriginal women remain.

## CHAPTER 5: STOLEN BODIES/SEVERED CONNECTEDNESS

### Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has examined a number of areas of literature that form a basis for this and the following chapters. At its very core, this thesis is about identity and this chapter will examine the core premises and understandings being proposed to understanding the lives of the women examined here.

Chapter 2 examined how removals were structurally enabled and the resistance movements against them. In this chapter, a theoretical map for understanding how the removals impacted upon Stolen individuals and upon left behind communities is given. To do this, who are the 'Stolen' within Australia is examined more closely with a particular focus on how they are portrayed publicly. The four main impacts central to understanding how the 'Stolen' are created include: the actions taken upon the physical bodies of those removed; the psyche of those removed; the experiences of those who were left behind; and the actions and perspectives of the broader Australian people. It is argued in this thesis that these processes have resulted in body and cultural dysphoria in varying degrees for those removed individuals.

### Who are the Stolen in Our Country?

What do we mean when we say 'Stolen' in the Australian context? To begin with, take this definition 'to steal' from the *Macquarie Dictionary*:

- to take or take away dishonestly or wrongfully, especially secretly
- to commit or practice theft
- to move, go, or come secretly, quietly or unobserved.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia, we most commonly link the idea of 'Stolen', whether children or generations, to Aboriginal children. That perspective though tends to forget the thousands of other children brought to our shores in questionable circumstances. In the book *Orphans of the Empire*, Alan Gill examines the lives of these children of the British Empire. For example, on 22 September 1947, the *Steamship (SS) Asturias* delivered the first intake of post-war child migrants to the port in Fremantle.<sup>2</sup> The idea for them to come to Australia was to 'rescue and import British children'.<sup>3</sup> The parallel between the stories of the child migrants and the Stolen Generations is very clear, particularly where, as shown in *Orphans of the Empire*, some of the children were

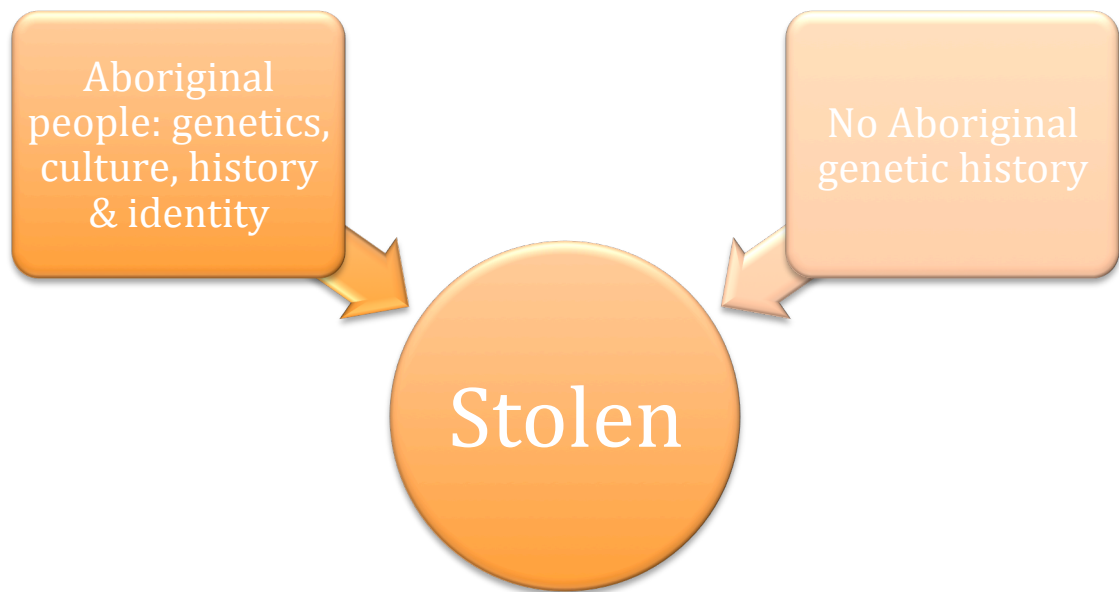
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<sup>1</sup> The Macquarie Library Pty Ltd, *Macquarie Dictionary* (NSW: Macquarie Dictionary Publishers, 2002): 783.

<sup>2</sup> A. Gill, *Orphans of the Empire* (NSW: Random House, 1998): 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 486.

incarcerated in the same institutions.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it seems the desire to ‘remove’ children for their own good is a part of the behaviour of the British Empire. As Gill outlines, their experience was just as shocking and unjustifiable as the similar acts done to Aboriginal children. Figure 1 provides a diagram for understanding the phenomenon of the Stolen Children that includes both categories: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.



**Figure 1: Conceptual map for positioning genesis of Stolen identity in this thesis**

In the Australian context, as a result of the *Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, we understand Stolen Generations or Stolen Children as describing children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were removed from their families by the Australian and state government agencies and church missions, under acts of their respective parliaments. An important part of the identification of the children who ought to be targeted for removal though was biological with children of mixed race targeted for removal. As discussed in Chapter 3, for example, QLD began their intervention on children born of an Aboriginal or ‘half-caste’ mother.<sup>5</sup>

The terms ‘Stolen Generations’ and ‘Stolen Children’ are often contested publicly on the grounds of whether the children were in fact stolen and how many were actually removed so as to constitute a generation or generations. O’Connor’s argument previously presented in Chapter 3, that each of the phases of removals have been legitimised within dominant discourse and then

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 502–514.

<sup>5</sup> Pain and Woolcock, ‘Queensland Government Statutes’, 2213–2214.

constituted into public policy helps combat these arguments when they arise in the media. What remains clear is that whatever the ideological position taken, there has been legislation to enact Aboriginal child removals from 1869.<sup>6</sup> Institutions established throughout Australia's history from early in the colonies like the Parramatta Native Institution set up in 1814 also clearly had goals of impacting upon the structure of Aboriginal families.<sup>7</sup>

As O'Connor stated earlier, motivations for the removal of children included ideas about their neglect. In QLD, for example, the 1865 Industrial and Reformatory Act removed children due to an automatic finding of 'neglect'. Section 6, part 7 says 'Any child born of an [A]boriginal or "half-caste" mother' is a neglected child.<sup>8</sup> Other motivations included ideas for child protection that, framed within Social Darwinist ideas, Aborigines would die out or arising from a desire to maintain separate 'races'.

The usage of terms such as 'Stolen' highlights an understanding that children were taken against their parents' wishes. When objecting to the Aborigines Protection Amending Act 1915 enabling the Aborigines Protection Board to remove Aboriginal children from their parents without having to establish that they were in any way neglected or mistreated, the Hon P. McGarry, a member of the Parliament of NSW, described the policy as 'steal[ing] the child away from its parents'.<sup>9</sup> In 1981, Peter Read published *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in NSW 1883 to 1969*, which further reinforced the use of Stolen as an appropriate descriptor for removed children.<sup>10</sup> The term was also used when, on the 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a formal apology to the Stolen Generations, on behalf of both houses of the Parliament of Australia.<sup>11</sup>

In the lead up to that formal apology, and since, there are those who have contested these terms. For example, in April 2000, a scandal occurred when the then Aboriginal Affairs Minister in the Howard Government, John Herron, tabled a report in the Australian Parliament that questioned if only 10 per cent of Aboriginal children had been removed, and whether that statistically constituted a generation. Mr Herron later apologised for the 'understandable offence taken by some people' as a result of his comments but only after a week of scathing media commentary,

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<sup>6</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*.

<sup>7</sup> NSW Government, *Social History Overview*, C8.2.

<sup>8</sup> Pain and Woolcock, 'Industrial and Reformatory Schools Act 1865', 2213–2214.

<sup>9</sup> NSW Parliamentary Debates 1914–1915, 1951.

<sup>10</sup> P. Read, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883–1969*, Occasional Paper no. 1 (Sydney: NSW Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Prime Minister of Australia*, viewed 31 August 2008, [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech\\_0073.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0073.cfm).

and the attempted invasion of parliament by scores of protestors. The report and its disputable figure of 10 per cent remained unchanged.<sup>12</sup>

Other debate occurred encompassing such ideas as: why we need to dredge up past actions at all; why should present Australian citizens be held responsible for other people's actions in history; the *Inquiry* was not representative of all opinions focusing on only the negative; Indigenous children who were removed were removed for their own good and once removed were offered opportunities previously unavailable to them; or it is not right to judge the past using the perspectives of the present.<sup>13</sup> Andrew Bolt, for instance, argued: 'The Stolen Generations was a dangerous myth'.<sup>14</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis though, the Stolen Generations are understood to be individuals who each in body, in voice or in mind experienced the interference of authorities that resulted in them being taken from their family of origin and enduring a process that impacted upon their connectedness to their Aboriginality and created in them profound and deleterious existential and identity issues.

### **How We, the 'Stolen', are Portrayed**

Through the numbers of autobiographical texts and historical studies published over the years, the people populating the title Stolen Generations have become increasingly known. While many know us as family, or members of community, there are many who only know us through media portrayal, family innuendo/secrets or publicly developed theories or imaginings. Perhaps the most prominent depiction of the Stolen was through the *Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from Their Families* and the subsequent *Bringing Them Home* Report.

The report of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (the Inquiry)*, entitled *Bringing Them Home*, was tabled in Parliament on 26 May 1997. As discussed more fully in Chapter 3, the key findings of the *Inquiry* were:

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<sup>12</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), *The 7.30 Report*, viewed 31 August 2008, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/stories/s116731.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> H. Wooton, 'Ron Brunton and Bringing Them Home', *Indigenous Law Bulletin* 4, no. 12 (1998), viewed 26 April 2012, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/ILB/1998/44.html>; R. Manne, 'The Cruelty of Denial', *The Age*, 9 September 2006, 1–3, viewed 26 April 2012, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/robert-manne/the-cruelty-of-denial/2006/09/08/1157222325367.html>.

<sup>14</sup> A. Bolt, *Herald Sun* February 2004, quoted in I. Macintosh, 'Australian Journalist Questions 'Stolen Generation'', *European Network for Indigenous Australian Rights*, 11 March 2004, viewed 26 April 2012, <http://www.eniar.org/news/Bolt.html>.

- Nationally, between one in three and one in 10 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970
- Indigenous children were placed in institutions, church missions, adopted or fostered and were at risk of physical and sexual abuse. Many never received wages for their labour
- Welfare officials failed in their duty to protect Indigenous wards from abuse
- Under international law, from approximately 1946 the policies of forcible removal amounted to genocide; and from 1950 the continuation of distinct laws for Indigenous children was racially discriminatory
- The removal of Indigenous children continues today. Indigenous children are six times more likely to be removed for child welfare reasons and 21 times more likely to be removed for juvenile detention reasons than non-Indigenous children.<sup>15</sup>

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre's (PIAC) report called *Restoring Identity*, which investigates the idea of reparation for Stolen Generations people, identifies a number of goals including the following:

- Acknowledge the distinct identity of the Stolen Generations within the Indigenous community and consult with them about design and delivery of reparations programs
- Affirm identity and experience of removals through 'telling story' in an appropriate forum, with an official acknowledgment and apology
- Establish memorials and community education programs in response to proposals developed by the Stolen Generations and their families
- Allocate funds and premises for Stolen Generations support groups to provide culture and healing centres, to support removed people in the community in which they now live
- Provide travel subsidies for removed people to visit family.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, there are two important points to note in this material for the discussion here. The first point is that the *Bringing Them Home Report* and consequent public debates put into the public domain that after their removal, children were likely to be not looked after and potentially had been abused in some way. This is generated by all the arguments for the need for healing and the use of narratives that highlight the suffering of the removed children. The issue with this is

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<sup>15</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*.

<sup>16</sup> Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Restoring Identity: Final Report of the Moving Forward Consultation* (Sydney: Amanda Cornwall Public Interest Advocacy Centre, 2002): vi.



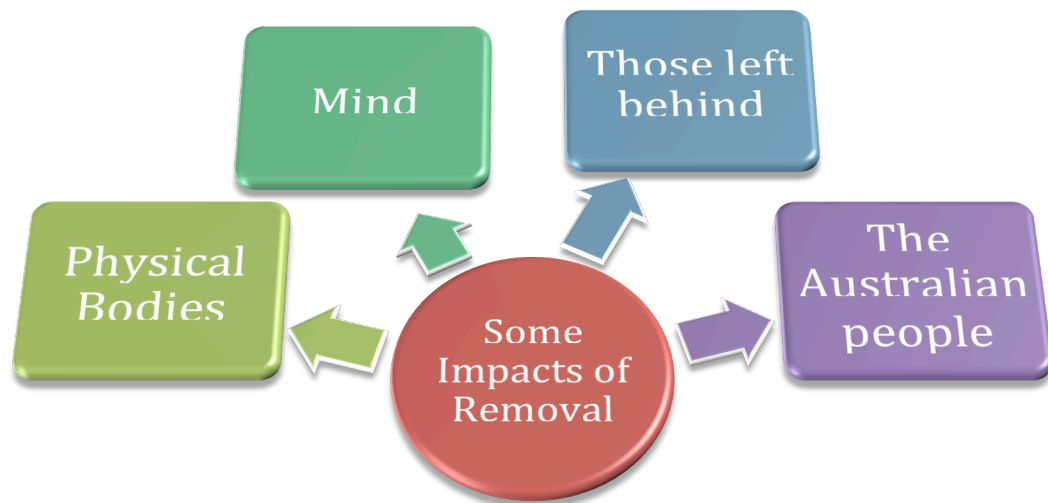
not that the suffering caused by the removal process is contested in any way in this thesis, but that it creates a mindset in the wider Australian public that all people of the Stolen Generations have something wrong with them.

The second point to note is that made by PIAC that there is a distinct identity of the Stolen Generations *within* the Indigenous community and that the identity and experience of removals to be recognised. So the question is raised as to whether the Stolen children ought to be understood as being a group within the Australian Indigenous communities or if there are other possible identity positions for this group.

There appears to be an expectation, as PIAC spoke about, that the Stolen voice speaks from within the Aboriginal community. However, the position of the Stolen Generations, diagrammatically represented in Figure 2, alerts us to the complex terrain within which the Stolen Generations must form identities and out of which we speak. Is there a perspective that the 'Stolen' are possessed by two communities: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal? If so, what does this mean for identity formation with the 'Stolen'?

### **Exploring the Experiences of the 'Stolen'**

As presented in Figure 2, it is the contention of this thesis that the removal of Aboriginal children including the women examined in this thesis, from their families has impacted upon four main areas. These four are: the physical body of the children themselves; their minds; those who were left behind; and the wider Australian society. Each of these will be explored in more detail below.



**Figure 2: Some Impacts of Removal**

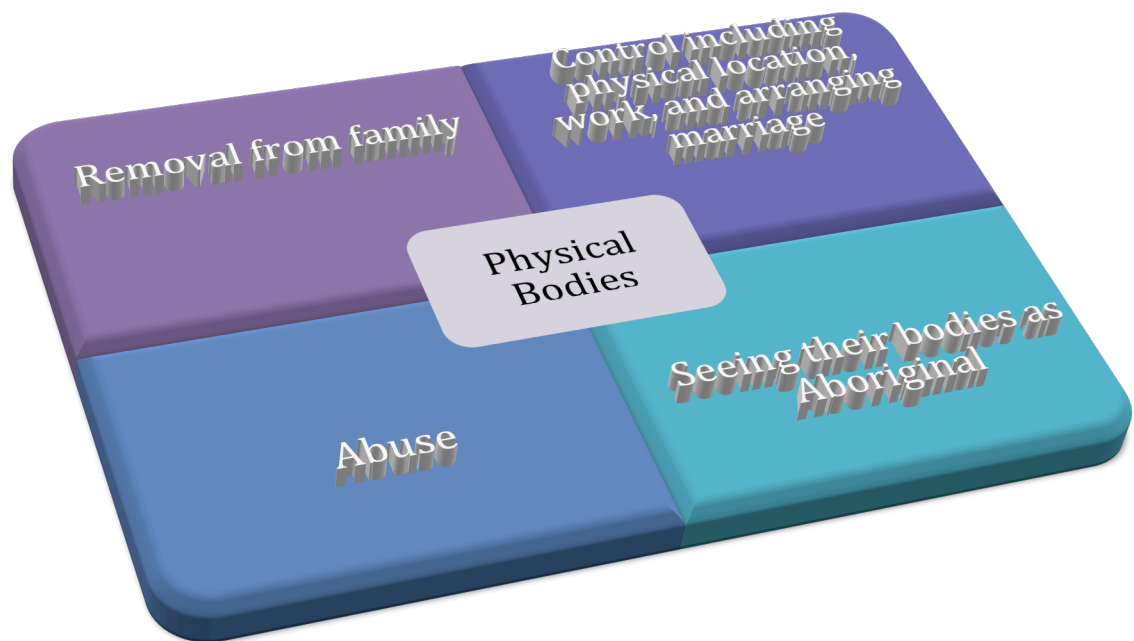
### **The Physical Removal of Aboriginal Bodies**

Figure 3 unpacks the experience of physical removal of the children by naming four main areas in which there was bodily ramifications. These are: removal from family; control including physical location, work and arranging marriage; abuse; and seeing their bodies as Aboriginal bodies. One of the major sites impacted upon the physical bodies of those removed. As will be discussed in more detail in this section of the chapter, one of the ways that physical bodies were impacted was through the physical removal of the children from their homes and families. Every aspect of the life those bodies lived was then controlled, managed and, often, abused. The other main impact was upon the reading of the physical body by that person themselves. As will be discussed later, the children had removed their sense of their physical bodies as being inscribed with their Aboriginal genetic heritage.

#### **Removal from Family**

It is crucial to recognise that a deliberate process of disturbing or disrupting the ‘Stolen body’ was enacted. The ‘Stolen body’ is that of the physical flesh and blood person. The first step taken was to remove the ‘Stolen body’ from their natural/biological family. Every state and territory enacted legislation to allow this physical removal of children from their families of origin. Responsibility for the custody, maintenance and education of the children of ‘[A]borigines’ (defined in legislation), for instance, was given to the state government in NSW in 1909. The *Aborigines Protection Act Regulation 1909* of that Act allowed Aboriginal males

under 14 years of age and females under 18 years of age to reside or take their meals in any building as required by the manager.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 3: The physical removal of Aboriginal bodies**

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, stories in the *Bringing Them Home Collection* outline that families experienced removals as unbelievable or surreal and beyond the family's control. The removals were enacted in many ways. Some parents were bribed or blackmailed to leave children in Homes in exchange for employment. Some children were taken while at school and not allowed to go home and say goodbye. Later, if the children regain contact and asked parents about their removal, the parents were unable to speak about it or say they had no idea why the children were removed.<sup>18</sup> What is difficult for the parents to explain to their returning children is the overwhelming lack of control or self-determination their parents had against authorities like police who could and did just swoop in and take children at will.

Control Including Physical Location, Experiences and Work

A crucial part of the process of disturbing the body involved the implementation of control over every aspect of removed children's physical lives. This section explores how this control was routine for both Aboriginal children and adults as well as how the added element of the way control was enacted was that what was set up in childhood continued into adulthood. Children

<sup>17</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 601–602.

<sup>18</sup> Record 57.

were routinely denied a childhood: the time to play, dream, attend school to plan for a life's career and then move into an adulthood of their choice.

One major part of this control was changing the individual's identifying details including their name, or misnaming them, and changing their date of birth.<sup>19</sup> The changing of names included both first names and surnames. When a child is adopted their name is changed to that chosen by the adoptive parents. In the Homes, children also routinely had their names changed including tying together both civilising and Christian motivations to save them from being heathens, by changing them to saint's names.<sup>20</sup> There appears to be intent to deal with people as a group to be managed, and not as individuals of worth and integrity. Part of this was the racial problematising of Aboriginality indicated by legislation such as the *Queensland Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, which was designed to manage the 'Aboriginal' and 'half-caste' populations in QLD including where they would reside.<sup>21</sup> Kidd and Haebich talk about the treatment of the physical body of the children removed to missions and dormitories across Australia and describe the starvation of children as routine. Making children work for hours and hours on chores and maintenance work around the institutions offset the costs of raising them but it also taught them how to do hard physical labour. They were then apprenticed to continue this hard labour for home and station owners at little or no pay.<sup>22</sup>

Another form of control was through the removal legislation that often differentiated the types of treatment for males and females. In WA, for instance, the *Aborigines Act 1905* allowed for the employment of Aboriginal males less than 14 years or any Aboriginal females, and they could not be removed from this employment without the permission of the Chief Protector.<sup>23</sup> Presumably, this meant that at any age an Aboriginal female could be sent out to work with their employment negotiated by the authorities through the power invested in them by the Aborigines Act. The control enacted through apprenticeship that children were moved into as younger teenagers continued into adulthood through legislation like the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918* in the NT, which was very specific about the employment of Aborigines, Aboriginal women, and 'half-castes'. Pay for those employed in town was to be 'awarded' five shillings per week. They were to be fed, clothed and provided with tobacco and shelter. In the country, if

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>20</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 345.

<sup>21</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 618.

<sup>22</sup> R. Kidd, *Black Lives, Government Lies* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000): 11; Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 359.

<sup>23</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 631.

relatives or friends accompanied them, their payment was amended. In either location, all wages were held in trust.<sup>24</sup>

Control also came in the form of where people could live or eat. In NSW, every Aboriginal male under the age of 14 years and every unmarried Aboriginal female under the age of 18 could be ordered to reside or take their meals in a place as so directed by Mission managers.<sup>25</sup> When children got to a possible age for marriage in some areas the authorities would arrange the marriages of Aboriginal people. In his 1997, Social Justice Report, Commissioner Mick Dodson said: 'Up until the mid-1950s, a myriad of laws and bureaucratic regulations dictated who we married, where we lived, where we worked and what we did with our earnings—if we were actually paid for our work at all'.<sup>26</sup>

For example in a letter from Cecil Cook, Chief Protector in NT, he says:

In the Territory the mating of [A]boriginals with any person other than an [A]boriginal is prohibited. The mating of coloured aliens with any female of part-Aboriginal blood is also prohibited. Every endeavour is being made to breed out the colour by elevating female half-castes to white standard with a view to their absorption by mating into the white population. The adoption of a similar policy throughout the Commonwealth is, in my opinion, a matter of vital importance.<sup>27</sup>

The control of what people could do and when, meant that free choice was not available to Aboriginal people and in particular, those children who were removed. They had no control over whom they could associate with, where they went to school or later where they were employed, how they dressed, what they were named, and whom they married. Many were also depersonalised to be known by numbers, their lives were seen as things to be managed not as children to be loved and cared for.

Seeing Their Bodies as Aboriginal

This next concept builds on the others already described in this section of the impacts upon the physical body of the 'Stolen' children. This concept, seeing their physical bodies as Aboriginal, must be placed in its historical context of the development of who are Australians and indeed valued Australian citizens. Part of the creation of the Australian nation was the articulation of

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<sup>24</sup> ABC, 'Aboriginal Australia: The Unfinished Business—Institutions', *Australia's Centenary of Federation*, 2001, viewed 5 May 2012, [http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep4/ep4\\_institutions.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep4/ep4_institutions.htm).

<sup>25</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 602.

<sup>26</sup> Dodson, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner—Fifth Report 1997*, viewed 5 May 2012, [www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/social\\_justice/sj\\_report97.pdf](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/social_justice/sj_report97.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> C. E. Cook to Administrator of the Northern Territory, 7 February 1933, National Archives of Australia, Commonwealth Records Series, Department of the Interior file A659/1; 1940/1/408, quoted by K. Windschuttle, *The Stolen Generations*, viewed 12 May 2012, [http://www.stolengenerations.info/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=140&Itemid=109#\\_ftn15](http://www.stolengenerations.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140&Itemid=109#_ftn15).

what or who will be an Australian citizen. In the lead up to Federation, the colonies debated that question. At that time, there were approximately 50,000 Chinese people living in the colonies and an assortment of other nationalities particularly as a result of the gold rushes.<sup>28</sup> Leaders debated their perceived need to restrict immigrants that ultimately led to the passing of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*. More colloquially known as the 'White Australia Policy', its purpose was to centralise whiteness of skin as an agreed upon part of Australia's national identity. These types of perspectives around who were the valued citizenry would dominate Australia's debates around immigration until this very day. The other main black population (approximately 10,000) resident in Australia at that time were the South Sea Islanders who had been bought under questionable circumstances to work in the fields of QLD and NSW. Under new legislation in 1901, they were dispatched to their islands of origin.<sup>29</sup> Australia is thus a country that started with a legislated and deeply felt aversion to the 'yellow' and the 'black' skinned peoples of the world. Unfortunately for Aboriginal people this became the context to their everyday lives within the new nation of Australia.

Legislation for the management of Aboriginal people in general has always had a genetic component to it. Legislation in 1905 in WA for instance presumed that 'full-bloods' would eventually die out and thus it was only the children of mixed blood that had to be dealt with, leading to their removal.<sup>30</sup> In NSW, the Aborigines Protection Board also held the same idea with the added idea that Aboriginal culture itself was also almost extinct so in removing the children they could then be assimilated.<sup>31</sup>

In order to enact these beliefs whether they were in the Homes or in other placements, the children are told things like: that their skin is white; or they are white; to forget about being Aboriginal; or they are never told they are Aboriginal. What is crucial to understanding this concept in its position here is to understand that the children are told that their bodies are not Aboriginal. John in the *Bringing Them Home Report* reports: 'I was definitely not told that I was Aboriginal. What the Sisters told us was that we had to be white. It was drummed into our heads that we were white. It didn't matter what shade you were. We thought we were white.'<sup>32</sup>

Haebich says that in all states, the very fair-skinned Aboriginal children were treated differently to the darker-skinned children. The fair-skinned children would be sent to the child welfare

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<sup>28</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission *Towards a Racially Pure Nation*, 2001, viewed 8 January 2010, [http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep2/ep2\\_culture.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep2/ep2_culture.htm).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, *Telling Our Story: A Report by the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia on the Removal of Aboriginal Children from Their Families in Western Australia*, The Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, 1995, 190.

<sup>31</sup> Read, op. cit., 1983, 28.

<sup>32</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 166.

institutions whereas the darker-skinned children would be sent to mission station based institutions for only Aboriginal children.<sup>33</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, this rewriting of the physical identity of children also had the social or psychological component which, when put together, created a very strong push for their Aboriginal identity to never develop or at the very least is severely psychologically damaged. ‘I started looking at my hands and wondered, why am I the colour that I am? Why are you white?’<sup>34</sup> And another: ‘These people are different, they’re dark and I thought I was white you see. I said, ‘I why wonder why they’re so dark? ... I thought, I look brown like them too, but I said, Oh no, I’m white ...’<sup>35</sup> This clearly shows a mental and a physical aspect of dysphoria at work in this girl.

#### Abuse

The other main concept to present to contextualise the material to come is the contention that the Aboriginal, and hence also the ‘Stolen’ body, became gendered and sexualised, and thus open to abuse. Goodall talks about the difference in legislation between males and females in the way it differs for each gender.<sup>36</sup> She proposes that for females it was about controlling Aboriginal women’s sexuality and reducing the Aboriginal birth rate. Unfortunately, attempting to control the sexual life of Aborigines meant removal from their families of origin to homes where they sometimes became the target for paedophiles and abusers.

What that meant for the people speaking to the *Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, is that they reported to the *Inquiry* that children in the Homes as well as in other placements experienced all forms of abuse. Approximately 28 per cent report physical abuse and approximately 17 per cent revealed sexual abuse. The *Inquiry* personnel did not ask witnesses to specifically report on abuse but nevertheless submissions talk about physical abuse such as rape, sexual assault, whippings and beatings, and the absence of care such as medical care. Sometimes, the abuses lead to the untimely death of children. Children learnt to dissociate from their feelings and their bodies as a way to cope. They literally in many ways became empty vessels with many speaking at the *Inquiry* for the first time about their experiences.<sup>37</sup> ‘I led a very lost, confused, sad, empty childhood ...’<sup>38</sup> They reported attempting to tell responsible adults and the adults not wanting to be given the information.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 345.

<sup>34</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 150.

<sup>35</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 404.

<sup>36</sup> Goodall, ‘Saving the Children’, 6-9.

<sup>37</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 163.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 168.

The purpose of this thesis is not to focus on this particular aspect of people's lives in itself but the abuse must be named as part of the process where children lost control over their physical bodies. They lost their opportunity to be safe. While there may be some argument that safety was not guaranteed had they stayed in their families of origin, for the purpose of this thesis, it is argued that their abuse was part of implementing an external locus of control over these children as part of their removal and assimilation. While there is no suggestion that abuse was a universal experience, beyond the abuse of the removal itself, abuse is a recurrent theme in the witness testimonies to the *Inquiry* and in other literature such as in Haebich and Kidd mentioned in this chapter. There are also instances in the testimonies of individuals talking about wanting to commit suicide, and about having a breakdown as an adult when something triggers their memories. They also talk about having babies themselves as teenagers while talking about other risky behaviours like drug-taking, criminal behaviour, homelessness and so on. As these risk-taking and self-harming behaviours serve as strong indicators of abuse, it would seem reasonable to assume then, that, although the self-reporting of abuse sits at 17 or 28 per cent in the *Bringing Them Home Report*, the incidence may in fact have been even higher.<sup>40</sup>

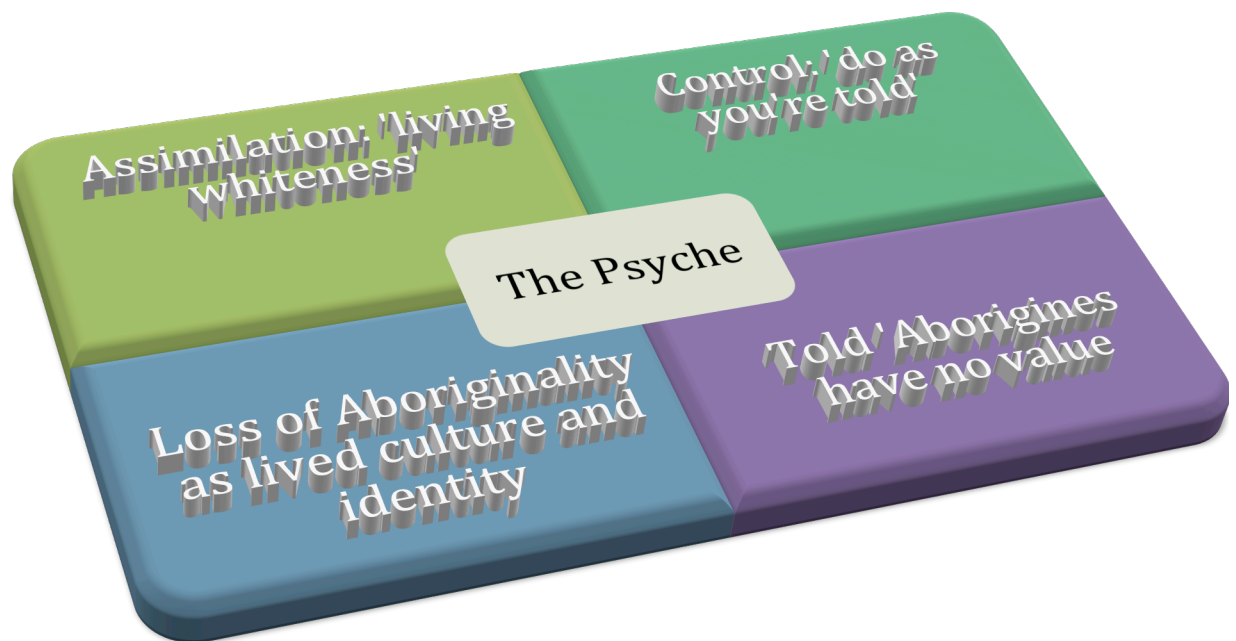
### **The Impacts upon the Minds or Psyche of the Removed**

As Figure 4 illustrates, the second major area of impact proposed here is that of the impacts on the minds or psyche of those removed. This section argues that a deliberate process was instigated to influence the minds and self-definition of those children removed from their families. It is proposed that this can be described by focusing on four areas that were targeted. These are: assimilation, control, a loss of Aboriginality as a lived culture and the devaluing of Aboriginal people in the minds of the removed children. While having this discussion separately to the physical effects on the removed children is difficult, it is crucial to the argument posited here that each part of these processes was planned and sustained, hence it is equally crucial to name and describe each part of these processes. Each will now be explored in turn.

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<sup>40</sup> South Eastern Centre against Sexual Assault, *Indicators of Child Sexual Abuse*, viewed 5 January 2010, <http://www.secasa.com.au/index.php/workers/23/>; South Eastern Centre against Sexual Assault, *Indicators in Adults*, viewed 5 January 2010, <http://www.secasa.com.au/index.php/family/12/100>.





**Figure 4: The impacts upon the minds or psyche of the removed**

Assimilation: 'Living whiteness'

As discussed in Chapter 3, assimilation became dominant public policy from 1937. Not only were the children the target for this attack but also the Aboriginal adults were encouraged to desire 'whiteness' as part of the wider assimilation project.<sup>41</sup> The Aboriginal race was seen to be dying out and Aboriginal culture as a way of life was seen to hold little to no value in the eyes of the non-Aboriginal population for the 'de-tribalised' cross-breeds.<sup>42</sup> These perceptions were instituted as official and/or unofficial policy at all levels of government. Local councils wanted Aborigines moved on from their surrounds to missions. State governments regulated on where people could live and so hand in hand with local councils moved Aborigines to missions or reserves. The federal government made decisions on issues such as what income support would be extended to Aborigines or other areas such as national service.

In WA, Mr A. O. Neville, the second Chief Protector of Aborigines, believed that all the 'pure blacks' would be extinct within one hundred years as they were not quick breeders but the half-caste children needed to be prevented from 'getting a taste of camp life and reared in accordance with white ideas'.<sup>43</sup> Thus, on the missions and reserves and in the Homes, children

<sup>41</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 275.

<sup>42</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities* (Canberra: Commonwealth Printers, 1937): 6.

<sup>43</sup> Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, 1995, 1–2.

were told they were white: 'I remember the welfare and foster home trying to say that I was not Aboriginal. They said I should not be told that I was Aboriginal.'<sup>44</sup> It is important to note Peter Read's point about the intent of the policy and then practice of assimilation. He said that is that it was believed that the 'full-bloods' would die out and thus for full assimilation to be successful, all should be done to stop Aborigines associating with each other. In many states where the numbers of 'half-castes' were growing, they were also collecting together and living as Aborigines. Consequently, socialisation itself was seen as the major problem and thus it was argued, contact between Aborigines and also 'half-castes' should be controlled and limited.<sup>45</sup> In NSW, by 1918, policy turned towards dispersal as the strategy to control this. Part of this strategy was the elimination of reserves and the removal of all children under 18 years of age from those reserves.<sup>46</sup> Read reports that, of the children removed, he believes at least a third never returned or were heard from again. While tracking the number of children removed is difficult, what is known is that the number of reserves in NSW alone dropped from hundreds to 71 in 1939.<sup>47</sup>

The major difficulty in this process of assimilating Aborigines and the removed children remained the beliefs and actions of those other Australians. While on the missions or in the Homes, the children were forced to assimilate and thought of themselves as white, when they interacted with the wider society they were routinely called defamatory, racist names. This made assimilation near impossible and the children were left completely confused about their place in society:

I didn't know any Aboriginal people at all—none at all. I was placed in a white family and I was just—I was white. I never knew, I never accepted myself to being a black person until—I don't know—I don't know if you ever really do accept yourself as being ... How can you be proud of being Aboriginal after all the humiliation and the anger and the hatred you have?<sup>48</sup>

One woman remembers being a child in a Home in Perth, and the children of the local church calling to them as they marched in pairs in their Home uniform, going to the same church: 'All the niggers in navy blue'.<sup>49</sup> Later, they moved into a society they found did not want them because they were Aboriginal:

When they went and mixed with Aborigines, some found they couldn't identify with them either because they had too much white ways in them. So that they were neither

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Read, 1983, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>48</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 200.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 355.

black nor white. They were simply a lost generation of children. I know. I was one of.<sup>50</sup>

#### Control 'Do as You're Told'

Following on from the previous section on the physical control of Aborigines and the removed children, this section discusses control of the mind. Earlier, a crucial part of the attitude that was at work and then entrenched in law was the idea that *all* Aboriginal people had to be managed as if they were children. This entrenched a form of paternalism that made it easy to pass legislation like the 1897 Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Bill (Q:D) that controlled where all people deemed to be Aboriginal lived, worked and could move them anywhere, at any time as the Protector desired.<sup>51</sup> Palm Island, (off the coast north of Townsville, QLD) was first made a mission in 1918, and was set up to receive Aboriginal people committed for punishable offences from anywhere in QLD. In some instances, the crime women had committed was giving birth to a 'half-caste' child.<sup>52</sup>

Over the period between 1918 and 1971, approximately 4,000 people were sent to Palm Island. Many of those in the early years were marched across parts of QLD in neck and leg irons.<sup>53</sup> On Palm Island in the 1950s, all residents of the mission lived to bells. The bells rang many times during the day including for the commencement of the morning work parade with roll call, lunch, dinner, and curfew.<sup>54</sup> The Superintendent, ex-policeman Roy Bartlam, believed Aborigines incapable of thinking for themselves and 'must controlled for the good not only of themselves, but of the general community'.<sup>55</sup> When Aboriginal people in the streets of Palm Island passed a white person, they had to stop and salute them. The unmarried residents of Palm Island all lived in sex- and age-segregated dormitories. At any time and without warning, authorities organised mass weddings among people who often barely knew each other. Kidd argues these mass weddings served a number of purposes, one was to reduce overcrowding in the dormitories; another was a means of preserving discipline and control over residents of the dormitories; and another reason was to remove the girls who were troublemakers from the dormitories.<sup>56</sup>

When assimilation was legislated and became the policy choice for all states the end process of assimilation was seen as each individual wanting what mainstream Australian society is seen as

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<sup>50</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 152.

<sup>51</sup> Museum of Australian Democracy, 'Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld)', *Documenting Democracy*, viewed 13 May 2012, <http://foundingdocs.gov.au/scan-sid-532.html>.

<sup>52</sup> J. Watson, *Palm Island: Through a Long Lens* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

<sup>56</sup> Kidd, *Black Lives*, 15.

wanting. It was understood that the individual, while biologically Aboriginal, lives 'Australian' culture, and self-identifies as an Australian person. The goal of the assimilation policy is the eventual disappearance of Aboriginal culture and sits alongside the hope for the disappearance of the Aboriginal 'race'. As the 1937 Aboriginal Welfare Initial Conference of all state and Federal officers working in the area of Aboriginal Affairs declared:

That this conference believes that the destiny of the natives of [A]boriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.<sup>57</sup>

Peter Read talks about the use of legislation to enact assimilation but while the governments did not want to continue to have people identified as Aboriginal, many towns did not want people they saw as Aboriginal hanging around. Aboriginal people falling under the Act in NSW could have their location, education and employment controlled by the authorities. There was no such thing as free choice for them. In the instance where people were released from living under the Act, they could have their 'non-Aboriginal' status revoked at any time.<sup>58</sup> In WA, in the 1930s, segregating Aborigines onto reserves was seen as desirable and Aboriginal children remaining with their parents were excluded from attending state public schools thus encouraging further segregation.<sup>59</sup> In NSW, those Aboriginal children in school were either educated in schools especially for them, or until 1972, if they were in public schools, they could be excluded by the school principal, for example, if a white parent complained about their presence.<sup>60</sup>

These examples help construct the way control was taken of Aboriginal people in general. In the Homes, control was total. The children were told they were not wanted and that the families, if they had them, did not care about them. They were sometimes told their parents had died. They were also told that their parents were worthless, alcoholic or their mother was a prostitute. In using this strategy, the child was destabilised in their beliefs they had about their parents. Many institutions operated like prisons or concentration camps with starvation and neglect standard.<sup>61</sup>

Dormitory life was like living in hell. It was not a life; These are people telling you to be Christian and they treat you less than a bloody animal; They used to lock us up in a little room like a cell and keep us on bread and water for a week if you played

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<sup>57</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> The Exemption Certificate in NSW is one example of the rewarding of assimilated behaviours: Read, 1983, 29.

<sup>59</sup> Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, 1995, 15.

<sup>60</sup> J. J. Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous: A History of Aboriginal School Education in New South Wales* (NSW: Southwood Press, 1989).

<sup>61</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 155–159.

up too much. Stand us on a cement block outside in the rain with raincoats on if you got into trouble—for a month, after school, during playtime.<sup>62</sup>

So-called ‘carers’ within the Homes had immense power and in some cases, this power was abused and children were physically, mentally and sexually abused. After an inquiry into conditions at Kinchela Boys Home, NSW, in 1933, the manager was instructed to no longer use a stockwhip on the boys or tie them up any more. The boys in this Home were observed to have the tendency to ‘sit on their haunches motionless and almost silent’.<sup>63</sup> In another example:

The nuns at New Norcia used to beat us every day for the simplest of mistakes; even for clearing our throats. I lived in fear of the next hiding which I knew would come at any time. Most of the time we didn’t know what we’d done wrong. The nuns who were in charge of us were always telling us we were wicked, evil, dirty savages.<sup>64</sup>

As stated earlier, sometimes the authorities would arrange marriages between the inmates of Homes or missions. This control over even marriage occurred in most states or territories. In the NT, a marriage between an Aboriginal female and a non-Aboriginal male required the permission of the authorities. In WA, in the 1905 Aborigines Act, that form of marriage required the permission of the Chief Protector.<sup>65</sup> In QLD, the female remained in the guardianship of the Protector and when marriage occurred to non-Aboriginal people, again the Protector’s permission was required and guardianship was at last conceptually transferred to the husband as when they married, guardianship was released. In this way, although there was a desire for the assimilation of Aborigines, the process was controlled.

This section has presented material to explore the control exercised over all Aborigines including Aboriginal children. In the Homes, deliberate actions were taken to make the children reliant on those within the Home itself and doubt all that existed outside.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, this did not bode well for those children when their time came to an end in the Home, as it always did.

#### Loss of Aboriginality as Lived Culture and Identity

The point made at the 1937 Welfare conference was that Aboriginal culture should only be lived by those tribalised ‘full-bloods’ seen to be unable to be assimilated and reflecting a eugenics perspective, they were believed to be dying out. Across the nation, the idea was to ‘smooth the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 160–161.

<sup>63</sup> Read, ‘The Stolen Generations’, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, 1995, 5.

<sup>65</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 631; ABC, ‘Aboriginal Australia: The Unfinished Business—Institutions, Australia’s Centenary of Federation’, 2001, viewed 5 May 2012, [http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep4/ep4\\_institutions.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/federation/fedstory/ep4/ep4_institutions.htm).

<sup>66</sup> Read, ‘The Stolen Generations’, 10.

dying pillow'<sup>67</sup> of those 'full-blood' Aborigines and assimilate the cross-breeds or in slavery-related language still used at those times, octaroons, quadroons or half-castes.<sup>68</sup> In the Homes, children were forbidden to speak any language other than English and every attempt was made for them to leave any lived Aboriginal culture behind: 'Being at Wandering mission meant that I lost a lot of my Aboriginal culture. We were never taught anything about Aboriginality.'<sup>69</sup> As noted earlier, there were a couple of blockages to the inculcation of assimilation and one of those was the starvation of the children. The children in some Homes were able to offset their starvation by going into local bushland and, in some instances, farms, and collect food to eat. This ability had often come about as a result of their inculcation to Aboriginal lived culture. This also happened on missions where the government rations did not suffice and adults were encouraged to hunt to offset their insufficient rations.<sup>70</sup>

Crucially though, the removed children lost a sense of themselves as Aboriginal children. This was a deliberate goal of assimilation. Perhaps in the debate in 1937, it was not realised how cruelly this could be enacted against the children: 'Not once was I told I was of Aboriginal descent'.<sup>71</sup> As quoted earlier, the perspective many children grew up with was 'and I was just—I was white';<sup>72</sup> 'I didn't want to be brown, you know, I wanted to be white'.<sup>73</sup>

Told Aborigines Have No Value

As described earlier, a serious attack was made on the credibility or worth of the children's parents but it sat alongside a wholesale dismissal of the worth of all Aboriginal people. The removed children were taught that the last thing they would want is to be an Aborigine. Children reported being afraid of Aboriginal people, even where those Aboriginal people were their own parents or grandparents. Some would cross the street rather than walk near an Aborigine:<sup>74</sup> 'I had a fear of Aborigines, knowing that they were evil, wicked'.<sup>75</sup>

The conference in 1937 again can give us some sense of the perspective around in society about Aborigines whatever their blood quantum. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aboriginals, QLD, addressed this conference arguing there should be a united policy across Australia to deal with Aborigines and that the first step of the development of that united policy should be an agreed policy of the types of Aborigines they were dealing with. He separated Aborigines into the

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<sup>67</sup> T. Wright, *Fight for the Aborigines, Report to Central Committee Meeting, 14–16 February 1947*, Communist Review, April 1947, viewed 13 May 2012, [www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/pdf/a000230.pdf](http://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/pdf/a000230.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 1937, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Read, 'The Stolen Generations', 24.

<sup>71</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 156.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>73</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 404.

<sup>74</sup> Read, *The Stolen Generations*, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 407.

following groups: those Aborigines still living on their own lands living on food they collect for themselves; those who live on land wanted for pastoral uses; those ‘detribalised’ who cannot live on their land anymore and perceived to be a menace to the wider community; and finally those cross-breeds who require special treatment according to their particular mix. The actual words were:

1. Those with a preponderance of Aboriginal blood and entirely [A]boriginal in character and leanings
2. The cross with lower types of alien races such as Pacific Islanders, Malays, Africans
3. The European-Aboriginal cross or those with higher Asiatic types
4. The quadroon and octoroon with preponderance of European blood.<sup>76</sup>

He went on to say that a half-caste with 50 per cent of European blood has the right to be given a chance to ‘make good’. Those with 50–75 per cent of European blood should be able to make a living and hold his own in the community, particularly if given a trade, but this should be achieved through a system of benevolence. He noted that trials of such support and independence had been conducted with a low success rate. He proposed four reasons for this lack of success. The first he noted was the colour prejudice enacted against them, which meant people did not want to either employ or have in their home ‘persons of coloured blood’. The second he argued was their attitude. He argued they suffered an inferiority complex feeling their half-caste position keenly making it difficult for them to hold their heads up. The third reason for their difficulties was that their education did not include how to protect themselves in business dealings and finally, they actually owned no technical equipment to work with.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, in the community, Aborigines were disliked or devalued or at the very least seen as a lesser class people. Aboriginal people were not wanted around and, as stated earlier, were moved along at every opportunity. Perceptions abounded wrapped up with racial stereotypes and fear for the safety of white people and lead to such regulations as those not allowing Aborigines such as (later Federal Senator) Neville Bonner, in towns after dark.<sup>78</sup> Within the Homes, children suffered by being taught to dislike Aborigines, their communities of origin or Aboriginal culture, or all three. The following is a quotation from a young girl living in a dormitory at Doomadgee: ‘I’d just cry my eyes out because I didn’t know who was who and who was right and what was going on. I loved my parents and I knew their way was right and their way was my way, but it was really hard for me to take. I’d go home and the missionaries

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<sup>76</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Aboriginal Welfare*, 6.

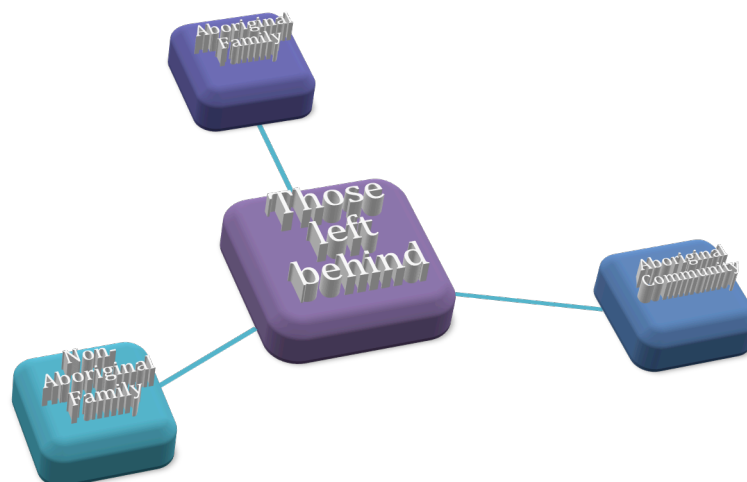
<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>78</sup> B. Nelson, *Transcript of Speech: Neville Bonner Scholarship*, 28 May 2003, viewed 18 May 2012, [info.anu.edu.au/ovc/Committees/120PP.../Transcript\\_Nelson.pdf](http://info.anu.edu.au/ovc/Committees/120PP.../Transcript_Nelson.pdf).

would tell me something else—that my parents are just ‘heathens’ and they’ve got to learn this Christian way.’ This girl experienced the feelings expressed in the quotation because her father went to kill a bird for its feathers and the girl said to her parents that Jesus would not love them if the bird was killed. This statement shows the mental conflict many children experienced. Places like Doomadgee are geographically a long way from the cities and towns they were meant to assimilate into and Doomadgee, like many of the other places, had adult Aboriginal people living in its vicinity. As identified earlier and again reflected in this quotation, the children were expected to obtain all their education from the authorities or missionaries and if they encountered any other experiences, their Christian-inspired teachings taught them to discount them.<sup>79</sup>

### Those Left Behind

In this section, we briefly look at those who were left behind and the possible implications for those people. In Figure 5, three main groups of people are identified. Firstly, the children’s family of origin predominantly made up of Aboriginal people but also may have included non-Aboriginal people. Many children had fathers who were not Aboriginal people. The removal of children identified as Aboriginal or ‘half-caste’ also had implications for the wider Aboriginal community.



**Figure 5: Those left behind**

The *Bringing Them Home Report* tells of the few numbers of people who went to speak to the *Inquiry* about the removal of their children and made this assessment: ‘the evidence clearly

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<sup>79</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 408.



establishes that families and whole communities suffered grievously upon the forcible removal of their children'.<sup>80</sup> In the submission from Link-Up (NSW) to the *Inquiry*, they said they were unable to find a single mother sufficiently healed enough to be able to speak about their experience of having their children removed.<sup>81</sup> The experience of losing children was traumatic and enduring. In *Lousy Little Sixpence*, a documentary exploring the removal of Aboriginal children, Margaret Tucker, removed to Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, tells of her uncle finding her mother crying in the bush by the side of the road after her children were removed by the police. This was after they themselves had encountered the children at the railway station and had begged for the children to be let stay with them.<sup>82</sup> In the movie *Rabbit Proof Fence*, based on the true story of the removal of three Mardudjara girls from the east Pilbara in WA, both the children's mother and grandmother are seen physically resisting the removal of the children and then when the children are gone, they hit themselves on the heads with rocks with the pain and grief they are experiencing.<sup>83</sup>

Haebich argues that the state intervention of the ilk into Aboriginal families' processes would never have been tolerated by white families, and left a legacy of pain and suffering. There is little doubt, as the following quotations demonstrates, that Aboriginal mothers felt the loss of their children to their very core:

Here is where they were shamed and humiliated—they were deprived of the opportunity to participate in growing up the next generation. They were made to feel failures; unworthy of loving and caring for their own children.<sup>84</sup>

The communities left behind suffered in many other ways as well. There was an expectation that all Aborigines who did not gently die out in their segregation would assimilate and move from living 'tribal'-based life styles. Another of the difficulties experienced by those left behind was the guilt of being left behind. The removal of children in some families was not wholesale. This also happened where children had different skin tones or different fathers. Some children were able to be raised in their families of origin and did not know about the experiences of the children taken. When children did manage to come back to the communities or when the Stolen Generations issues started receiving a lot more public attention, those left behind suffered a range of feelings from survivor guilt through to anger at the attention 'Stolen' children received that they themselves did not. The reality is of course that those who remained also experienced

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<sup>80</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 212.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> *Lousy Little Sixpence*, Chippendale: Sixpence Productions, 1983, directed by A. Morgan.

<sup>83</sup> *Rabbit Proof Fence*, 2002, video recording, Hanway Films, Australia, written by D. Pilkington Garimara, the daughter of one of the girls, and directed by P. Noyce.

<sup>84</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 212.

the racism and bad treatment experienced by ‘Stolen’ children. They were still the target of over-policing, being banned from public schools, and daily racism.

Choo, in her study *Aboriginal Child Poverty*, suggests that the removal of children from the Aboriginal community also brought about a level of poverty and lack of leadership to be suffered for years.<sup>85</sup> Janet Taylor writing a follow up from Choo’s work suggests that the sort of poverty experienced by Aboriginal people is both a non-material poverty (in terms of dispossession) and absolute material deprivation and is different in nature to other poor in the Australian population.<sup>86</sup> This identifies how assimilation can bring about the end of Aboriginal communities or Aboriginal culture as any economically viable future is taken and communities are expected to adapt to an assimilated lifestyle.

The final group of people something should be noted about are those parents of the children who were non-Aboriginal. On occasion, parents in relationships across race came to the attention of the authorities and parents have their children removed where for instance, the non-Aboriginal father is away for long periods working, the Aboriginal mother passed away or the authorities decided that the parents should not be together and separated the mother as well and placed her on a reserve. The loss of the children, relationships, and indeed lives were just as traumatic for any parent involved and the policies of removal were indiscriminate in that regard.

### **The Impacts of the Australian Nation and Its Non-Aboriginal Peoples on the Implementation of Assimilation**

The following section examines the way assimilation was enacted by the relevant governments for all Australians. The argument at the core of this section of material is that assimilation as a policy in many ways failed because it was both resisted by both Aborigines who did not want to give up their cultures and non-Aborigines who did not want to accept Aborigines into their ranks and communities. These ideas are encapsulated in Figure 6.

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<sup>85</sup> Choo, *Aboriginal Child Poverty*.

<sup>86</sup> Taylor, ‘Aboriginal Australians and Poverty: Issues of Measurement’, *Family Matters* no. 35 (1993): 46–47.



**Figure 6: The impossibilities of assimilation**

The turn towards assimilation as dominant social policy was heavily favoured by the wider Australian society. Unfortunately, it appears that major issues held back assimilation from total implementation. In NSW, the policy of assimilation meant that the remnant Aborigines left after the ‘full-bloods’ have died out previously segregated to missions and reserves needed to move to towns, cities or places where there was employment for them. In 1940, the Board in NSW began the implementation of a seven-point plan designed assimilate the Aborigines who remained. This plan included encouraging self-help in Aborigines themselves including getting them to work away from missions. Families assessed to be suitable could also be moved to towns. This plan still included the same management ideas for children and young people as previously implemented including removal and being put into service.<sup>87</sup>

When later assessed, this plan was seen to have failed, with as little as 39 houses made available for Aboriginal families in towns like Maitland and Newcastle.<sup>88</sup> The other part of this plan in NSW was the issuing of Exemption certificates. These, in essence, meant the individual no longer came under the Aborigines Act. The individual involved needed to not live on missions anymore and in fact was not allowed to return to any mission including those where their own family resided. They could purchase and consume alcohol but not share with those still under the Act. The Exemption Certificate was not an everlasting certainty as they could be revoked at

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<sup>87</sup> Read, 1983, 23–33.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 29.

any time for reasons such as too many Aborigines lived with them or they shared money with their relatives or their children went to live with other relatives.<sup>89</sup>

As discussed earlier, marriages between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people had been controlled. Even in those marriages accepted between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men, if the non-Aboriginal man left or died, the children could be taken away. The move to assimilation meant that marriages between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people needed to happen. They also faced the racism of the wider society. As stated earlier, strategies to have Aboriginal people disperse into society and disappear as they assimilated hit a number of damaging blockages.

Aborigines needed to become gainfully employed. With the pre-existing beliefs that they were only capable of manual labour, their access to work was limited. It was very difficult in towns and cities. On the stations, wages were dependant on who was accompanying the Aboriginal worker and often the worker was paid in rations rather than cash wages. They would often camp, and in some instances, were provided space to sleep under a roof.<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately, the public opinions that led to earlier segregation, including racist beliefs and actions, still existed and manifested in a number of ways that directly affected the education to which Aboriginal people could gain access. Early in the colonies, the assumption was made that Aborigines were stupid. The Protection Board argued the purpose of training Aboriginal children was for them to join the 'industrial classes of the colony'.<sup>91</sup> Children in the Homes were trained to be manual labourers and servants. Girls were taught to bake and clean and the food products of their training were then the food served in the Homes back to them. Children went to apprenticeship around the age of 14 or 15 and thus received very little education. If the child could read and write, this was considered a good standard of education for them and the best that could be expected of them intellectually. Children in towns in many parts of the country could and were denied access to local schools by at the request of other parents.<sup>92</sup>

The effect of the perceptions of Aboriginal intellect as low combined with closed access to full educational experiences ensured the lower level of educational qualifications if any. History shows there were no publicly identified Aboriginal graduates from Australian universities until

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>90</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 212.

<sup>91</sup> Read, *The Stolen Generations*, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Australian Museum, *Indigenous Australia Timeline 1901–1969*, accessed 19 May 2012, <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Indigenous-Australia-Timeline-1901-to-1969>; NSW Board of Studies, *Aboriginal Educational Contexts: Timeline 1900–1966*, accessed 19 May 2012, <http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/aboriginal-studies/timeline/timeline-1900-1966/>.

the mid- to late-1960s. So many times, individuals report it was the perceptions of others that impacted upon the educational experience they gained. As Margaret Valadian said, it was only encountering a teacher in Brisbane who believed she could do well that she herself imagined a future for herself that included higher education. She went on to become the first Aboriginal female graduate of a university (Bachelor of Social Studies, The University of Queensland, 1966)<sup>93</sup> and the man who was the first Aborigine or first Aboriginal male is Kumanji Uncle Charles Perkins who completed a Bachelor of Arts in 1965 at the University of Sydney. Kumanji was moved with his mother's permission to continue his schooling from The Bungalow to an Anglican institution for boys in Adelaide. While the Bungalow in Alice Springs was also an institution, Perkins had resided there with his mother. Kumanji Perkin's mother herself was part of the Stolen Generations having been removed from her mother and sent to Adelaide to be raised.

As discussed earlier, many places implemented curfews on Aboriginal people being in town after dark and certainly enjoying all the parts of Australian culture was not possible for Aboriginal people. Even after serving in World War I and II, Aborigines were refused service of alcohol and where this was relaxed, they were not necessarily allowed in the pub itself, being served perhaps through a side window instead. The legislation in these instances was clear and Aborigines still, even after serving the nation as soldiers (which they were banned from doing), came under the Aborigines Protection Acts. The majority of these Acts were not removed until the late 1960s. This included a level of surveillance that may surprise many Australians. Police have always watched Aborigines closely and their movements tracked; in part because they were mandated to do so as the responsible body for undertaking some child removals but also removal of adults to missions, reserves and gaol.<sup>94</sup>

The final point though is a reinforcement of the idea that the Australian people were not ready to live alongside assimilated Aboriginal people even if Aboriginal people wanted that. The appointment of Professor Shane Houston to the University of Sydney in 2011, encouraged him to recount the story of another appointment of his to a large WA health service where, when asking for a particular staff member at one of the hospital's reception desks, he was told: 'Oh no, the Aboriginal people need go to the area out the back'. He said 'They actually made you go through a glass door and sit in a separate area, because they didn't like Aboriginal people sitting

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<sup>93</sup> The University of Melbourne, *Australian Women's Archives Project: The Australian Women's Register Margaret Valadian*, accessed 26 August 2011, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/IMP0213b.htm>.

<sup>94</sup> Muswellbrook Shire Council, *Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Their Communities—Police*, with Walking Together Reconciliation Committee, accessed 19 May 2012, <http://www.workingwithatsi.info/content/reading2D.htm>.

in the same room'.<sup>95</sup> This shows that many individuals continue to treat Aboriginal people as another people and certainly a different class.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has proposed some ways to move closer to a full understanding of the implications of Stolen bodies/severed connectedness for all those involved in Australian life, but more particularly, the Stolen Generations. Through the close examination of four major impacts of removal—the physical bodies, the minds, those left behind, and the wider involvement and desires of the Australian people—the argument has been presented that this has created a group of people now known as the Stolen Generations who have suffered the full effects of policies of segregation, protection and then assimilation. The next chapter furthers this exploration of the resulting lived life of Stolen Generations adults based upon the information presented in this chapter, that each has lost a connectedness or embeddedness to Aboriginal culture as a deliberate process enacted upon their bodies and their minds. The resultant dysphorias will be examined in light of those narratives and then developed further in Chapter 10.

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<sup>95</sup> C. Rodley, 'Shane Houston Inside the Tent', *Sydney Alumni Magazine*, accessed 19 May 2012, <http://sydney.edu.au/alumni/sam/july2011/shane-houston.shtml>.

## **PART TWO: EXAMINING THE NARRATIVES**

### **LIVED LIVES, TOLD STORIES**

## CHAPTER 6: THEMES IN THE *BRINGING THEM HOME ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION*

### Introduction

This chapter is the first of three chapters that focus on presenting the stories of women of the Stolen Generations central to this thesis. As previously discussed, the HREOC presented the Australian Federal Parliament in 1997 with the *Bringing Them Home Report* that examined the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. Among the recommendations was that stories of individual lives of these people involved in the removals be recorded for the benefit of all Australians. These stories were collected on behalf of the National Library of Australia and are housed in Canberra. There were approximately 300 stories collected during the initial collection phase in the late 1990s, including interviews with removed children, government authorities, church personnel and carers. This chapter focuses more specifically on the themes generated by a reading of the *Bringing Them Home Collection* at the National Library of Australia.<sup>1</sup>

These interviews provide an opportunity to examine a number of issues including those earlier discussed issues of body and cultural dysphoria, through the eyes of people involved in removal processes. This chapter explores the material found when the collection was read specifically for the stories of women taken from their families who had contributed their stories either personally, or via a second party. While the target of the reading was specifically to concentrate on removed female children, other stories were read where they were tied to the women's stories, for example, in the instance where a woman was interviewed with her husband. In this chapter, the themes are presented with the stories of the individuals employed to reinforce the way each theme plays out.<sup>2</sup> In later chapters, these themes will be revisited as they arose in the stories of two particular Stolen Generations women collected specifically for this study.

As was outlined in Chapter 2 on methodology, the National Library of Australia Collection was visited three times. After the second visit, a preliminary analysis of the material was undertaken. At that point, a number of themes in the material were identified that appeared to resonate with the ideas discussed in the literature review. These themes fell into two broader sections: cultural identification and family identification. Visit three though initiated a restructuring of the earlier categorisation of cultural identification. The examination and discussion of cultural identification and family identification remain but the material is split into two broader

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<sup>1</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a list of the *Bringing Them Home* interviews reviewed for this thesis.



categories of focused on the years spent in 'care' and secondly, the post-'care' years. The term 'post-"care"' is used because some individuals were released as early as 16 or 17 and these ages while bordering on adulthood were still very young ages to be set free from 'care' arrangements to manage their own lives.

### **Years in 'Care'—Stolen Culture, Stolen Identities**

As noted earlier, in the *Setting the Scene* chapter, each of the states and the NT of Australia passed laws enforcing assimilation. Each interview read was examined for each interviewee's perspective on living their Aboriginality/Stolen-ness or difference, if anything. That is, how was their experience different to that of their biological family or others who are not like them, for example, not Aboriginal, not Stolen, or not living in the Homes? The outcome of these policies, it is argued, was an attempt to subvert Aboriginal identity and assimilate the children to the wider 'Australian culture'. Interviewees describe living through their childhood not being told, and not having any idea, that they are Aboriginal. If they 'discovered' their biological heritage, it occurred when other kids told them and they were actively discriminated against on the grounds of race, or they found out when they saw their birth family.

Such was the dislocation of the girls that some of the interviewees were able to identify when they first gained awareness of their own Aboriginality, and also the first day they saw Aboriginal people and recognised them as such. One interviewee first saw Aboriginal people at about eight years old when she was moved to a new home where there resided a large group of Aboriginal children. She spoke about being able to immediately fit in and be accepted by them.<sup>3</sup> What seems apparent is that interviewees do identify that at some stage they become aware that they are different to non-Aboriginal people. These children seemed to be routinely taught a dichotomy of white to black, 'Australian' to Aboriginal, and 'us' to 'them'. The following quotations make this point eloquently:

I had a white family ... [but] because I'm black skin ... I stuck out like a sore thumb ... [a] little black at the end of the line.<sup>4</sup>

I used to look at myself in the mirror and often wish that I was white. I wanted to be white because everybody else was white. You know I didn't see any other black faces around me and, you know I, I just wanted to be white like the rest of the family.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Record 8, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Record 51.

<sup>5</sup> Record 53.

There also appeared to be a process of indoctrinating the girls to fear anyone Aboriginal. This set up a situation in which Aboriginal people became strangers having no commonality with or familiarity to the children. When the girl's relatives came to the Home or into their lives, they refused to understand or recognise them as their relatives. Interviewees expressed the experience of being scared to the point of hysteria when seeing Aboriginal people at their Home or in the streets of the nearby town. Two women commented:

Well, see, when we were in the Home none of us children knew that we were Aborigines. We thought we were white. We were told we were white and we didn't know, you see. So I was terrified of any Kooris, black people, I saw, you know. They took me up to Mum [Home matron], Home, you see, and when I opened my eyes there was these two boys there and I screamed and clung onto Mum, you know, and I said, 'get those black fellas away—not fellas—boys away from me, you know. I was really terrified, I really was, you know. I'd never seen a dark person, you know.'<sup>6</sup>

Grandfather came to fence and she ran away screaming cause he was black.<sup>7</sup>

The matrons, nuns, and workers in the Homes gave the girls instructions like: 'Do not talk to the natives'<sup>8</sup> and 'I was told never to go near them'.<sup>9</sup> This went along with morality lessons about blacks being drunks or no good.

The girl in this quotation was taken from Bomaderry to Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls and faced a serious challenge to her self-identity:

At Cootamundra big girls came to me and I said 'why are you girls black?' The biggest girl said 'You've got brown skin'. I said 'No. Everybody told me I was white, we're white from Bomaderry, you know, down there'. They said, 'No have a look at your skin', and when I looked at my skin some of the girls had light brown skin like me, you see. I started bawling because I was the same colour ... They gave me a shock because I didn't know what colour I really was, you know.<sup>10</sup>

This particular quotation shows us that she was able to see her brown skin tone but it is at this point that she gains a realisation that it may signify more than just the colour itself. Many other children did not develop that deeper understanding until later in their lives.

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<sup>6</sup> Record 3, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Record 78, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Record 58, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Record 3, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Record 3, p. 19.

Some of the children knew of their Aboriginality. Sometimes they knew due to experiences where their difference had become apparent. Some, because they were in homes with non-Aboriginal children and although, for instance, all of them were lined up when potential foster parents visited, it was only the non-Aboriginal children who were chosen for foster care. The children remaining learnt that it was because of their Aboriginality that they were not chosen. Sometimes the children were the only Aborigines in their school or in the area. They speak about not really having a sense of what Aboriginality might be but coupled with the experiences of being taunted or being told they were different, they quickly learnt their difference was a disadvantage. Alongside this, for some children, there were some very negative messages about Aborigines and Aboriginal children like: 'black children belong to the devil'.<sup>11</sup>

The negotiation of their own sense of Aboriginality internally, and with others, was very difficult. When the children left the Home to go to school, they could be called names like 'abo' or 'nigger' or 'black'. More than one child was taunted with 'nigger, nigger, pull the trigger one, two, three'.<sup>12</sup> They had no identity as Aboriginal or as a native, so it made no sense to them when they were called those names in the school, and this led them to feeling very confused: 'Became friends [with white children]... but couldn't play with them after school cause town too racist'.<sup>13</sup>

Their confusion was only heightened by many of the girls having been taught they were white: that is, to think and behave 'white'. One recalled:

I was told never to go near them they wanted us to be white ... lot of Kooris called me whitewash and coconut ... I could never sleep at their place. It made it pretty hard for me to mix with my people because I didn't know what to do and if I say something out of place about Kooris I'd more or less get my throat cut, you know.<sup>14</sup>

One interviewee talked about being treated differently in the schoolroom: 'If you didn't get passed being white you don't get an education. Ones that pass for white got more education than the half-caste and full-bloods'.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, the enormity and comprehensiveness of the attack on the identity of these girls is difficult to understand but it resulted in every part of their identity being contradicted, changed,

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<sup>11</sup> Record 55, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Record 78.

<sup>13</sup> Record 78.

<sup>14</sup> Record 3, pp. 6–7.

<sup>15</sup> Record 55, p. 25.

manipulated or disturbed to such a large extent that in some cases, the individual child could not even keep their birth name that they may have had for years. They were routinely separated from their siblings; and moved from place to place, dormitory to dormitory, Home to Home. In some instances, they were not told they had siblings in the same Home or they were banned from seeing them.<sup>16</sup>

This was experienced in the Homes, in foster placements, and in the adoptive arrangements as well. One foster mother said to an Aboriginal girl she was fostering, ‘you can never trust an Aboriginal. They lie, they cheat and they steal.’<sup>17</sup> There were good people who wanted to help the children and offered some of the placements. Even then, this could become a little tainted. One foster mother told her Aboriginal foster child that ‘Aboriginal people need help’ to learn how to live in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Some were told that their family did not want them or that they were the spawn of the devil, or their mothers were whores and they would become so also. For some children in the Homes, the only people who loved or cared for them were the other children. Time and time again, the interviewees talk about a lack of love shown to them by the people in charge of the Homes in which they lived their lives. The other children became their support. Being sent to foster placements or work placements, though, separated these same children, and often they never saw each other again. Little information was shared with the children including not being told where the other children went or if they would be back. If they were taken themselves, they were often not told where they were going. Clearly, this was a very destabilising process for those children. Ironically though, one interviewee commented the idea or possibility of family connections was so far from their minds that it was not until later in their lives that they even had the language to consider these other children as brothers or sisters.<sup>19</sup>

Many of these children did not have a real experience of families or siblings having spent a large per cent of their lives in the Homes. Some were told they had no biological family or that they had died.<sup>20</sup> This was sometimes even when there were siblings in the Home. In one instance, the children who had been raised by their parents before their removal were told untruthfully that their parents had perished in a car accident.<sup>21</sup> Often the information provided

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<sup>16</sup> Record 50; 53; 72. In addition, see a discussion about these movements in Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 374.

<sup>17</sup> Record 29.

<sup>18</sup> Record 66.

<sup>19</sup> Record 67. This material is very sensitive, and while the records are available to be read, the majority require written permission to be quoted. Rather than seek these permissions, general summaries were used where direct quotes were not already freely available. All material is verifiable via the records list provided in Appendix A.

<sup>20</sup> See Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 343, for examples.

<sup>21</sup> Record 59.

was untrue. This is evidence that there was a clear intention to obliterate familial and cultural identification among these children.

Further, children were routinely removed in family groups or to the same Home over a staggered period. The overwhelming experience seemed to be that they did not recognise the other children as their siblings as they were never told they had siblings when they had been removed at a very young age. Sometimes, other Home children told them about the presence of their siblings. They often had no idea how to relate to them though as they would be separated into age groups in the Home and live in different places to each other. Bonding then occurred to other children where they were rather than to their biological siblings or relatives. They were given the overwhelming sense of being alone in the world. Interviewees spoke about how not having a sense of their ancestry meant that they had no sense of belonging, no sense of family. When they saw their siblings and other members of their family, they recognised a physical similarity but had no sense of identifying with them or even a sense of how to connect with them.

The repeated restatement of feelings of loss through the collection is a resounding presence. The interviewees talk about feelings such as constant and overwhelming loneliness, lovelessness, and the experience of total devastation from being told they are in the Home because their family did not want them. Some speak of the loss of their mother's love whether or not they had ever known this prior to going into the Home. This loss exists even if they were able to have contact with their mother later in life. They were just strangers to each other.

Girls who were taken after spending years with their families lost much that their families had taught them. They were then taught a whole new set of rules and then just thrown back to their families at a later date. The irony then being that they felt nobody wanted them, or that they could not relate to either group completely.<sup>22</sup> It was into that void that people started to drink or be self-destructive in other ways, and often the only people they could relate to successfully and feel a commonality with were other ex-residents of the Homes. They could not relate to people well and later on felt other flow-on effects including being unable to love their own children as they wished. In some instances, their children were then taken away as well.

I was so angry at the whole system and every time I used to drink things used to get worse and I used to go and try and suicide and try to kill myself, trying to forget things. The more I drank the more things just come back.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Record 23.

<sup>23</sup> Record 24, pp. 41–42.

In some rare cases, interviewees spoke of being loved and accepted, although uniformly they spoke of having little or no contact or understanding with their family of origin and no sense of their Aboriginality.<sup>24</sup> Tragically, later in their lives, many of these same individuals were then accused of being white, talking white, thinking they are white, acting white: 'Only a coconut'.<sup>25</sup>

Uniformly, children experienced 'whiteness' as valued by the Homes and society. Being assimilated was precisely the goal of the intervention upon their lives by welfare authorities. Unfortunately for the children though, this was not an agenda of either their biological families or communities.

It is a shocking to consider that at no point did these children experience their cultural behaviours as valuable. When they are in the Homes, they were too Aboriginal, and if they had a chance to reconnect with their family and communities, they were not Aboriginal enough. Some interviewees spoke about creating an identity to answer the questions about their skin colour, particularly when they had a sense that they may not be white. They did not though perceive themselves as either culturally or biologically Aboriginal either. Many respondents spoke about having a sense of being different, of having a foot in either world, but not really being of either. This is the body and cultural dysphoria at work enacted so clearly in the actions of the authorities who raised these children.

The narrative of the childhoods of these girls rarely speaks of care. The responsible authorities whether they are nuns or other 'workers' had responsibility for these children, but their work is rarely described as 'caring'. These children were raised from birth through to adulthood by people whose job it was to care for them but care seems to have been rarely practiced. Too many times, the telling of these narratives talk of indoctrination, neglect, pain and suffering and not the actions usually used in raising children like caring, respect, safety and a least a little love.

It is not surprising that the children valued the other children in the Home. It was really only them with whom they shared even remotely the same values, goals or experiences. They have a commonality. While this aspect of the children's lives was partially documented in the *Bringing Them Home Report*, it is crucial to note that it also operates as a crucial aspect of their loss. With the other children, there are no shared assumptions about their experiences like those held by community or family. The gulf between what the children experienced and what their families believed they experienced is wide. The interviewees say that many of their families of

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<sup>24</sup> Record 23, p.13.

<sup>25</sup> Record 78. 'Coconut' is slang for someone who is black on the outside and white on the inside.

origin assumed that they had experienced a reasonable upbringing. In some instances, they did not want to share the real story, as to do so, would hurt the family even more:

You know when you come into a family that's been so dysfunctional, and you come in with your own dysfunction, they think you've had a good time and when you start hearing some of their stories you know they haven't had a good time, so it's not always possible to tell that you haven't had a good time.<sup>26</sup>

Often the removed girl had no desire to speak about the abuse anyway. To describe the day-to-day experience of institutionalised life was too difficult and impossible to convey to the outsider. It is these experiences and connections to the other children that are later discussed in this thesis as the 'unknowable othering' that happens to Stolen Generations: where the pain and suffering is too difficult or unconscionable in such a way as to be almost impossible for the observer to grasp.<sup>27</sup>

Even those children that had more positive lives also had a great gulf to bridge when they went 'home' to Aboriginal communities that suffered poverty, damaged lives, social inequality, and disadvantage.<sup>28</sup>

### **After 'Care'/Adult Life**

All of the interviewees contributing to the *Bringing Them Home Collection* were adults at the time of their interview. This skews the record in a way because they speak about their childhood experience after it has ended. Even lives spent in early adulthood can be many years ago. That being said, what is also interesting about the interviews is that there is a scope to look over the years and look at the trends that emerged for people, including in the areas of relationships and the impact of removal.

Time and time again through, these records these women spoke about feeling alone and generally going through their lives by themselves. Their sense of disconnection seems dominant. Each visit to the collection reinforced this reading. Thus, often it seemed to be said that people felt alone even where they had had children and relationships. They continued to speak about the other kids in the homes of their childhood as being their only family and when they had children themselves, that they became their only family. Relationships with their family of origin were never easy and were often uncomfortably difficult and full of ongoing issues. Some issues could be resolved within families but most were not.

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<sup>26</sup> Record 65.

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 9.

<sup>28</sup> Record 14.

It is useful to consider the way the earlier identified themes play out in adulthood. It is reasonable to assume that to disturb an individual's sense of stability in childhood so much, in so many ways, has to result in very disturbed or destabilised adults. As identified earlier, the first period of disruption seems to be when a child was in the 'care' phase. The second time appears to be when the removed individual is still a teenager and the welfare authorities decide it is time to release them from their care arrangements. At that point, usually at the age of 18, the young person has to establish a way to live independently. For young women in Homes, it meant expulsion from the Home, and extinguishment of any formal foster care arrangements.

Questions they faced included: was there somewhere for them to go? Do they have a family somewhere? Where was home? Some talked about grouping in cities with others who have been in the similar circumstances. In some places, they found themselves still under the rule of Protection Acts. One interviewee spoke about having being brought up as white, and that she was to have nothing to do with Aboriginal people. Then, upon her release from the children's Home, she was told to report monthly to the police station because she was still under the *Protection of Aboriginals and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Amendment Act 1934 Qld*. In this example, the young woman then had the police attend her wedding because under that Act she was still under the control of guardians. She married a non-Aboriginal man thus she was released from being under the Act.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps she was then seen to be the responsibility of her new 'guardian': her husband?

Part of the reason for not seeking out the family was a desire to avoid being rejected again. Standing outside those experiences, it is very difficult to explain how the story of a 'biological family who could make everything okay again' is so powerful. I (Stephanie Gilbert) grew up never looking like anyone in my family or in my community. Being adopted was a secret to be shared with only your best friends. In hindsight, my family all looked so different so it was probably only me who thought it was a secret. I remember thinking as I grew older that it did not matter if the relationships or friendships did not work out because they were not my 'real' family. This belief made me act much more irresponsibly in those relationships than I would do now. It was living out the opposite to the saying 'you can't choose your family'. For me, my real family was going to be the end to my isolation and being hurt. My family would look like me, love me, and like me. Only after having met them did I learn that it is your friends who tend to be the people who can love you unconditionally and hence become your family.

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<sup>29</sup> Record 50.



The following section of the chapter talks about this journey post-release. Some of the issues occur when the women are still teenagers but tend to extend across the rest of their lives. Uniformly, we see evidence of abuse, destabilisation and their cultural dysphoria in the interviewees' narratives. As adults, some women have returned to check records at the Homes where they were institutionalised and found there are no physical records that they were ever even there. In itself, this nullification or erasure of the records is like another denial of their experience. Did it really happen? Do they matter? Did they ever?

### **Cultural Dysphoria: Loss of Knowledge/Culture/language**

The respondents uniformly spoke about the opportunities they had lost to learn the culture of their family of origin by being removed. They also then tied this loss to a current experience of standing between two or more cultures and not really being fully part of any (institutionalised culture as well):

I think because they wanted us to be like white people. They want us to speak like white people and to do what white people do and they want us to. Well, it's pretty hard for me to say things like that because, as somebody said, I got one foot on the Koori side and the other foot on the white side. I'm in the middle, and so ... it makes it pretty hard for me to relate to the Kooris. ... I find it very hard to be taught the Koori's way.<sup>30</sup>

It took me years to go back to where I was born, because I was too frightened, because of the brain washing.<sup>31</sup>

In many cases, respondents spoke of learning their culture through going to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or through other self-directed means like reading. They consistently say though that there is no going back to the culture or living like they would have if they had not been taken. This excerpt illustrates this point well:

Q: Are you managing to reconstruct your Aboriginal identity? Do you think you ever will?

A: Not totally. Nope, never totally. 'Cause there's always this thing that pushes you back. I don't know what it is. It's something, and I've talked to other women about this and um ... I mean we laugh about it, we're not like those blacks you know,

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<sup>30</sup> Record 3, pp. 9–10.

<sup>31</sup> Record 58, p. 20.

those blacks in Redfern, all those blacks over there. It's just something that's been with you all your life.<sup>32</sup>

I got a job in one of the offices there near Central [Station in Sydney], and this is when I found out I was Aboriginal ... 'Don't take me where there's a lot of blacks'. [Friend replies] 'J\_\_\_ look at the colour of your skin'. I just went berserk and it seems like I've been doing that for the rest of my life, just going berserk because I just didn't believe it, that I was black like them, you know.<sup>33</sup>

This woman experienced utter heartbreak and confusion caused by having her understanding of who she was, and more particularly any sense of Aboriginality, interfered with. She poignantly commented: 'The negative side, everything, my whole life. My whole life has been bloomin' lost. I've been nothing, I've just been a shell with nothing inside.'<sup>34</sup>

Other interviewees said there was no point of focusing on their losses because it just could not be fixed now. In addition, some also argued they had been able to find a comfortable place living between cultures.

### **Dawning Awareness of Reasons for Removal**

An interesting part of the story many of the interviewees told was about coming to a realisation that they were taken from their families of origin as a result of an attempt to control Aborigines or because of the colour of their skin.

Now I'm grown up I believe it's just because of the colour of skin, that's what I believe, because we were black. I believe that now: out of sight, out of mind, get the little black ones away so not to mix with the white ones. ... They call my family half-castes.<sup>35</sup>

She realised, at Cootamundra Domestic Training *Home* for Aboriginal *Girls*, that she was there because of the colour of her skin. Children at the school also pointed it out to her.

A woman in the collection spoke about coming to a realisation that they deliberately split her family so that the colour would no longer exist. That realisation did not change anything for her though because she still over her life believed nobody cared about her at all and she felt deeply hurt and troubled by the experience of removal.

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<sup>32</sup> Record 58, p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Record 58, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> Record 58, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Record 55, pp. 7–8.

Another spoke about Aborigines being considered dumb and so having their children removed would not mean anything to them: 'I think they didn't understand because they were people ... I felt they looked down on another race, a black race, as being lower class of people'.<sup>36</sup>

Some were told later as adults that because they were half-castes, their parents knew there was an expectation they needed to be dropped off to the Home, so they just did it because they were pre-empting the inevitable. Other parents just waited for the day for the authorities to come and get them.

One woman spoke about being sent to a Home because the property where her mother worked already had a number of Aboriginal people employed or living there. She had been with her mother on the property until she was seven when she was then sent to the Mission and on to a convent. When she sought to go back, she was told by the woman in charge of the property, 'there are enough black people out here on this property without any more'.<sup>37</sup> She has remained at that very same convent since her removal and is now an adult woman. When asked about her identity, she spoke about then having almost no conception of being Aboriginal 'as a matter of fact it never enters my head that I've got Aboriginal blood in me'.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting then that this woman contributed her story to the collection.

In Record 8, the woman says that after being taken and struggling to understand she was Aboriginal and being led to believe there were no Aborigines left, she says: 'I get very angry, you know, because why should I, why, I shouldn't have had to have an identity crisis'.<sup>39</sup>

Part of the difficulty these women faced was as adults coming face to face with the knowledge that they were the very people they had been taught to fear and avoid. They went home to find their mothers were Aboriginal, as were their siblings and other relatives. One interviewee talked about expecting her mother to be white and getting a terrible shock when she met her and she was not: 'Shit she's not white'.<sup>40</sup> She never said anything but after being told her father was 'Negro' she had operated her whole life, including her marital life, not knowing whether to say she was 'black' or that she might give birth to a 'throwback' (the term given colloquially to babies born of mixed parentage with a 'Negro' who are born with black skin colouring). It is difficult to explain the conflict experienced by this woman through her life and then to find that

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<sup>36</sup> Record 64.

<sup>37</sup> Record 16, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Record 16, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> Record 8, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> Record 13, p. 11.

all along, it was her mother who gave to her, her brown skin, and her father was in fact not a 'Negro' at all.

Another woman had a breakdown at age 22 when her cultural dysphoria hit:

I started to question my Aboriginality, and ... I read the book, Charles Perkins ... and I had a breakdown, and ... I didn't know whether I was black or white, because I just didn't. Aboriginals didn't exist in this country, that's what the book said. And I had a terrible breakdown.<sup>41</sup>

In some instances, other Aborigines accused them later in adult life of trying to be 'white'. Conversely, non-Aborigines still perceived them as Aboriginal; a state many had little idea about either. This is an emotionally fraught space to be in because they had a sense of being taken against their will from their family and culture of origin, and then when they become older, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people judge them for not understanding how to 'be Aboriginal'. They had other comments made to them like that they were not like other Aborigines. This pain arising from cultural dysphoria created by removal was further complicated by a number of factors relating to their family identity.

### **Family Identity**

#### **Difficulties Getting back to Extended Family**

The theme of family identity comes through in the interviews as expressions about the struggle each interviewee had connecting again to their family of origin where they met them. One group of interviewees knew their siblings and family before going into the Homes. Another group of people did not know their family of origin at all before or during their time in the Home. Another group knew there was family in the Home with them but had no sense of these other children as siblings. Some thought they were an orphan and there was no family to know about at all, only finding out later that this was incorrect.

In Record 86, the interviewee spoke about meeting her siblings as being 'being nerve-racking'. One day when she had been a child, a van pulled up in the street near the five siblings and bundled the lot in and took them to the orphanage. She had been adopted later into a family along with a biological sister although others had remained in the Homes. She blamed her mother for her troubled life but later realised that it was not her mother's fault. She never got to

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<sup>41</sup> Record 8, p. 28.

meet her or talk to her and now often wonders whether she is similar to her mother in traits or looks. Her father lived on but was a broken man after the loss of his children.<sup>42</sup>

The interviews predominantly shared one point though and that is when the interviewees had contact later in their life with their biological family, the encounters and relationships were very difficult. They were looking for commonality where there often was none. For instance, another way body dysphoria operated was that even though the individuals were aware they were biological connected to their family, nothing had prepared them for a physical resemblance between them. This could be a shocking experience when faced with physically looking similar to someone when never having seen them let alone wrapping your head around that they are your sister or brother. In some instances, people could be compared to relatives who had died or found significant ones like parents had died before they could be connected with.

The other thing that was missing when encountering these relatives was an understanding of how the family dynamics worked and who everybody was and where they fitted. This is one of the ways cultural dysphoria worked in the lives of these ‘Stolen’ children. Often the returning child just felt left out of everything. In some instances, they went home to find that their parents had had other children who were able to grow up in the family and be loved by their family of origin. There was a sense of a loss of love, of understanding and even the ability to speak in the same concepts and language:

So when I got there, I was highly emotional, I was fearful, I had no idea of what was going to happen. I didn’t know if I would be accepted. I was just up and down, with highs, with joy, with fear, lows, hearing history about things for the first time that, in a sense, shattered the scaffolding of fantasy that I had built as a child to hold me and my world together. Going home actually shattered that scaffolding, knocked it down and replaced it with another scaffolding of a family history that I had built for myself to hold me together, if you like, as a child.<sup>43</sup>

Relationships with parents, particularly with their mother, were difficult and alien and often these relationships were filled with unresolved feelings. Interviewees both sought the mother they maybe never had, but also could not forget all that had gone on. The mother became the focus of much blame. One interviewee talked about not having known who her parents were and then when she finally met her mother, she rejected her as her mother. Later in her life, she forced herself to relate to her but they started out essentially as strangers.<sup>44</sup> Many women talked

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<sup>42</sup> Record 86.

<sup>43</sup> Record 23.

<sup>44</sup> Record 3.

about meeting their mother and being unable to connect in any way. In some instances, it was that they had lost their language and in others, they were totally alienated. In one instance, the woman involved found her mother who shook hands with her. Later, she was to find out that her mother had looked for her the whole time she had been gone.<sup>45</sup>

In some instances, they found out that although they had believed nobody ever loved them or fought for them that in fact, someone had. It does not mean though, that the adult interviewee was able to recover from that earlier heartbreak. In some instances, the parents spoke a different language to the children and so something as basic as having a conversation between mother and daughter could not happen:

Oh it was terrible. Oh, you know, that was when, you know, the whole of my body was crying, my soul, body and spirit were crying because he [Grandfather] was so excited to see me so to, you know, talk with me, and yet I couldn't understand one word ... I wanted to ask him so many things, you know, and yet I couldn't.<sup>46</sup>

It took me a long time to figure it out, but I had to ask a lot of people. And the difference between me meeting my family today is that my family still practices their law and still speaks their fluent language. English next, language first. And me being a white Aboriginal girl in a white man's society, speaking white man's tongue is very confusing to an Aboriginal person that has been brought up speaking language. That's the only two different culture things I'd had. I might be coloured skin but knowing my culture and language is different.<sup>47</sup>

#### Unable to Sustain Marriage or Relationships

The records show that in the majority of cases girls married or got partners but mostly they were unable to sustain a relationship with them. In many cases, they spoke of the partner remaining a good friend but they were unable to live with them. In some cases, they had had abusive partners. One woman's husband triggered her memories of the nuns in the Home when he said 'You're mine, you belong to me'.<sup>48</sup>

Some had successful marriages and in some instances, this was with men who had also been removed from their family of origin. The major reason seems to relate to the next point about family relationships as well, and that is that children were forced to become emotionally distant or numb.

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<sup>45</sup> Record 12.

<sup>46</sup> Record 64.

<sup>47</sup> Record 51.

<sup>48</sup> Record 50.

But I think one of the things that happened in the dormitory, you learnt to suppress any anger, not only anger, but you didn't cry about things. Unhappiness, sadness, any of these were suppressed. It was better that you kept it in. I was very good at that, very, very good at it.<sup>49</sup>

#### Unable to Sustain Extended Family Relations: Their Children Become Their Only Family

Given the difficulty and unresolved issues with their birth family, many interviewees had a perception of their own marriage and offspring as being the only family they had. Thus, most just looked to their children and grandchildren as their family. As this woman says, people say to her: 'Oh you don't know what it's like to have a family' and her sense was that she did not.<sup>50</sup> It meant that she and others did not see those roles in families played out. If they grew up in Homes, they lived as institutionalised people answering to bells, rules and whistles. Authorities who were there were employed to 'care'. When they did actually care, this was a positive, but never replaced having a mother. They did not witness or experience being in a family and learning the dynamics of how families can work. Thus, when they had children of their own, they had no idea where to even start except to know that they wanted good for their children and not what had happened to them. Unfortunately, many also lost their own children into care.

The women in the interviews expressed a sadness of the loss of cultural inheritance their children received as a result of their removal. They lost the stories, culture and knowledge and relationship with extended family. They spoke about not being able to converse in the same language or having similar values and ideas of the world. As previously presented, Record one gives us an example of this experience: 'It made it pretty hard for me to mix with my people because I didn't know what to do':<sup>51</sup>

Um I don't know why that is [contact lost with extended family]. Um I think the family bond has been sort of broken and, um, you know we sort of, we care about one another but that bond has been broken and we're sort of like, just like friends, you know, not brother and sister sort of thing.<sup>52</sup>

Some told the sad stories of meeting their mothers as strangers, or at the end of their mother's life, even though they may not have ever seen them before that fatal encounter:

Um, probably my biggest regret is that I didn't see my Mum before she passed away just to tell her it was okay and that I didn't blame her, and that I turned out okay, I did okay, and that my children will never ever know her.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Record 19.

<sup>50</sup> Record 81.

<sup>51</sup> Record 3, pp. 6–7.

<sup>52</sup> Record 53.

<sup>53</sup> Record 14.

The woman in Record 59 could not go to her mother's funeral, 'whether it was because I didn't want my emotions [to] go, I don't know, or whether because it was a finalisation of what I really wanted to find out and couldn't, and it was final'. Julie Lavelle interviewed in the *Inquiry*, remembered thinking, on about learning of the death of her mother: 'Why was I crying over a woman I never knew?',<sup>54</sup>

Others, like me, miss having a mother every day and yet my childhood care included an adoptive mother, three foster mothers and a couple of house mothers in a Home. The romanticised concept of mother that I dreamt of through my childhood never eventuated. Perhaps it is a case of just too much pain and too much emotional distance.

### Losing Their Own Children

The experience of having children raised many issues for interviewees. In some cases, the interviewed women were the children or grandchildren of women removed from their families. The women, themselves, then lost children in horrific circumstances, to adoption, or were forced to give them up to the welfare to go into a Home:

And if I had been alright, if I hadn't had this identity problem, I think that child might have been alive today, you know [child drowned in bath].<sup>55</sup>

Other interviewees also spoke of having breakdowns or acting in self-destructive ways that led to their children leaving their care. Those who raised their children spoke of being unable to love their children, as they believed they would have if they had not had their childhood experiences. In some instances, some spoke of being able to give love to their children in ways they had never been able to give to anyone else in their lives, ever.

### Conclusion

This collection was examined for what it would tell about the construction of people's identity within an institutionalised system designed to obliterate, obscure or confuse that process. Did they talk about Aboriginality? Did they have a sense of loss? Did they have a sense of wellness and comfort about their identity now as adults? In the years of care section, the interviewees' records are almost all imbued with an overwhelmingly sense of loss. The bodily dysphoria of being Aboriginal and often looking 'Aboriginal' was active in the minds of the children as they were inculcated to believe they were white, sought and punished to act 'white' but came up against others who often brutally did not agree with this body reading. This then also led to their

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<sup>54</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*.

<sup>55</sup> Record 8, 32.



cultural dysphoria with no culture practiced by these children being acceptable to either community: white or Aboriginal.

Living between two ways of being and feeling a full part of neither culture was also a common experience post-‘care’. There are differing levels of wellness with many expressing despair and emptiness through to an uneasy resignation to get on with it. The original project of assimilation to make these children white appears to have failed on the basis of this evidence, and it has often and tragically created havoc for their sense of self and the rest of their lives. The overwhelming sense of loss, loneliness and lovelessness are clear themes in the lives of these now adult Stolen Children. They continue to show the bodily dysphoria that was created by the processes of removal and attempted assimilation. When going home, for instance, they were required to acknowledge that in spite of their own self-concept, their families were made up of Aboriginal people. The idea of cultural dysphoria is also clearly played out particularly in the reunion processes that see such a disjuncture between the lived life of the removed children and families and communities they left behind. In reflection, only in a few cases were there children who received messages of unconditional love, and acceptance in enjoyable childhoods where children were able to play, grow and learn without brutalisation and rejection.

In the next chapter, the earlier life of a woman taken from her family as a young child will be examined to assess whether these same themes of body and cultural dysphoria exist or for instance loneliness and rejection are banished.

## **CHAPTER 7: FOCUS INTERVIEW A: AS IF THERE WAS A CHOICE AVAILABLE TO ME WHEN I HAD WAITED ALL THESE YEARS TO KNOW WHO I WAS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter starts the presentation of two chapters focused on interviews carried out for this thesis. They illuminate further some of the stories highlighted in the material collected from at the National Library of Australia. In this chapter, we examine the life of a woman, Sherry (pseudonym), removed from her family at the age of eight months. She had an opportunity for reunion with her biological family at the age of 16 but only established permanent contact at the age of 26. This chapter initially presents what the Biographical Narrative Method calls the lived life track of her life. Secondly, it presents and examines her told story. That is, the story she wraps around the bones of the lived life ‘facts’ of her existence. Finally, the chapter turns to analyse the interviews within a number of categories including relationships and social circumstances and social structures. As we will examine, Sherry shares a great many of the structures previously outlined in the *Bringing Them Home* material. She struggles to understand her Aboriginality and regain a sense of membership in her family of origin among other issues. Sherry’s development of her identity got a dry run when early in her twenties she ‘came out’ as a lesbian. As discussed later in this chapter, this required Sherry to reshape her self-definition in terms of external expectations and stereotypes as well new unfamiliar feelings and her fears.

### **Lived Life (See Table 1)**

#### **0–18 years**

Early in the 1960s, Sherry was born in Sydney and was removed from her mother when she was approximately eight months old. For a period of four months, she was institutionalised in Sydney before being placed into a long-term foster arrangement at the age of one. She remained in that foster placement until the age of 13. During these early years, Sherry was happy and settled with her family. She was naturally skilled at sport and excelled at soccer. There was some concern about her being a tomboy and in response she was sent to a girls-only school for her high school education.

Sherry believed up until the age of 13 that she was living in her only family. She was unaware of her care status until at the age of 13 when, after a short period of troubling behaviour including truanting generated by her foster father’s critical illness, she was removed from the long-term foster placement. Her removal was justified in terms of her acting out behaviours including missing school, smoking and hanging around with older young people who were

engaging in self-destructive behaviours such as alcohol consumption. It was not that Sherry herself had particularly participated in these activities but she was in proximity to them.

Upon her removal from her long-term foster placement, she was placed for a period of two months in an institution in Sydney, and then placed again more permanently outside of Sydney. This first institution of her teenage years was similar in nature to a detention centre. She spent from then until her release from care at the age of 18 at that second institution. Thankfully, the second institution was smaller and more personalised. Sherry was placed under a care and control order for all her teenage years. However, at aged 16, Sherry's Department of Community Services workers told her that they had found her biological mother and a week later, sent her to QLD to spend the weekend with her biological family. When she arrived, she found that not only was there no father, there was other siblings she had no prior knowledge of. As will be discussed later, Sherry's contact with her mother petered out over the next year. Sherry was unable to emotionally manage the contact with her biological family but was also fearful of the Department's offer to move her to them permanently. She threw herself into her sport and played at competition and representative levels being highly supported by her carers.

When she was 18, Sherry left her care placement and was able to share a flat with friends. She remained in contact with some of the carers she had had at this home as well as her foster family.

### **Eighteen years old to the present day**

At the age of 18, Sherry was released from her care arrangement. As she explains it, she shared a flat with friends and because she had gained employment with a decent wage, she was a valuable asset to her friendship group.

She was employed with the Department of Sports and Recreation in an Aboriginal training program and she remained there for three years before moving across to the Department of Community Services (DOCS) at the age of 21. Sherry joined DOCS in the unenviable positions of being both young and also an ex-ward in a workplace filled with workers who managed wards of the state and in fact had managed Sherry herself.

Also at 21, Sherry started the processes of coming out as a lesbian. She explains that there were many discriminatory and stereotyped messages around that process and identity as well as the ones she was encountering around Aboriginality.

At age of 25, she came across a file while in the workplace that cited the reason in the court documents for removal of the child involved was ‘Aboriginal’. This shocked Sherry into questioning the reasons for her own removal. She arranged to see her own file with the desire to have the circumstances around her own removal answered. She shared with a few close friends the experience of reading this file but the file provided the link back to her biological family that she had lost in her teenage years after her initial meeting.

At the age of 26, she was able to reconnect with her biological family again and has spent the intervening time getting to know them and they her. Her partner was very supportive in this process and this reconnection process has been much more involved than she perhaps ever envisaged. In part, this is because as well as her immediate family, her mother has numerous siblings and other generations of relations as well. Sherry continues to work in fields related to Stolen Generations and welfare.

**Table 2: Sherry’s Lived Life**

Year	Age	Occurrence
1963 October		Born Sydney
	8 months	Made Ward of State, Child Welfare Department Institutionalised 4 months (8 months–12 months old)
1964	12 months	Fostered to Anglo-Scottish Family
1967–75	4–12 years	Primary school at North Ryde
1970	8 years	Exposed to racism by teacher
1975/6	12–13 years	Private High school in North Sydney
1974/5	11–13 years	Foster father heart attacks and long hospitalisation at early adolescence (12–13)
1976	13 years	Removed at 13 to institution following truancy
	13 years	Institutionalised in Bidura, Glebe Sydney (2 months) No school
	13 years	Institutionalised at Newcastle
Circa 1979	16 years	DOCS required her to fill form for Abstudy
Circa 1979	16 years	Sent to QLD by DOCS for a weekend long holiday with biological mother and four younger siblings (aged 9, 8, 6, 5)
1980		Foster father died
1981–1988		Ceased contact with biological family

1981–1983	18–21 years	Worked for Department of Sports and Recreation
1983	21 years	Started working for DOCS
	21 years	Recognised homosexuality
1987	25 years	Read on case file reason for removal: Aboriginal [not on her own file] Acquired her own case file as a result
1988 onwards	26 + years	Recontact with biological mother/family Accompanied on visits with family until age of 30 when started going alone

## **Told Story**

### **Reading for Relationships <sup>1</sup>**

#### **Foster Family Relations**

Sherry grew up from the age of 12 months to 13 years in her foster family. They were her family. She knew no other. For a long time, they did not tell her that she was a foster child and treated her as their biological child. The foster parents were advised to never tell her but at some point they decided to do so. In hindsight, this may have been useful when she later came into contact with welfare authorities.

They were a very loving and supportive family for her and while ‘the welfare’ visited her home, they were not particularly interested in her as a person and did not interfere with the placement until her teens. She started to question these authorities about her biological family asking about what they looked like, who were they and so on. The foster family was unaware of, and therefore unable to prepare Sherry for, an awareness of her Aboriginality. They knew nothing about the family of origin and thus had no information to share with her about either thing.

Her placement started to be threatened when entering adolescence and she started acting out by getting in trouble at school, missing school and getting caught smoking at school. The truancy officers contacted the welfare department and they became involved in attempting to settle her down.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*.

The basis of the unsettled behaviour and acting could probably be linked directly to her foster father having suffered over a period of 18 months, four heart attacks resulting in a serious life-threatening state of health. This destabilisation of the foster family was extreme and added pressure in a situation in which she already worried about her fostered status and experienced a sense of rejection from her biological family. In the end, the result was her removal from her placement and detention in an institution.

Later, she was moved to another institution to the north of Sydney and during that time, she had contact with her foster family and indeed continues to do so to this day. Unfortunately, her foster father passed away in her later teenage years.

#### Interaction with Family of Origin

The initial contact re-established with Sherry's family of origin occurred when she was 16 years of age. The initial contact occurred after the welfare authorities followed up Sherry's requests for information on her family of origin. At one case conference, they announced that they had identified her family of origin and asked whether she might like to visit with them. The family lived out of NSW so perhaps she might like to spend some school holiday time with them? Incredibly, with no preparation and no support, she was sent off the next holidays to spend a weekend with them.

When she arrived at the airport in their hometown, her 'family' was there to meet her. What she had not realised is that although she had no knowledge of her siblings at all, they had knowledge of her and indeed had known they had a sister all of their lives. They had every year celebrated her birthday. In all, her biological mother and four siblings were there to meet her at the airport that day.

They all travelled back to the family's house and as soon as it was possible Sherry attempted to engage her mother in a conversation about her parents, their relationship and her subsequent conception. What she did not realise until much later was that she had been conceived via her mother's rape. While she would later discover this information through another relative of her mother's generation; it would be an unrelenting 10 years before she had an ability to comprehend her mother's uncommunicative reactions to her teenage questions.

After that weekend, Sherry gradually severed contact with her biological family. Sherry rationalised this to herself in a couple of ways. The first was that her mother's lack of response to her questions had led her to believe that her mother was not really interested in her. Sherry

felt very angry that few, if any, of her questions had been answered. In fact, Sherry told herself that her mother did not like her at all.

Another reason though was that the caseworkers seemed to be interested in something other than Sherry's best interest. They assumed that the weekend visit had gone well and, although they were not explicit with Sherry about it, they seemed to be pushing strongly for her ultimate return to her biological family. It started with them pushing for Sherry to go to her biological mother and family for the six weeks of the Christmas school holidays. Up to that time, she had been going to her foster family for holidays and she did not want anything to jeopardise her spending time with the people she saw as her real family. She got a shock though to hear that her biological mother wanted her to visit again because she had talked herself into believing that her biological mother hated her.

She did not have enough emotional sophistication to say that her even though her mother and siblings did not see her as a stranger, she felt they were strangers. More crucially for her, that while she had not been 'kept' by her mother, her mother had kept four other children. This sharpened the sense of rejection and bewilderment for Sherry.

After she arrived back from that weekend, her biological mother wrote to her and also rang her regularly. As the letters and phone calls went along, the case workers reflected to her that they thought the relationship was going well. They said they hoped to be able to offer her to go and live with her biological family for the remainder of her Year 11 and 12. The caseworkers would say things like: 'It'd be good for you to live up there'.<sup>2</sup> The harder they pushed, the more she resisted and in the end she rejected, completely, going back to QLD.

To ultimately complete this resistance, she severed her contact with her biological mother. The letters came but she did not answer them or the phone calls either. By the end of Year 12, she had ceased all contact. Sherry believes this process really disrupted her ability to do well in her school studies and she ended up failing her Higher School Certificate.

### **Themes in Sherry's Narrative<sup>3</sup>**

This interview plays out a story of great love and great loss and pain. Sherry's very astute knowledge of these two poles has meant she has been able to work over many years towards making her life positive and fulfilling. In part, she has done this through her work in attempting

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<sup>2</sup> Interview 1, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

to gain social justice for children and assisting the world to glean more of an understanding of the Stolen Generations.

### Identity

When Sherry was less than one year old, she went to live with her only set of foster parents: 'They were supportive, very loving and very protective'.<sup>4</sup> They raised her in the northern suburbs of Sydney and within their Anglo-Scottish Australian culture. She was very settled in this environment until she was told she was not a birth child of this family and that her foster father was chronically ill. Of course, this set Sherry to wondering whose child she was or who she was. She asked the case managers from the welfare:

I did always question them about, you know, who's my Mum and dad? And where are they? And what do they look like? And can I see them? And all that sorta stuff ... I was, that was a constant mantra and they ummm, they never told me anything, in fact what they would always say is 'we don't know who they are, we don't where they are' and I wasn't conscious, but certainly at an unconscious level I was internalising a lot of that and feeling rejection, but of course not having the umm cognitive capacity to articulate any of that.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that Sherry identifies a sense of rejection being developed within her from this time. This would then later be added to the rejection she thought she had received when she met her biological mother. When remembering this period, she notes how frustrated and dismissed she felt when, after asking these questions, she was summarily dismissed by her caseworkers. She was told: 'little girls should be seen and not heard, Sherry':<sup>6</sup>

Yeah, it just always left me feeling with a gap and umm, cause what happens at an invisible level always when your growing up and interacting with other kids is, kids who are within their birth families they're getting a lot of this information which is just available all around them and umm and I didn't get any of that and I was always wondering, not to the point where you know I would umm get too saddened or anything, but it was just a nagging feeling of not knowing and wanting to know.<sup>7</sup>

When, after her removal (13 years old), she was placed in an institution to the north of Sydney, she continued to ask questions about her biological family. The answer to those questions, when it came, did so abruptly. In one of the case conferences at the Home when she was 16, the workers told her in a very blasé fashion that they had found her mother in QLD and they would

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<sup>4</sup> Interview 1, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Interview 1, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Interview 1, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Interview 1, pp. 14–15.



organise for a visit to her and her four siblings. She was deeply shocked having had no preparation for receiving the information she had sought for approximately seven years.<sup>8</sup>

In giving her that information they then also handed over a photograph of her birth mother:

I had always been quite egocentric about my thinking of what my Mum looked like I thought you know she was just ... I was gonna look in a mirror and it was gonna be me and so when they produced these photographs not only didn't my Mum look like me, neither did my siblings.<sup>9</sup>

The photos had Sherry's mother and Sherry's siblings but Sherry was convinced they had given her the photos of a family belonging to another kid in the same Home. The reason why was because the photos were clearly of Aboriginal people. At this moment in time, another mind-numbing shock occurred:

I was switched onto that [Aboriginal people] cause in my third class social studies project I did a thing about Captain Cook and found out about Aboriginal people in the most hideous derogatory way from my primary school teacher which had a lasting impact.<sup>10</sup>

In 1970, at age eight, her school teacher set a social studies project on Cook's ship, *HMS Endeavour*, and the 200 years since it had come to 'discover' Australia. In the project book, Aborigines were depicted as dressed in a laplap, standing holding a spear. The teacher advised the children 'not to trust Aboriginal people and warned the children to be careful they'd go ya [sic]' or words to that effect.<sup>11</sup> She also used the term 'abo' [a discriminatory term]. Even though the project included a trip to Sydney Harbour to see the boat and watching and joining with Aboriginal dancers, the message of Aboriginality as problematic was implanted.

Sherry had been taught by her foster family to not use discriminatory terms like 'wog' to describe other people. She remembers at the time of her teacher saying 'abo' that that was a bad thing. Given this grounding with conflicting value systems, it really was problematic to be shown a picture proposing her family was Aboriginal. She did not believe it for a long time. Her initial reaction though was having believed her mother would look like her, she said 'oh that's not them' and passed the photo straight back.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Interview 1, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Interview 1, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Interview 1, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Interview 1, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Interview 1, p. 22.

And I just couldn't quite understand what was going on cause this was the first time ever in my entire life that umm... I found out about their Aboriginality which of course was then me trying to digest that well I'm not actually what I thought I was which was Anglo-Scottish and umm so I...<sup>13</sup>

This is clearly an example of body dysphoria where the individual brutally faces evidence that their bodily markers may actually indicate something else to what they believed. Later, the welfare would argue that she had romanticised what her mother was going to look like and that she was 'rejecting her Aboriginality' but as Sherry explains, she had no idea that her mother would look any different to herself.<sup>14</sup> Either way, this case conference was extremely traumatic for Sherry and she walked out after expressing a number of expletives, slamming the door as she exited. Instead of taking this as an indication to take things for this young person a little slower, DOCS decided to send Sherry off to meet her biological mother and siblings *alone* a mere two weeks later:

I was as nervous as hell and arr I had only just found out who my family were.<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a girl of approximately 16 who is a State Ward, after being removed in a horrible set of circumstances from the foster family who reared her and then institutionalised, being sent to another state to meet her birth mother *alone*. It is almost impossible to think of a more effective way of destabilising this young woman. Except of course they then made her stay with these strangers who are supposedly her family, in a strange state and a strange house. Just two weeks before she had been told she was Aboriginal, which, up until that moment, she had had no prior knowledge of.

Upon arrival at her visit, her mother shared a box of photos of Sherry from her birth through to her removal at eight months old. The shock for her mother though was that she met at the airport that day, a 16-year-old, five foot six inches tall teenager who bared little resemblance to that eight month old baby she had lost. Sherry as a 16-year-old institutionalised young person would have potentially had some quite defensive behaviours as she had experienced a sense of rejection or betrayal by her foster family and then institutionalisation outside a 'real' family environment. Sherry talks a great deal about throwing herself into a sporting lifestyle during this time and it would seem she was attempting to get a sense of value being an important and skilled team member.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview 1, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Interview 1, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Interview 1, p. 8.

Sherry also entered that initial meeting with the expectation that her mother and family would be able to explain who she was. She grilled her mother with questions trying to find out exactly who she looked like and where she fitted into the family structure. Sherry's mother had experienced being removed from her own birth family and as a result of everything her mother had been through with her own removal, Sherry's removal and subsequent mental health challenges, she was unable to provide much guidance for Sherry, let alone for herself.

The other siblings' presence helped because they had no question in their minds: she was their sister and part of their family. They had, in fact, celebrated her birthday every year. So at that initial meeting, there were two groups of people, poles apart in feelings and understandings. Sherry and her mother bound together but unable to connect because of their shared past, and the siblings whose sense of family and acceptance and love was far less damaged because they knew exactly who they were, about their Aboriginality, and who their family were. At the end of the weekend, Sherry went back to her institution. Many questions were left unanswered and she felt unfulfilled as a result. She did not understand what caused her mother's silence and added to it was a sense that her mother had a family of which she had little or no part.

One of the unforeseen outcomes of DOCS identifying her birth mother was that they started to recognise the Aboriginal biological heritage Sherry possessed. Unfortunately for Sherry, it seems because she had no real sense of being Aboriginal but they on the other hand took it up with fervour. They started describing her as a 'young Aboriginal lady':<sup>16</sup>

Which drove me insane, because one, I didn't understand the whole arr Aboriginal identity. I didn't feel like I knew enough information to have made that transition but yet they had imposed this immediate transition on me through this use of language. And that used to just get me angrier.<sup>17</sup>

Sherry early on defined herself, as sporty and playing sport had been a very positive focus for her over her life. To encounter this new unrealised description as Aboriginal at 16 was very distressing and is a very good example of a mix of cultural dysphoria. When she was in primary school, Sherry's preoccupation with sport had caused the school, welfare and her foster parents some concern that she preferred 'boys' games and she even got caned for playing soccer.<sup>18</sup> This concern also drove the authorities to send Sherry for sessions with psychologists although at this point, it is unclear what their particular concern was: 'I think they thought I was some kind of gender freak or something'.<sup>19</sup> Later, this would also shape the high school that was chosen and

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<sup>16</sup> Interview 1, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Interview 1, pp. 10–11.

<sup>18</sup> Interview 1, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Interview 1, p. 16.

subsequently, Sherry was sent to a private girls-only school. In making this decision, again, the parents and authorities tried to intervene on Sherry's developing sense of self and it is powerful that Sherry herself recounts she was really only interested in the new school's physical education program.

I don't know where I woulda been if I didn't have that [sport] because that became a substitute and gave me a lot of..., reinforced who I was and my self-esteem and confidence and all that sorta stuff.<sup>20</sup>

Sport would continue to provide this focus for her when she moved to the institution as a teenager. Sherry would be lucky enough to find house parents who were willing to go the extra mile for her participation in sport, writing submissions for her to be able to attend events around the country. This support of her sports participation by the house parents reinforced the self-esteem and confidence that had primarily been instilled earlier by her foster parents. To continue to have support of adults believing in her really gave her an absolute strength and positivity that she has utilised through all of her life.

Sherry really preferred this sporting identity and it certainly held a great deal less conflict for her. However, she came back face to face with the Aboriginality issue again soon after finishing school because she acquired a position with the Department of Sports and Recreation. The manager of the institution she had been in had arranged this position:

Sometimes when we would be in a meeting at my office at the Sport and Rec. office and someone would come from Head Office and I would get introduced sort of like, this is the Aboriginal trainee. And I'd think 'aww no I'm not' and so that yeah, that didn't sit well.<sup>21</sup>

Again, later when considering a career move to DOCS, she faced the issue of her Aboriginality. She answered on the form that she was Aboriginal but 'I don't think I had any real sense of even thinking about myself in terms of being an Aboriginal person'.<sup>22</sup> When DOCS approached her to ask if she was seeking the Aboriginal identified position or the generalist position, she fervently advocated for the generalist position.

At this time, she notes though that she began to have positive encounters with Aboriginal people that helped begin a change of thinking about what Aboriginality actually was: 'Once I realised

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<sup>20</sup> Interview 1, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Interview 2, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Interview 1, pp. 7-8.

that Aboriginal was not a colour it was a culture and it was about who I'm connected to, who I'm a part of, that was just like a wave of ahhhhh'.<sup>23</sup>

That is not to say that this was ever an easy process for her. When for instance, she was exploring her reconnection with her biological family at age 25–26 she was asked 'why do you want to be Aboriginal?'.<sup>24</sup>

I finally knew and I'm trying to deal with, well I know I'm Aboriginal, I don't fit the colour, I don't fit the appearance but this is who I am. And then I've got these dickheads on the sideline saying, you know. 'Why do you wanna do that?' As if there was a choice available to me when I had waited all these years to know who I was. So that was the thing that probably, that took a good, I don't know, couple of years. So I also just got to a point where I thought, no well I'm actually seeing and meeting all these other Aboriginal people and nobody actually looks just like my history book.<sup>25</sup>

The major challenge to Sherry's identity that again asked her to reshape her self-definition was when she came to the realisation she was a lesbian. This occurred in her early twenties, although it seems that might have been in the minds of those who committed the early interventions on her playing 'boys' sports. Sherry describes this process of 'coming out' as almost a training run for her reconnection at 26 with her biological family. She talks about deconstructing herself to come out:

Of living a life, of hearing all of these negative derogatory remarks made. Having no arr role models of gay people, let alone gay women or even knowing any same sex couples or just having a sense of a gay lifestyle. And if there were stuff on television they were either some mass murderer or some you know some trumped up Nancy queen and it was really unrealistic. And then all the individual umm comments that are made on a social or work level. Having to go through that process of thinking, well actually no, this is me and I'm going to not take on any of that and I'm not any of that. So at 26 then moving through that whole acceptance of my identity. In a way I'd had a practice run a deconstructing all that bullshit around me and then the negative stereotypes.<sup>26</sup>

The two aspects of Sherry's identity explored here—developing a sense of Aboriginality and her homosexuality—have required a process which Sherry herself sees as parallel. The two

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<sup>23</sup> Interview 2, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Interview 2, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Interview 2, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Interview 2, p. 5.

identities have socially attached negative stereotypes, a lack of public positive role models, and no clear guidelines about how to live with these identities:

Just a whole, a whole enmeshed process of just, I s'pose trying to get through that period of turmoil of, well now that I know this what you know, what does it all mean and then just, and also I umm, particularly about knowing about my Aboriginality it was, at 21 having to do that whole deconstruction when I came out.<sup>27</sup>

#### Twice Removed: Recognising the Pain

From the very start of this interview, Sherry named and expressed many, many emotions. She spoke extensively about feeling protected, safe and valued by her foster family. She went into the world, while with her foster family, believing they were a solid back up for her. In her life, her trauma was not connected to the absence of good parenting and the best possible opportunities.

Sherry spoke a great deal about the underlying feelings of rejection she had from knowing her birth family had given her away. This was particularly highlighted for her at the first reunion at the age of 16 when she discovered four siblings who had not been given away. She experienced a great deal of anger and hurt trying to understand why she had been given away but they had stayed:

And umm and [of] course the other thing was as a 16 year old I saw that my Mum didn't have me but she had the other four and I was think... you know I was like well why? Why? Why didn't you want me, but you obviously want them and I didn't understand any of that but you know this was actually out of her control and not her choice, anyway so.<sup>28</sup>

She then spoke also of her sense of being bullet proof right up to the moment she was removed from her foster family. It is difficult to imagine the shock of this removal, especially for Sherry at aged 13. She was removed directly from the school and was not able to return to her family home or take any of her possessions with her: 'Didn't go home to my family or see anybody or get any of my belongings. Straight to the institution, and I was institutionalised for the next five and a half years'.<sup>29</sup> She was immediately incarcerated into Bidura where she was not allowed to leave and was treated with no compassion or empathy:

I remember sitting down and I was crying and one of the workers just javelin style throwing a broom at saying and me 'get out there and sweep that up' and just not, not being at all concerned that I was upset and/or even capable of acknowledging

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<sup>27</sup> Interview 2, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Interview 1, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Interview 1, p. 4.

that or saying you know stop crying or something even or just, you look upset or whatever but just, nothing! Get out there and sweep that up!

And I just thought and I had never experienced that kind of cruelty [sic] and I know that's not cruel in the sense that so many other people had horrible, horrible things happen, but for me, I'd never had that, you know I'd come from if I was upset for any reason you know fallen off my bike or something ... had these parents that would gather me up and hold me and cuddle me and all that sort of stuff but yeah.<sup>30</sup>

Moving from that initial foster placement, which had been home, was a massive emotional and traumatic occurrence for this young woman:

That institution was a lock up ... We didn't go to school. It wasn't a pleasant experience although again you know I wasn't physically or sexually harmed in any way but certainly the systems abuse was umm pretty powerful ... so the kids in this institution, some were like me who were wards of the state, but some were there who umm had committed crimes and so they were being umm charged. For instance, two 17 year olds that had stabbed somebody and they were girls! You know back in 1976 just that didn't happen so umm ... yeah it was pretty daunting as it turned out I mean I was just bloody blessed really. I ended up being really, really good mates with these two girls, but initially I was terrified of them and I didn't really understand childhood abuses or trauma ... But they did have this umm thing about arr I don't know wanting to [pauses] pierce the skin and .... so, so there was this umm almost initiation that took place in the institution. I went into that institution without any piercings I came out with six piercings in my ears and umm... The thing I was always grateful was back in 1976 you didn't pierce any other part of your anatomy [laughing] cause I know they woulda gone for that was well umm and of course if you didn't agree to have your ears pierced by them they'd beat you up. They were just they like were totally full on. Anyways I opted yep I'll do it do my ears I was a bit of a wuss and umm I had a big mouth but you know when it came to the crunch I was a bit of a wuss.<sup>31</sup>

When she describes the removals, she identifies her strong feelings of empathy and respect for both her mothers. She notes how traumatic her removal was to her foster mother with other people not able to enter Sherry's room for a long time after she was gone. When she describes

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<sup>30</sup> Interview 1, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Interview 1, pp. 4–5.

her biological mother, she recognises extensively what she calls ‘generational pain’.<sup>32</sup> Her biological grandmother, mother and herself were all removed and unable to grow up in their families of birth:

I can’t not think or whenever I’m with my birth Mum, just be in awe of, not in a sort of fluffy lovie-dove way, but just how, how is it that you’re still breathing? How is it that you’re still alive? And, and you’ve just had every fibre of you ripped to shreds, literally, physically and sexually as a kid, but as an adult, emotionally.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, this is a story of strength. Sherry after her reunion with her family again at the age of 26 discovered the story of her conception thanks to her mother’s twin sister. She knew that her aunt had told her with the agreement to not discuss it with her mother. Sherry herself though bought an overwhelming sense of compassion and love to this. On her decision to not ask anymore of her mother: ‘I just think that I would’ve I think I would’ve caused her more distress...’.<sup>34</sup>

But I can’t talk to my Mum, either of my Mums, about either of my separations because it’s just sooo incomprehensively painful for both them. So even though I, you know I do have some questions about many different things, I just have to live with that.<sup>35</sup>

There was many a time though that Sherry suffered as she tried to process what had happened to her and how to reconnect with her family. She said:

Oh well probably in my twenties I partied [both laughing] I partied away those thoughts and feelings and any burden of umm responsibility that I did yeah, that I did carry. Not in a conscious way, not like oh God I’m feeling really overwhelmed umm, you know, I think I need to go sort this stuff about Mum or whatever...<sup>36</sup>

Thus, in summary, we leave it to Sherry to guide us on whether the pain and suffering has been worth it in the long run:

I’m quite satisfied of where I’ve got to and I honestly think umm if I hadn’t had all of those struggles all along the way and some, some are really difficult. Particularly during adolescence umm and no doubt when I was an infant when I was taken from Mum and then you know in an institution for that time till I was fostered. I don’t know what kind of stuff happens to you at that age but umm, there was a whole lot of things at a cost, but now for me as an adult umm I sort of feel grateful in a way

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<sup>32</sup> Interview 2, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Interview 2, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Interview 2, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Interview 1, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Interview 2, p. 6.



that I've experienced some real struggles, 'cause I think it's given me real strength. Like I don't, I don't wish anything were different for me, even though [pauses] not knowing who I was, it was just a pain in the arse for f...ing years, am I allowed to swear? [Giggling].<sup>37</sup>

I think also for other members of the Stolen Generations. I think if I would've been treated badly as well, I'm sure that would've just produced a very different outcome. The fact that I was well cared for and safe and warm and fed and all that stuff umm counter balanced it a bit.<sup>38</sup>

#### Welfare Attempts To Undermine Or Destroy Her Relationships Between Her And Her Biological Family

Sherry's initial removal as a baby was not discussed during these interviews. Later, in discussions, she analyses her and others in her family as part of the Stolen Generations. Her removal remains something of a mystery because her mother is unable to speak of it and the little information has more come from other relatives.

Sherry certainly constructs herself and her mother and many other relatives within the Stolen Generations category. For our analysis, what we know is then that removals happened around trying to control 'Aboriginality' and its transmission, particularly in children of mixed heritage (Aboriginal and other). Sherry is well aware of the historical circumstances surrounding her removal at eight months, as her following comments show:

Then I was made ward of the state and then it was at a time when in NSW there was the Aboriginal Welfare Board and the Department of Child Welfare and they ran parallel. The Department of Child Welfare actually, umm, oversaw the Aboriginal Welfare Board, it was like a, an arm of another arm within that umm Child Welfare Department which was the statutory body. The way in which the practice was set up was that kids who were of a really dark appearance were kept under the umm the administration of the welfare Board, whereas kids like me, being a bit fairer, part of the assimilation policy was to slide me over under the Child Welfare Department and then be perceived as Anglo-Australian, purely on the basis of my appearance, not on my cultural membership or my Aboriginal identity, and of course that was erased, that was the big thing. So then umm, I was in an institution for about 4 months, then at a year I was fostered to an Anglo-Scottish family who were not told about my

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<sup>37</sup> Interview 2, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Interview 1, p. 14.

entry into care, who were not told about my Aboriginal identity and who were strongly advised to say I was the birth child.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, she sees the act of encouraging the foster family to say she is a birth child as part of this process to dismantle her original family, alienate her from her Aboriginality: body and cultural dysphoria. It should be noted here that in fact, she was not adopted into this family; thus, by law her biological mother held some rights to her and should have been able to have contact during her childhood.

The second major attack on her relationships with her family of origin was when she reunited at the age of 16. As stated earlier, she was given two weeks between when she was told of their existence and when she sent to another state to visit them and stay for a weekend. So the preparation given to her by her caseworkers was to say: 'well you don't have to go if you don't want to'.<sup>40</sup> Sherry commented:

As an adult I reflected on that cause I think they tried to sabotage it. The way in which they set that up there was nothing gradual about it, it was just simply just drop me in it and then think that I was going to retreat, which I didn't.<sup>41</sup>

When Sherry returned from that visit she was a boiling vat of emotions including hurt and anger. At this point, we are talking about a young person who had been institutionalised for three or more years. While her placement was reasonably stable there was incredible pain over her removal from the only parents and family home she had ever known and then incarcerated into two institutions in the duration. As argued earlier, Sherry saw her participation in sports as the activities that most helped her remain stable.

Her caseworkers enacted two conflicting sets of behaviours. The first, as mentioned previously, was that they quickly sent her for a visit with little to no support or preparation. The second was that they quickly wanted to send her off again regardless of her experience on the first visit. Their next step seemed to be to have Sherry to stay with biological family over that very next Christmas period. This was a horrifying thought to Sherry who had left the weekend believing her biological mother did not like her. Unbeknownst to Sherry, the caseworkers seemed to want to repatriate her to her family of origin.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview 1, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Interview 1, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Interview 1, p. 8.

The idea of repatriation rolled on though, gaining some momentum with the authorities suggesting the relationship between her and her birth Mum was developing well and perhaps she would like to go and live with that family for Year 11 and 12. Her relationship with her biological mother had developed further because when she returned to the home, Sherry's mother both wrote and rang her. This had increased the knowledge they had of each other and proved to be a far more useful way of communicating across the divide between them. Once it became clear to Sherry of the 'welfare's' push for repatriation, Sherry managed to make the relationship with her biological disappear by not answering her calls or letters. It is difficult to realise the fear and panic in a young person that would lead them to turn their back on a relationship they had actively sought for so long:

Had that been managed appropriately, that is, had DOCs done that gradually with me and in a productive way, me, my Mum, my siblings, my whole extended family, would not have missed out on an additional 10 years.<sup>42</sup>

### **Describing Sherry's Voice<sup>43</sup>**

The interviews with Sherry were a blend of deep intellectualisation focusing on the removal experience, coming to terms with living multiple identity positions sometimes at odds with each other, and a sharing of not only deep and lasting trauma, but also and the experience of healing in many ways for herself and her family. Sherry was able to articulate at a very intellectual level the attempt to erase her Aboriginality and to withhold that information from her for most of her young life.

What we also see in this set of interviews, as with many of people who suffer trauma, is the distancing of feelings from the narrative.<sup>44</sup> While some forms of disassociation can be quite serious mental health disorders, it is possible at a level of depersonalisation to have a sense of being out of reality or at least at arms-length to those you love.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps a poignant example of Sherry speaking in more of a report fashion than emotion is when she finds out the manner of her conception:

Oh and I was gonna say something else to you then about umm ohh yeah, with Mum so when we reconnected at 26, and I still didn't know immediately and umm of course at that stage I had been in DOCS umm for maybe five years or so, so I was really quite aware of sexual abuse and sexual assault stuff and in our interaction over the first few months of reconnecting I would ask questions but I was a bit more

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<sup>42</sup> Interview 1, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*.

<sup>44</sup> See dissociative disorders such as depersonalisation disorder.

<sup>45</sup> Mayo Clinic, *Depersonalization Disorder*, accessed 5 March 2012, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depersonalization/DS01149/DSECTION=symptoms>.

articulate, and a bit more sensitive in my approach and basically all I was getting was some monosyllabic responses like you know, how long did you know him for? ‘Not long’ umm so there was nothing like ever ... there was nothing, nothing at all umm and I thought something, something’s weird here and that’s when, and by that stage I had a chance to develop a bit of a rapport with my auntie and she let me know. But I didn’t, and she was under strict instructions as well—to me not to talk about it, so and I knew anyway not to really talk about it. So I never have. And I don’t know whether my aunties told her...<sup>46</sup>

In this part of the interview, it is clear that the feelings expressed are about causing her mother pain and not too much about her reaction to learning this knowledge. She also says nothing about learning that there will be no father for her to get to know:

So yeah but again its akin to being, being here as a product of rape cause I like being here umm, but I hate the thought and I always sorta carry a bit of that that, what Mum went through for me to be here but at the same time, it’s also for what both my families went through, again for me to kinda have these challenges thrown at me left, right and centre to get to this point.<sup>47</sup>

One point Sherry made very strongly in her second interview was the commitment and love her mothers had to her.

### **Placing Sherry and Her Family within Wider Cultural Contexts and Social Structures<sup>48</sup>**

There are a number of aspects to this interview that bear some further discussion. They are particularly noticeable when in reference to the other interviews and material examined in this thesis.

#### **Living with Multiple Families and Relationships**

Every day, Sherry balances having a biological mother and family, a foster family who helped to make her who she is, as well as the house parents who created a parental relationship, and the family she herself has created. The management of these conflicting roles and responsibilities along with feelings and obligations is highly complex.

Sherry makes the point that a group of strangers who she learnt were her siblings celebrated her birthday every year. She did not know they existed but they knew she existed, and to the point

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<sup>46</sup> Interview 2, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Interview 2, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

that they noted her birthday. That is stunning. Complete strangers met her at 16 years at her first reunion, accepted her with open arms, hugged her, and were so familiar with her, she freaked out. They had lived with the knowledge of her for their whole lives but they were complete strangers to her.

It is difficult to understand the motivations of those in authority for concealing her origins or advising her foster parents to conceal them. In turn, it is not clear why her foster parents decided to reveal them when they did. What is interesting about this story is that Sherry walked in from school when welfare authorities were sitting in her house, so they must have come up with some story to explain their presence. She was clearly fostered so the other point worth noting is that her biological parent had a right to see her that was clearly not allowed.

A child who was a State Ward had very limited ability to make decisions for themselves. Decisions were made on their behalf by authorities and very few welfare authorities ask what the young person wants and what they want to achieve for their life, especially at this time. This aspect of inclusion in decisions was clearly denied both to Sherry's mother and Sherry herself.

### **Emotional Implications**

When Sherry was removed from her foster placement at the age of 13, one of the particularly striking aspects is that she was not allowed to go to her home and collect her belongings, or for that matter say goodbye to the parents who had raised her since she was 12 months old. It is hard to imagine the level of shock and overwhelming feelings of rejection experienced by Sherry. She had no idea what her foster parents were thinking at this time or what involvement they had in this happening. She thought the warnings from the welfare authorities were jokes and they did not help her to understand they were not. She had no idea this was a real possibility. She went from those people she considered her family to an institution. This is a further reinforcement of the discussion in the *Bringing Them Home Collection* where children were moved from placement to placement with no regard to their feelings or connections with other human beings:

At 13 I didn't have any real sense of real authority or power because my 13 year old brashness overtook everything and I thought I was bullet proof.

And so I was there, yeah as I said, for 2 months and there was this irony of here I was for two months, possibly even two and a half months not attending school, sitting around smoking cigarettes and what I'd been doing prior to coming to the institution was taking days of school and smoking cigarettes. Anyway umm then after a while they approached me and said I was going to another institution. Oh still

in this time I know nothing about I still know arr no information about my Aboriginality, my family, my Mum, my dad, my extended family, my entry into care and I still don't even know why I'm in care. Why I'm in this institution.

Umm except that they were pretty umm pretty keen to always convey this message that I was somehow evil but in one way seeing these two 17 year olds was, was confirmation for me that yeah I was bit of a larrikin and a bit cheeky but I knew I wasn't really, really naughty or evil... like they were full on.<sup>49</sup>

There are a number of messages in this quotation, including her sense of loss of her foster care, her powerlessness and confusion and the unknown of what was to come but particularly relevant to this thesis is that she states clearly that not knowing who she was has had such a deep impact on her life. When we track through these issues to later years, we see that in her coming process, she has to challenge her self-definitions including going back to seeking her birth family at age 26.

When this set of interviews was carried out, Sherry was in her mid- to late-forties and she had deeply invested many years getting to know her mother, siblings and other relatives. She had also developed a very strong sense of belonging to the Stolen Generations and worked very hard to spread information about both the experiences of Stolen Generations and to fight for young Aboriginal people who came into the view of child protection authorities. Over her years, she has also spent much time supporting her foster, biological and her immediate families.

She states that going through the turmoil and difficulties gave her a real base of strength from which to learn and grow and go into the world.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, as it has been shown in this chapter, Sherry's life is one that is a celebration of resilience, success and struggle. Balancing and building seemed to be the order of the day. Balancing the great loss of her biological Mum right at a key point of her young body and mind developing, shipped off to an institution and then luckily to a second loving and caring home. Loss and devastation again at 13 when the only family she would ever know was brutally taken from her. This story has every part of a Hollywood blockbuster, but it is in fact the life of one who would argue they are an ordinary person. The striking part of the story is the resilience that she has brought to these memories and experiences of removal and her tussle with coming to realise the many aspects of her adult self. This story fits squarely within the stories of lives of

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<sup>49</sup> Interview 1, pp. 4–5.

those known as the Stolen Generation. It has all the markers shown in the earlier chapter on the *Bringing Them Home Collection* including the rejection of her in her two removals and the difficulties of reunion with her family of origin. As with the other stories reviewed, Sherry is able to discuss coming to an understanding that she was the target for a systemic approach of disrupting Aboriginality. While achieving some stability through her sporting prowess, her narrative still holds a traumatic body of information highlighting loneliness, abuse of her love and family devastation. Her earlier life experiences have an ongoing impact and it is her lifelong building and healing that is the site for celebration in this story.

## **CHAPTER 8: FOCUS INTERVIEW B: MY SISTER IS EVERYTHING<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the life of a woman, Beryl (pseudonym), removed from her family at the age of 10 years old. The chapter is the second chapter focused on individuals interviewed specifically for this thesis. In this chapter, the main facts of Beryl's story are conveyed in a descriptive way so that her selection of facts is clear. Second, the chapter also examines the story Beryl tells to introduce us to her life. That is, the story she wraps around the bones of the lived life 'facts' of her existence. There are three individuals that play a big part in this story: Beryl's birth mother whom she was removed from; her sister Margaret (pseudonym) who was left behind when Beryl was removed; and the villain of this story—Bob Still (pseudonym), Beryl's stepfather. What follows is an examination of those relationships but also the life lived as a consequence of removal. Beryl's removal has led to many consequences in the way she has lived her Aboriginality and indeed as her lived life track highlights, during her earlier married years she did not have much opportunity to gain more information about her heritage.

### **Lived Life**

#### **0–18 years<sup>2</sup>**

Beryl's mother was born at Brewarrina to a full-blood Aboriginal woman.<sup>3</sup> Beryl herself was born at Nyngan. Beryl, her sister Margaret, and two brothers shared the same biological father. Their father, a non-Aboriginal man, left the family living at Bourke to go to find work in Sydney. There were two children born to her mother and father who died before Beryl's birth. Shortly after her husband left for Sydney, Beryl's mother acquired a boyfriend, Bob Still, who would go on to play a role in much of the rest of Beryl's relationship with her biological mother including fathering four other siblings with her mother.

When Beryl's father returned from Sydney, he found his family had moved on and later they would move to Pillaga Mission with Bob Still. Beryl believes the police moved on the family from living on the riverbank in Bourke, and because Bob Still's mother resided on Pillaga mission they went there. Bob Still had worked as a drover and since it was depression times, he

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter uses pseudonyms for all of the individuals named. In the majority of instances, first names are given; however, in the case of Beryl's step-father, Beryl used his full name in every communication, and this chapter continues that practice. In addition, initials are used for 'host' families.

<sup>2</sup> See Table 3.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'full-blood' is used for two reasons. First, Beryl herself uses the term in a way that perhaps suggests the validity of her claim to Aboriginality. Second, 'full-bloodedness' is regarded as a type of validity in both the Aboriginal and wider Australian communities.



was able to help Beryl's mother to support her family. She herself was working in cafés in Bourke and was able to bring leftovers home to the family as well as her pay.

It is Bob Still whom Beryl credits with her removal, as she believes it was in response to his sexual abuse of Beryl that she was moved from the family home at Pilliga Mission at aged 10. Beryl believes that the local Superintendent decided she was to be moved. She was moved to Pilliga town where for a brief period she worked for a family in their home and shop. This family ran a shop in the town of Pilliga. They were well off in Pilliga terms and while working Beryl was also able to attend school for a brief time at Pilliga Town school. During this time, she was not paid for the work she did for the family. She stayed there for approximately four years.

After those four years, Beryl was moved to a pig farm at Gwabegar. She did not remain long at this farm and moved on to a property at Barabadine. She worked caring for an elderly lady she called Grandma P. She slept on the veranda until the family later built her a bedroom off the veranda. She cared for the elderly lady until she passed away. Later, she moved to the son's property, and she worked on the sheep and wheat farms. She added to the family's income by catching and skinning rabbits. During this time, she ran away from the family's property twice and went to Coonamble. When Beryl was 16 the P's organised her to meet with her mother in Coonamble in the park as her family had been evicted from the mission and they had moved to Coonamble.

During the time at both the P's residences and at the place in Pilliga, Beryl continued to have a relationship with her family of origin. Her sister walked out the 11 miles to the property at P's and sometimes she was allowed to stay overnight. Beryl also visited the family back at the mission but unfortunately on the return trip to Pilliga town her stepfather attempted to rape her. Thankfully, her screams were heard and she was rescued.

Beryl's biological family along with Bob Still, her stepfather, moved to Coonamble in November 1947 but at the time Beryl had no knowledge her family had left. The family had grown as Beryl's mother had had by this time four other children to Bob Still. At this point, her sister who had walked to see her at her place with the P's also left the family after almost being raped by Bob Still. At aged 15, their mother sent Margaret to live with a cousin of hers, away from the family. Her sister had initially started working in the mission hospital in the treatment room washing and cleaning at aged 14 and a half, and was paid by getting extra rations. Later, Margaret went to work in the Coonamble Hospital.

## **Eighteen Years Old to the Present Day**

By the time she reached legal age, Beryl was married to a man who was the brother of another of the nursing trainees at the Coonamble Hospital. He had given her a merry chase that resulted in her ultimate capitulation, marriage and babies: 'He chased me quite a while otherwise I would have been a mother a lot sooner'.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, they would have six children together. At the beginning of their marriage, they continued to reside in Coonamble but later they moved to reside on the coast closer to Sydney.

Margaret also spent some time away from Coonamble and went for a period to live in Orange where she worked in Orange psychiatric section. After her return to Coonamble, she started living under the bridge in Coonamble with her mother and stepfather. Upon hearing this, Beryl had Margaret come and stay with her, and her husband, and their first child. Beryl and Margaret went into hospital to give birth within two days of each other. Margaret went first but still had not given birth two days later when Beryl checked in. They ended up having their sons on the same day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Their mother ended up raising her son even though shortly after the birth she married the father of that child.

After their move to the coast, Beryl's husband had an affair that brought about the end of the marriage. Beryl worked in a café after the marriage broke up to try to cover costs but she just could not cover the expenses created by staying in their house. After being evicted, she moved the family to a caravan park. Beryl helped out around the park for a period and in the end, the owner employed Beryl to manage the park herself.

After her initial marriage, Beryl was involved with a man who unfortunately died of cancer. Sometime after that relationship, she met her current husband who worked in the mines and they moved away from the coast to the town where they still reside. By the time Beryl made this move, five of her children stayed closer to the coast and their father, with only one child making the move with Beryl.

Beryl's sister later would move to the same town as Beryl and married again also. Later, both Margaret and her husband would reside permanently in a nursing home. Beryl's sister suffers dementia and deteriorated with the condition to the point she could not live independently.

Beryl spent some time with her natural father as a young adult when her father was residing in VIC. She went down to VIC on her holidays from the Coonamble Hospital. While she was

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<sup>4</sup> Interview 1, p. 5.

there, she worked in the pub she was staying at and had a lovely time with her father. Her sister also spent some time with their father going to dances in Sydney with him. Beryl was not aware that they had spent so much time together until she saw photos when she was clearing up her sister's house after sister went to live in the nursing home.

**Table 3: Beryl's Lived Life Track**

Date	Occurrence
24/4/1884	Grandmother born Sydney
1902	Grandmother married to Grandfather in Brewarrina (13 children)
1914	Mother born Brewarrina
	Mother married Beryl's father, two children born but deceased before Beryl's birth (1931)
11 December 1931	Born Nyngan
21 December 1932	Sister Margaret born
	Moved to Bourke sister and brothers born
	Moved immediately to Pilliga Mission with mother and mother's boyfriend Bob Still
1941 (10 years)	Removed from family to work with family in Pilliga town
	Family left mission?
1944-45	Worked on pig farm near Pilliga: Gwabegar
1945	Farm at Barabadine, (P's)
	Grandma P's son's farm after Mrs P. died
1948: 17 years	Visited sister in Coonamble
	Moved there to work, café then hospital (short time)
	Married in Coonamble Lived on coast with husband Mother to six children Mother visited her there Husband left her while living there Biological father died of cancer Sydney
1956	Mother died
1978 approx.	Moved to Hunter
	TAFE
1991-2001	Started homework centre worked there
2001	Retired from paid work
2004	Daughter diagnosed with leukaemia while at university
Nov 2010	Daughter died
Aug 2011	Beryl died

### **Told Story**

### **A Working Life**

Beryl's working life emerges as an important analytical area for this interviewee and the way her life played out. In fact, it almost seems that her working life began very early at her removal and continued for the rest of her life. Her initial removal in 1941 at just 10 years of age saw her work as an assistant in a shop although this was unpaid work. During that time, she was allowed

to attend school on a more frequent basis. Her next move out to a pig farm in 1944 meant her schooling life as a child was over.

At the first farm near Pillaga, Beryl was expected to help with the chores of both the farm and the household. Her shift to the P's farm at Barabadine in 1945 saw her looking after Grandma P. as well as working in the house. After the death of Grandma P., she went to the Grandma P.'s son's farm, and started working around the greater farm area as well as undertaking domestic work. She helped with the children and got given other jobs like catching and skinning rabbits for sale. She said: 'As I stayed there longer I got given other jobs such as catching and skinning rabbits or going out with Mr P. or a man on the farm to sell the rabbit skins. The only time I ever saw money was when I was selling the rabbit skins, I would give the money to Mrs P'.<sup>5</sup> Up until the end of service, she was paid little if anything but was at times supplied newer clothes to wear.<sup>6</sup>

One of the great trials Beryl endured was recouping the lost wages for those years. The double tragedy was that not only was she not paid at the time for that work that took her away from her family, she also endured a memory loss of that time. Beryl commented: 'Sometimes it's emotion and emotion just... it locks your memory up, it's very powerful'.<sup>7</sup> She had few if any memories of those years and wondered why she could recall some things and not others. Only through processing them in her own mind and sharing the reminiscences of others did Beryl create some broad storyline for what had happened in those years.

The first paid work Beryl did where she actually received her wages was in a café where she worked in Coonamble after moving from the younger P. family, to live with her sister in a boarding house. After the cafe she started her nursing training at the Coonamble Hospital around the mid-1940s. Beryl got side tracked from this career path when she met her husband only returning to the workforce when her husband left and she needed to support her children. At that time, Beryl worked in a Chinese takeaway and later, as she was living in a caravan park with her children, she started helping the park manager. Later still, she would be employed as the manager herself.

Aside from a few stories about her trials with her husband, and supporting her sister, Beryl did not extensively address the period between living in close proximity with her family in Coonamble to when she moved to the Hunter when she was raising her six children with her

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<sup>5</sup> Interview 1, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Interview 1, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Interview 1, p. 21.

husband. After her move with her husband and one child to the Hunter, work re-surfaces in her life, and Beryl started volunteer work for many community projects. The first area she went into, and that would later turn into paid work, was with Aboriginal children in an after school program to provide support to the children and assistance with their school work. She was told that she was not qualified to run such a program and as such it could not be funded. Beryl enrolled at TAFE, to gain the requisite qualifications. After completing those, she went into the coordinator position at the homework centre she had dreamt of. After a number of years running the homework centre, she retired and her daughter was appointed into the position. When her daughter had a period during which she could not work, Beryl went back into the position. She continued in that position until someone else could be appointed. All in all, Beryl put, at the very minimum, 10 years into the homework program.

Her retirement from that position did not mean that either her interest or her work would slow down. Other programs she would volunteer for included work with a women and babies and an early childhood program. She continued to fight to win her 'Stolen wages' and won them back in 2011. After that win, she was investigating whether her sisters were retrievable as well. All in all, Beryl's work life lasted 70-odd years and at her death her city of residence lauded her works particularly for Aboriginal young people.

### **Reading for Relationships<sup>8</sup>**

#### **Family Relations**

Beryl suffered nearly eight years between her removal and her being reunited with her sister in Coonamble. After those years, she would live with her children and husbands until her death. Initially, Beryl's entry into the adult relationship arena was very difficult for her:

Never ever leaving the bush only going to town to do the shopping and mind kids while the others ... From 10 till 17, hardly see a male person except the workers and of course, everybody's working ... slaving kinda work.<sup>9</sup>

In many ways, Beryl's life was about seeking connectedness. Family relationships were very important to her and she put a great deal of energy to helping her family stay together. When her first marriage ended, she fiercely fought for her right to raise her children:

And the father of those six kids arr my six kids. He found himself a girlfriend. I had to get a job to be able to feed us all properly. He use to drink and we never got enough money arr and then he had the audacity to come to me and tell me about his

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<sup>8</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>9</sup> Interview 1, p. 5.

new girlfriend and he wanted the kids and you can well imagine what I would have said, being a lady I won't repeat it. But in other words yeah well, over my dead body, that's the nicer way of saying it.<sup>10</sup>

When later her children grew up and had partners and children, she would work hard to keep contact going between the parents even if it meant they all had to go camp at her place.

Beryl also sought connections with her past. She was very interested in compiling the information about her family and where they had come from for the use of the generations to come. She wanted them to be able to refer to a compilation of the material all gathered in one place like a book or an audio-visual resource:

I wanna get every member from my grandmother to my grandfather right through. I want to get everything in a collection of certificates and then put them all into a cd or something like that something that doesn't fade away or whatever. I think they'll last longer and it's just one thing you can look at every time when you get a family gathering you can put that up on a screen, television or computer, Television hopefully it'll go through that and this is the sort of thing that that I want and I want to give each member of my immediate family one each so they can show to their kids and hopefully then make a newer one as you grow older make one to include your grandkids. You see I've got my great grandkids.<sup>11</sup>

Beryl was very proud of her children. She was immensely proud of her daughter obtaining the coordinator job from which Beryl herself retired. One of her sons is a qualified artist. She said, 'Oh he's excellent yeah. He wanders away from Aboriginal art in itself because we're from Brewarrina where my mother was born and our meat or totem is the tree lizard'.<sup>12</sup>

This quotation in itself seems a little incomprehensible between the first section focused on her son's art and the second part about where she and her mother's heritage and the family's totem. In the second interview, she comes back and offers a way to understand how she sees the link:

Well, nobody was buying Aboriginal art, only coming from countries where the original was really original. There was a lot of dot painting going on around, where—you didn't do dot painting. I told another son who passed in the art world at the University in Sydney that, no dot painting, you need to go to Brewarrina and so he did and he found that ah... no more dot painting for him ... But he's more now

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<sup>10</sup> Interview 1, pp. 5–6.

<sup>11</sup> Interview 1, pp. 17–18.

<sup>12</sup> Interview 1, p. 10.

going into—because he lives on the Central Coast - he does more the ocean and what do they call that kind of...

Interviewer: ...landscape?<sup>13</sup>

### **Relationship with Family of Origin**

Mother

‘Although Mum didn’t swear, if I recall, she was a real lady, up until I was 10. I must’ve remembered all the good things about her, but my sister didn’t’.<sup>14</sup> What is not reflected in this quotation is that the relationship Beryl had with her mother was both complex and painful.

Beryl’s mother created a relationship with Bob Still when her husband went seeking work in Sydney during a time of depression. While he was gone Beryl’s mother worked but found it difficult to make ends meet. Her relationship with Still alleviated some of her financial woes as Still worked hard as a drover. Beryl’s mother would end up splitting from Still while in Coonamble, but it would be many years later and the relationship between Beryl and her mother would remain damaged. Beryl’s father did come and find them on Pillaga and try for custody of his children but he would never live with them as a family again. It is not difficult to imagine that this created ill feelings towards Still from the children.

This is to some extent because of the other person who plays a role in the story: her sister Margaret. It appears that the difficulty between these three was mostly due to her mother appearing to not believe Beryl’s her story of her attempted rape by her stepfather. She said, ‘my mother didn’t believe me, but she did believe ... She did believe my sister, because she was older [when the abuse came to light]’.<sup>15</sup>

After her removal, Beryl saw her mother when she went home to the Mission but on her return trip her stepfather attempted to rape her. Later, when she was 16, she had a visit with her mother in the park at Coonamble. It came about because Grandma P. died and Beryl had become very close to her and felt distraught about her death:

I ran away. Cause I blamed everybody else. I was so happy with that old lady and doing things for her and when I ran away, I was looking for my mother, that’s who I couldn’t find, but the P’s found me because I was talking about Coonamble... . Now I’m not quite sure the kilometres from Baradine to Coonamble was but in any case

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<sup>13</sup> Interview 2, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Interview 2, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Interview 2, p. 4.

they took the girls to the swimming pool. And they would have seen my mother in the park at Coonamble. So unbeknown to me, they arranged a meeting with Mum.<sup>16</sup>

At this point, Beryl had no idea this visit was going to occur and it is easy to imagine that this visit was very emotional. Beryl had not lived with her mother or had any significant contact with her for approximately six years. They also had the conflict between them that resulted from the behaviour of her mother's partner:

At the time, I remember going down to see Mum and I'd see Bob Still and I'd turn around and go back. So meeting her in the park through the P's was the first time I'd seen her. Ahh. Well I worked for the F's for four years, at McK's maybe one maybe two.<sup>17</sup>

Later in her married life, Beryl attempted to have more regular contact with her mother when they were both residing in Coonamble. That relationship was always complicated by the presence or potential presence of Bob Still.

When Beryl and her husband moved to the coast, her mother came with Beryl's nephew for a visit. Unfortunately, Beryl's husband and mother did not get along well and after a week her mother went back to Coonamble. However, she did leave her grandson with Beryl for a bit longer. At this point, after living under the bridge in Coonamble her mother had managed to move a Housing Commission home.

When her mother died in 1956, it again caused angst for Beryl as one of her younger siblings organised her funeral and burial and she was buried under the name Still although there is no evidence her mother ever married Bob Still. She was also buried next to Still at Coonamble: 'The Mum and Dad are there together side by side, so I don't know, she's under the name of Still'.<sup>18</sup> Beryl believed this was because one of Still's daughters organised the burial of their mother. In using the words 'the Mum and Dad', the quotation does show that the whole affair still held a great deal of pain for Beryl who distanced herself in the telling of this story as if this woman was indeed not her own mother.

When Beryl was asked about talking with her mother about what had happened in her younger years, Beryl speculated on her mother's lack of response. Beryl said:

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<sup>16</sup> Interview 1, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Interview 1, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Interview 2, p. 26.



Well, I tried to talk to her, but she wouldn't tell you anything. I think she didn't want to bring up the past, because maybe she felt bad, I don't know, because she was told about him. Margaret first told her and she didn't believe Margaret about me.<sup>19</sup>

In the interview, Beryl's high emotion and confusion can be detected as she answers whether her mother was married to Still:

No! I don't know. I have no idea even though they're saying in some of these [documents] that she was willing to marry him, but another paper prior to that said he was already married but then later they say that he wasn't married. So they might have be only taking his word I don't know if they check up or not but. Um Mum is buried as [a Still]. I haven't got anything to do with the burial but I'm going to investigate that. I've gotta do things, one thing at a time you know and getting the money if I get anything will help me do all of this.

All in all, the relationship with her mother became very complicated because of her involvement of Bob Still and after her removal was not ever very stable or supportive again. To that extent Beryl had high hopes for her relationship with her natural father.

Father

Beryl's relationship with her father was made difficult by the economics of the day early in her life as her father left the family to seek work in Sydney. Upon his return to the family, his wife had already hooked up with another man. The reasons for this seem to be particularly around the economics of feeding four children. It may be, though, that Beryl's mother had been deserted by her husband. This remains unclear. When he tracked them down at Pillaga Mission, he bought presents for the children and there appears to have been some attempt on his behalf to seek custody of the children. Given the times, it is difficult to believe he would have been successful without a wife, and the children would have been under the effects of legislation for Aboriginal children. Whatever the circumstance, Beryl and Margaret romanticised their father. Beryl reconnected with him shortly before her marriage and enjoyed a holiday with him and his wife of the time. She did not have a substantial relationship with him and he appears to have moved around a great deal as well. However, her most substantial relationship was without doubt with her sister Margaret.

Margaret

Beryl's relationship with her younger sister is perhaps the most complex and enduring Beryl had. Prior to Beryl's removal from the family Beryl described her relationship with Margaret as close. They did chores for the family like getting bread from the baker together. They were little

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<sup>19</sup> Interview 2, p. 28.

more than a year apart in age. As Beryl related: 'I'm born in December and so was she, only I'm in December '31 on the 11<sup>th</sup>, Monica's born on the 21<sup>st</sup>. We're about 11 days—a year and 11 days'.<sup>20</sup> From the time, that Beryl was removed through to their ultimate parting with Beryl's passing, they maintained a relatively close but very complex relationship. Central to the relationship after her removal, at least in Beryl's mind, was the history of sexual abuse of both girls enacted by the stepfather. Part of this difficulty was whether or not the mother believed the sexual abuse had happened. Beryl particularly holds a lot of hurt that her mother did not believe her own story but appeared to act to protect Margaret at aged 15 after Bob Still had interfered with her. It appears that this abuse may have occurred from the age of nine or 10 until Margaret was 15 when she was sent to reside with her mother's cousin. However, it remains unclear why by the time Beryl came to Coonamble, her sister then aged 16, was already living alone in a boarding house.

Thus, many of the feelings Beryl experienced with Margaret were initiated by her removal from her family:

Maybe I don't know but anyway the fact is that you know, we didn't see much of each other as kids except for when she did come and visit me and the Ferguson woman said that she could stay sometimes. But then when she left, see I used to blubber and carry on and hang on to her and all that, and they threatened that if I kept doing that they wouldn't let her come. Well, when they left and moved out of the mission I didn't know. I wasn't told and she never came. So I had a bad time.<sup>21</sup>

Beryl experienced major concerns right up to her death that seemed to include guilt for Margaret's suffering, not only because of Still's sexual abuse, but also as a result of the eight years that their mother refused to talk to Margaret. This silence seemed to be a result of sexual abuse issue. When asked, Beryl felt that her sister Margaret 'saved' her.<sup>22</sup>

And now I sometimes, it's my guilt I think, sometimes think she knows [that she was abused because Beryl had left] because her Mum never spoke to her for eight years. Now whether that was about [Bob Still] being exposed and Mum not believing her at the time. Who knows because Mum didn't believe Margaret when she told Mum about him touching me and that's how Margaret explained it.<sup>23</sup>

After Margaret left Coonamble, she started to mix with many more non-Aboriginal people and both Margaret and Beryl ended up married to non-Aboriginal men. It is interesting that Beryl

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<sup>20</sup> Interview 2, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> Interview 1, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Interview 2, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Interview 1, p. 18.

makes the point that Margaret moves to have more non-Aboriginal friends but they both end up marrying outside the Aboriginal community. In terms of the assimilation policy, this is what it would have wanted them to do and create offspring who move further and further away from being 'full-bloods'.

Margaret kept as independent as possible until the last possible moment before moving to her current nursing home accommodation. Initially, she was caring for her husband at home but he was admitted to hospital and upon discharge, as he required a high level of medical care he was moved to a nursing home. Margaret shortly followed him there, suffering with dementia. Beryl used to be told stories by people about Margaret mixing up dates and times of appointments and activities. Margaret did not want Beryl to interfere in her life and was able to cover how much she had deteriorated. Later, when Beryl packed up her house, she realised how confused Margaret had become:

Well I'd see her down the street. She wouldn't let me help her. See she's so independent normally she didn't need help. But if you ask her it sorta must have made her feel like she was even worse. I don't really know what she thought but we used to meet and go to bingo Thursday night and she started not to arrive there and she'd turn up in the daytime thinking it was on. People pass on information especially taxi drivers because she wouldn't let, well she did let me share a taxi on occasions and [Beryl's husband] he used to pick me up and offer her a lift. No way! She would rather pay a taxi. [Sigh] I've had night after night crying over you know all of that and the way I'd have to go and sneak around to get help for her without her knowing I'd done it.<sup>24</sup>

Beryl's feelings about her sister are multi-faceted. In the following, what becomes apparent is the sense Beryl has that Margaret was also removed from her family and thus lost that base as much as she herself did. That being said, Beryl is incredibly loyal and defensive of Margaret and her sense of obligation and compassion for her sister are also clear:

I never lived a life with my mother and my brothers and sisters and Margaret didn't. She went and lived in Sydney for a long time ... We both lived in Coonamble that's where I got married to the kids' father. Coonamble Hospital and Margaret, she joined the hospital as well. After some time she decided she go to Orange. She went there and went into the Orange Mental Section to work as a nurse.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Interview 1, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Interview 1, p. 18.

When Margaret came back from Orange, Beryl argued she should not live under the bridge with her mother:

She became pregnant and she came back to Coonamble and I was married. Already had one child. Pregnant with the second one and I lived in Townsend Street in Coonamble and Mum was sleeping under a bridge at Coonamble with [Bob Still]. And I said 'Margaret, she can't stay there, she's coming to stay with me'. So she did.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Margaret went to stay with Beryl. In the quotation, you can also see the hurt at the decision of their mother to continue to live with Bob Still rather than them. Again, Beryl experienced a sense of loss and abandonment.

Up until her death, Beryl hoped that Margaret would be cured of her dementia and she would be able to discuss topics like what happened to Margaret's daughter who had died as a child. Once, when Beryl went to visit her sister in the nursing home, her sister called her 'mother' such was her confusion, but when asked about it Beryl emphasised her sister would have known she was not their mother, and that Margaret looked after her so much.

#### Other Siblings

At the time when Beryl was removed from her family the family had four children. When they moved to Coonamble her mother had Margaret and two boys. Four more followed quickly after their move:

And I can't remember any of my brothers and sisters, not the big ones I remember one twin and one sister. The youngest one because I believe the other twin had died at the mission. But according to the files that they went to Coonamble. So all those kids were, went to Coonamble.<sup>27</sup>

It was distressing to Beryl that all of the children and her mother seemed to bear the brunt of her stepfather's drunken abuse:

I was, ahh, I would have been. Ahh, I would have been 16 because in Margaret's letter she was 15 when Mum sent her to live with her cousin in Coonamble. Somebody I didn't know. See you don't know. ... you miss out on a lot of things, my two brothers he, he, he, Still that is, he flogged them with chains and straps cause he was a drunkard. He could still work and he worked but when he drank, he was cruel and he was cruel to Mum if she didn't let him molest my sister and my sister

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<sup>26</sup> Interview 1, pp. 18–19.

<sup>27</sup> Interview 1, p. 17.

didn't want Mum bashed see but then she did blame Mum for those eight years. When Mum got sick [big sigh, crying].<sup>28</sup>

To some extent, Beryl suffered also knowing the stories and knowing she could do nothing to stop any of it happening, even what had happened to her. She feels like Margaret really suffered for talking up about Beryl's abuse. After all, Beryl was removed and that left Margaret at risk of Still's attention.

There appears to be quite a period of time during which Beryl attempted to communicate with her adult brothers but Margaret ran some interference in that. For a long time, Beryl asked Margaret for contact details for her brothers but she refused to give them to her. Beryl was quite at a loss to understand why this was happening. In the end, what it turned out to be was that Beryl's ex-husband had banned one of Beryl's brothers from seeing their children because he was drunk. This created a belief that Beryl had been part of that decision but she did not even know about it. Beryl was able to convince Margaret finally that she did not have contact details for their brother and had no knowledge of her ex-husband's behaviour and Margaret supplied her with them. Thus, it was that Beryl reinstated contact with one of her brothers after the initial break. That particular brother had been married and separated from his wife. His health unfortunately deteriorated and he was admitted to a nursing home where he passed away in 2010. Beryl's youngest brother also passed away in 2010, and he had also separated from his wife although they remained close friends.

Beryl keenly felt their deaths as losses—of brothers and of memories about their past. She said: 'Because I'm the only one who seems to worry about the loss. Now, I've lost the two brothers. One was going to give me all the information about it but he never did write and he never did follow it up. When I got hold of the other one it was too late. My only hope now is A [sister]' ...<sup>29</sup>

Beryl had planned to spend some time up in Coonamble with her youngest sister in the hope to talk through some aspects of their earlier life and get some of the gaps in her memory cleared up. It is clear that all of the relationships she has had with her siblings were made very difficult by the existence in their lives of Beryl's stepfather.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview 1, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Interview 2, p. 7.

Since their childhood a few of siblings have remained in Coonamble but many moved elsewhere. One of her sisters, born to Bob Still, asked Beryl about their heritage and Beryl told her:

She never knew anything about what happened to my sister with him and I reckon I had to tell her, you know, why. She just apologised. It's not easy to tell somebody that sort of thing, but then we had to go through it, well, my sister did. I think I wanted to let other people know, because that was my sister and how lucky I was I escaped.<sup>30</sup>

The birth of children to all of the siblings has added an extra element to this story also. In the instance of Margaret, their mother raised her son and Margaret had another child that Beryl was unaware of until Margaret's health deteriorated and she went to live in the nursing home. She believes that one of Margaret's children passed away after eating peanut butter. In each case though, the children of the siblings now are adults with their own children. Beryl had some connection to each of these nieces, nephews and great nieces and nephews. Some of the relationships are more difficult due to their parent's divorces but Beryl was very intent on sharing family history with each of them.

#### Extended Family

Beryl over the course of our interviews said very little about either cousins or other relatives. There were a few exceptions to this. When she spoke about the decision to move the family to Pillaga Mission, it was because her stepfather's mother lived there. On their way to moving to Pillaga from Bourke, they stayed with her mother's mother in her house, which Beryl had a photo of showing her and siblings playing in her grandmother's yard.

While saying she had many relatives, she made particular note of one of the reconnections she had made in more recent times:

And the woman rang back and we identified her mother as my Auntie. My mother's sister who I thought wouldn't be alive and here we are crying over the phone and I said look we'll have to ring back and talk to each other in a quieter way because I won't remember anything I'm too excited and wound up. So that's what we did she rang first and then I rang her the following week and we posted stuff to each other and I've got papers, photo's old photo's done of the girls that she sent me and then I discovered she's got kidney trouble. Her husband's got cancer. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. And they had a shop in Victoria Aboriginal Artefacts. Both

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<sup>30</sup> Interview 2, p. 22.

Aboriginal people with two sons. Anyway I rang the house. I got up enough courage and I rang and the husband answered and 'Ohh thank God you're still alive then'. Well he's got that male cancer and they reckon they live for a long time. But Julie, his wife, was in hospital and he said 'Well she's alright now but not alright, you understand', and I've been too scared to ring again.<sup>31</sup>

Fear kept her from ringing again before her death in spite of clearly expressing the importance of this relationship. Both women had thought the other long dead. It was good that they had a chance to re-establish contact before both women passed. This is a good example of family breakdowns that occurred due to removal and while the individuals want contact and a relationship it is an incredibly difficult gulf for them to bridge. Miller talks about reading 'for relationships that examines connections, autonomy and dependence'.<sup>32</sup> This relationship between Beryl and her aunt reflects a connection that because of the forced independence of Beryl from her family of origin it creates a lack of autonomy in her right to choose to have this relationship with her aunt. Through her forced removal, she is left with severed biological relationships and predominantly the ones available to her are non-biological or what she creates through marriage and the birth of her children. The blockage so apparent in Beryl's telling of this story is that she fears to reconnect with her own aunt and the pain that is raised for her. Her second worry is that if she makes herself emotionally available to do this, her aunt will die and she will be hurt and left again by herself. Beryl mentioned this contact in her initial interview and in her subsequent interview she had not reconnected with her aunt or updated her knowledge of that family and indeed her same fears appeared to be still present.

#### People from Her Indentured Years

It is a little difficult to discern whether Beryl's work placements were legitimately set up through the Protection Board. The paperwork on such issues was often scant and Beryl had collected at least some of it in her search for her wages case. What is particularly interesting is the reconnection of Beryl with people who were children she cared for during the time of her indenture with the Board. On at least one occasion, Beryl was contacted and photos were pored over as the children, now adults, reconnected with her and shared their photographs and memories. These connections were very much enjoyed by Beryl but they also helped filled the blanks in her memory. It is clear those mental connections are so important for how we remember our lives.

As stated earlier, Beryl initially went to a family home in Pillaga Town. Beryl was in this placement there with another young Aboriginal girl, and they were allowed to go to school.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview 1, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, *Researching Life Stories*, 75.

Beryl remembers the name of this family and they owned a major shop in the town. The family in fact was a brother and sister who ran the shop. Beryl also had the sense they were important in the social strata of the town. She and the other girl would help out in the shop and their presence at the home and shop would have been noted by the townspeople. Beryl wondered whether her placement at this home came about as a result of a relationship between the Protector and the brother and sister she worked for. Beryl said not long before her own move to the pig farm, the other girl staying at the storekeeper's house that she used to play with was moved to somewhere else.<sup>33</sup>

Later, Beryl after the move to the pig farm, she did not have any relationships she could speak about and remember until later serving Grandma P. She became very attached to Grandma P. and was emotionally devastated when the old lady passed away. She then moved to Grandma P.'s son's farm. He and his wife had children and worked the farm. These were some of the people with which she would later reconnect.

When Beryl received a copy of her records from the Aborigines Protection Board she was able to see the real names of the people she had spent all this time with. In most instances, she realised the names she had remembered were close but not quite accurate. Beryl saw this as reinforcement for her belief that she had lost her memory of four years during these placement years.

### **Themes in Beryl's Narrative<sup>34</sup>**

#### **Filling in the Memory Gaps**

The gaps in Beryl memory created a torment for her that imbued her voice and story-telling with a tone of confusion and loss. She was set on a quest to find information to fill those gaps until her death: 'There's all these little bits and pieces that pop into your mind'.<sup>35</sup> She was frustrated by being able to remember things from childhood but not so many other things: 'If I can remember back that far, how come I can't remember a lot of other things?'.<sup>36</sup>

You can remember some things, like now all I want to do is remember good things, but mostly it's bad stuff. It's hard to get away from, those dramas. Sometimes I have this problem of getting rid of this Bob Still's image chasing me when I was nursing at Coonamble Hospital ... I still have a nightmare about that.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Interview 1, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Interview 2, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Interview 2, pp. 20–21.

<sup>37</sup> Interview 2, pp. 21–22.



In the information she received from the Aborigines Trust Fund Repayment Scheme, she found an application from her mother for a house in Coonamble. In that application, her mother had stated that Beryl was earning two pounds for her work. This information provided two points for consideration for Beryl. One was that she found out she was supposed to being paid and she was not, and second, her mother maybe knew where she was and her situation when it was not clear to Beryl what her parents had known, or if indeed they had known anything at all.

## **Identity**

When she was asked about whether she had always had a sense of being Aboriginal, Beryl said she had always had felt and known she was Aboriginal:

Well, I shouldn't use this word, but I sort of gloat to myself. Call it proudness and I gloat about how far back I can talk about, I've even got the moiety.<sup>38</sup>

Beryl was very strong about her own heritage and would talk about the language and memories she had as a young girl. She had after all, grown up with her family and with other Aboriginal people until the age of 10. She also knew about some of the plants and animals and shared her knowledge with the young people around her whenever she could.

Beryl argues that her removal was because of her skin colour and hence she is part of the Stolen Generations. Interestingly, she predominantly tied her removal in most of her interviews with this researcher as being tied to her being a victim to her stepfather's predatory behaviour. However, she says when it came to the actual act of her removal she was offered a holiday that she did not want to go on but was forced onto. These two almost contradictory storylines are in reality perhaps a reflection of the times because Aboriginal were routinely removed using the 'holiday' offer and in fact her removal may have had nothing to do with her abuse at all.

Beryl sought the validation of the Stolen Generations tag. There was a longing or pleading in her voice when she argues about how they took her Aboriginality by taking her from her family. She spoke of times when people had questioned her Aboriginality, as she did not look how they thought she should look:

Well, different ones in town will say if I didn't know you were Aboriginal I wouldn't look on you as being one. I think, well, some of those people that have said that - I just say, well, it doesn't really bother me whether people know or not, I know.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interview 2, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Interview 2, p. 19.

She felt this was a difficult thing to respond to and there appeared to be some anxiety about it for her. She shows distinct indicators for ideas of body dysphoria. She really wanted her body to reflect what she felt culturally. For example she went to do some work with some tourists and someone said to her:

When the Japanese find out that you're Aboriginal, they'll wonder why you're not black. And I said, why would they think that, 'well they expect to see black people', and I thought about it and I thought 'Ahh', so that's in the very first place why I started looking and my grandmother is a full blood. It's in black and white. I've got all of that.<sup>40</sup>

And she further reflected:

Well my father was white. Why wouldn't I be a paler colour? My sister's a bit browner but not really that much. But then I've got my youngest son whose very brown, my second son's a bit lighter, and the first son quite light. My colour.<sup>41</sup>

No, it wasn't that I didn't know it was because I knew and I wanted them to know. That's what I needed the information for. There's a lot of people wouldn't take your word for it. I'm the same, I wouldn't take somebody's word for it if they told me they were a millionaire and I knew their background.<sup>42</sup> They'd have to give me proof.<sup>43</sup>

Beryl's identity remained something she was both very strong and very fragile about. She started putting together a family tree with the help of someone she knew. They contacted someone they knew in the NSW archives and started constructing it starting with Beryl's maternal great-grandmother: 'Yeah so I've got, you know, all my genealogy',<sup>44</sup> 'Well, I decided I better make sure I get all the facts so that anybody wants to know about me, we've got it all...'<sup>45</sup>

She was strong in what she wanted for her family to experience and understand as their heritage:

So like I said, the DVD when it's made up—when the book is made and the DVDs are done, they'll all know. They'll just know their history where that came from and who their family members are, but as far as what my life is all about they won't

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<sup>40</sup> Interview 1, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Interview 1, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Interview 2, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> Interview 2, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Interview 1, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Interview 2, p. 17.

know. Eventually there's a book made. They can go out and buy the book if they want to read about me.<sup>46</sup>

It's not that I don't want them to know, I just think well—let them think how it is now, what things are like—keeps you happy.<sup>47</sup>

In these quotations, she shows that while she wants her family tree and heritage to be information the family has particularly, she does not want her own story to trouble them in their lives. She knows how much pain she has endured and does not want her family to be caught up in it.

Beryl's sister's identity was something that Beryl also struggled with because her sister had chosen to step away from actively identifying as Aboriginal. Beryl said her sister had chosen to be with the white people:

But I feel so sad about Margaret. You know being where she is. I sometimes wonder is it because of what happened to her as a child but you couldn't sort of think of [it]. Margaret her character, she started to mix with more non-Aboriginal people.<sup>48</sup>

Beryl was also very strong about identity when talking about other people misusing or falsely claiming Aboriginal heritage in the community she lived in. She believed people should provide evidence of their Aboriginal heritage that was real and verifiable:

So what my argument is that if you're Aboriginal I think you should have proof. You can be black as the Ace of Spades, people wouldn't doubt that you're Aboriginal, but if you're my colour and you do get whiter, because everybody's getting whiter.<sup>49</sup>

She also took on the issue in her dealings with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and the fact they would not accept Torres Strait Islanders to be members of the AECG. She could not understand it at all. When she travelled to QLD she asked about alternative ways to cope with the ruling.

### **Recognising the Pain**

Perhaps the saddest recurrent theme of this story is the anguish shown by Beryl because of the disruption in the relationships between herself, her sister and her mother. Beryl had many deep unsettling feelings about these relationships still. What is confronting was the ongoing trauma

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<sup>46</sup> Interview 2, p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> Interview 2, p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> Interview 1, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> Interview 2, p. 18.

of this story. Their mother passed in 1956 and yet Beryl continued to feel a deep-seated guilt around the breakdown of the relationship between her mother and Margaret. She also believed that Margaret's mental health issues might have been influenced by the earlier trauma of sexual abuse and the breakdown of that primary family relationship. What is true is that there is a link between Beryl's own removal, Margaret being sent from the family by her mother at 15, the sexual abuse enacted by their stepfather, and their mother's part in all. It certainly led Beryl to have a continuing sense trauma around this issue that were unresolvable.

However, Beryl was still attempting to resolve it by planning to visit her youngest sister in Coonamble. More particularly, though, Beryl put a lot of effort to looking after Margaret in her nursing home. She organised and packed up Margaret's house, got records from the Aborigines Welfare Board, and sought compensation for lost wages for her sister with the hope to make her life in the Home easier:

The legal people [chasing lost wages] sent me a pile of paper but you know with stuff like this that I'd sent them about me and that they never had that stuff about Margaret because [the] Trust [the Aborigines Trust Fund Repayment Scheme] then sent me paperwork for Margaret after I'd started mine. And I thought, well if I'm allowed to get [it] for her I will because the poor bugger's there. She could do with something. You know, not that I'm saying they weren't looking after her properly, but I was thinking 'well we could go there and take, get a taxi' because she can walk. The only thing is we would have to take her to a big park because she likes to walk and she would probably walk off.<sup>50</sup>

She was in constant communication with the nursing home to make sure her sister's care was top notch. Beryl's emotions were strong and certainly included a level of guilt including a sense of debt about being 'saved' by Margaret, and hence she very worked hard to care for her sister.

### **Losing Faith in Father**

Beryl reconnected with her biological father before her marriage and enjoyed a holiday with him. At that point, he had remarried a woman with a daughter a bit younger than Beryl and they all had a good time travelling with Beryl back to Coonamble after her holiday. Margaret would spend more time with him in Sydney when father and daughter both lived there. Later though, Beryl heard two pieces of news that combined utterly gutted her. First, she was told her father had cancer and secondly, when she went to visit him, she found out her father had a new son to his wife's young daughter:

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<sup>50</sup> Interview 1, p. 14.

It was a disaster for me to find that out, but I... That was [very distressed]—and I just lost it for him, it just went. I thought, you know, with [Still] and this happening to somebody you thought was a wonderful person and me saying our lives could've changed, but then maybe then now it couldn't have been for the better either, but then life plays funny things in funny ways.<sup>51</sup>

Beryl had always believed that life might have been radically different if her father had gained custody of her and sister back on Pilliga Mission before her removal but this new information showed her that she might have suffered at the hands of her own father had she lived with him. 'Well, when my father tried for custody, our lives would have been totally different. I maybe wouldn't be here today talking to you. You wonder about things like that, but on the other hand...' <sup>52</sup> At this point, her faith in father figures was absolutely crushed.

### **Living with Multiple Families and Relationships**

Beryl, as with the other interviewees, has worked hard to balance the competing demands of the family she created herself with the struggle to be part of her family of birth. In this instance, the removal of this child did not lead to another family being acquired except in the relationship she developed with Grandma P. That being said, even to the very end, Beryl struggled with her removal and the situations, hurts and gaps it led to her to experience. In the year prior to her own death, she experienced the loss of two of her brothers and she struggled to disengage herself from the conflicts within their families and prioritise her relationship with her brothers:

Never had contact with them [her brothers], so Margaret didn't really believe that I didn't know where he [her brother] was so. When I finally convinced her, she gave me his number so I used to ring him. Then one day I rang and there was no answer. So with good luck he gave me two of his daughters' phone numbers. And I rang one number and she answered, but she was a funny one she, she just, saying that my, cause my brother divorced, he and his wife got divorced and she talked about him being cruel with her mother and all of that, and I didn't want to hear that. So I rang the other one and she was a much nicer person. She didn't run him down and talk about him badly but because I didn't know where he was. She did and told me he was in a nursing home. Got the number of the nursing home. Rang there got to talk to him but he was hard of hearing and arr so after talking with him for ... I put a lay-by on all these clothes for him and that. Slippers and then I rang the women and told her he needed a hearing aid and she said we can't take him there and blah, blah, blah, and I said 'Well you get an ambulance' 'Ohh no'. I said 'yes you get an ambulance

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<sup>51</sup> Interview 2, p. 33.

<sup>52</sup> Interview 2, p. 27.

or a taxi' I said 'he has his pension, take it out of his pension for the taxi' I said 'I know all about this'. I just lied and I thought I'm gonna make it my business to find out and by God I did.<sup>53</sup>

Her brother died not long after this conversation and Beryl talked about having seen him standing in a doorway of her house, waving goodbye. It appeared to be very important to her to have cared for him by ringing, arranging clothes, and making sure the nursing home people looked after him properly. She definitely was seeking to fulfil her role as his caring older sister.

### **Placing Beryl and Her Family Within the Wider Cultural Contexts and Social Structures Examined in This Thesis<sup>54</sup>**

#### **Place of Aborigines in Australian Society**

As discussed earlier, Beryl had many opinions about Aboriginality and that people should provide proof of their Aboriginality. She also had a very real sense of the place of Aborigines in Australian society, and while maybe managing to avoid some of the racism faced by those with a darker skin, she faced her issues of racism:

Well, nobody really knows, unless you believe it and people up in the outback, the really outback places, really know what it was like and still is and how badly they are still suffering. And governments don't give two hoots, but in the beginning where they wanted to be White Australia and don't have any coloured people, but then things changed. The Greek people, the Italians, they would never have been White Australia, they couldn't change that, so they brought them out anyway, pushed the Aborigines more to the background than ever before.<sup>55</sup>

#### **Religion**

Beryl's biological father was a non-Aboriginal man. Both her father and her mother had her and her sister brought up in the Catholic Church. When she was young, she went through her first holy communion at Bourke with her sister, Margaret. While this religious education was not particularly spoken about by Beryl in the set of interviews for this thesis, she did address it once and it serves as a good indication of her faith:

Well, I used to be very religious and I thought, well, thank God that happened to me. I'm not so religious now, well, not since I found out the Pope didn't pay my bills.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview 1, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>55</sup> Interview 2, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Interview 2, p. 22.

While couched in humour, I think she reflected that her faith had not helped at times where she had felt she was really suffering.

### **Describing Beryl's Voice<sup>57</sup>**

Beryl was an amazing woman in so many respects. When discussing her stepfather and his impact, she made a comment that gives a good indication to her strength and veracity. The interviewer said, 'Don't talk about it if you don't want to, it's all hard isn't it. Sounds like he did a lot didn't he, [Still]?'<sup>58</sup> In reply, Beryl said: 'You've got to talk about things otherwise you never get to the end, yeah. What made me worse was Margaret not telling me everything and then'.<sup>59</sup>

The woman encountered in this set of interviews looked at her life in reflection and used her trials and troubles to inspire a desire for social justice for those around her. Her work in her community was immense and her actions to care for her siblings and her other relatives were tireless. She managed, although having years taken away from her family, to work at keeping her family connected. Now she is gone perhaps those links will be gone forever.

In these interviews, Beryl spoke about caring for her sister and her brother-in-law who were both in a nursing home in a nearby town. Beryl had been responsible for her sister's affairs after her sister was put into nursing care unable to live independently anymore. Beryl and her family sorted her sister and her husband's affairs, packed up their house, and managed to wrap up the leftover arrangements after her sister living with increasing debilitating levels of dementia and caring for a husband who was increasingly physically debilitated.

At the time of the second interview, Margaret's husband had passed away and Beryl was now solely responsible for her sister. She attempted to visit her once a week although this was quite difficult for her to do as she relied on someone else to take her. She had also taken up caring for the adult children of Margaret. When we last met, Beryl spoke about chasing money for her sister so that she could live comfortably in her nursing home. Beryl had been paid her own missing wages and she was very happy about her own ability now to use that money to get some resolution on a couple of outstanding issues for her, including going to Coonamble to meet with one of her younger siblings.

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<sup>57</sup> Goodley et al., *Researching Life Stories*, 118.

<sup>58</sup> Interview 1, p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> Interview 1, p. 19.

She was investigating having her solicitors look into her sister's missing wages and was hopeful that they would have success. Beryl was concerned that there would be no money to bury her sister when she died. Beryl did not get to that trip to Coonamble and unfortunately, she died leaving her sister still alive and in the nursing home. It is up to the rest of the family to take on caring for Margaret now.

Beryl said and it has such a deep meaning and reflects the torment left from her removal:

Beryl: I like an ending, not necessarily it happens that it's always a good one. ... But if it's resolved to me it's good, whether it be a bad one, or at least it's the end of that...

I: Well and having some answers?

Beryl: ...particular—the answers are the important part, that's the resolution of it.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately for Beryl, she was not able to find those answers during her life. The torment earlier mentioned, imbued the conversations we had. The issues in her life were complex and but perhaps the consequence of her removal is best illustrated when she said:

It's a disaster in my life, because I should've been able to be there, that's how I felt. He [stepfather] was the cause of our lives being changed and changed dramatically. There's no other word for it, because from the time I left there I'd never ever been under the same roof as my mother ever again until I had her come to Central Coast that time. For her, it was a little bit better for her to go, but she tried to—but she was homesick and that word homesick—I know what that feeling is like. Maybe not then at that age, but I remember every time Margaret left to go home, the poor little bugger, I still don't whether she'd walk home.<sup>61</sup>

You know it's a terrible thing. But what happened to me and how I felt was umm. That's how I feel. My Aboriginality was taken from me because of him. I never lived a life with my mother and my brothers and sisters and Margaret didn't.<sup>62</sup>

Beryl absolutely believed herself to be part of the Stolen Generations: 'I left there in 1941 and I was taken away. I didn't go voluntarily. I was told I was going for a holiday but I still didn't want to go for that either and after that I've gone blank'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Interview 2, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Interview 2, pp. 43–44.

<sup>62</sup> Interview 1, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> Interview 1, p. 4.



## Conclusion

These quotations help emphasise the points made at the beginning of this chapter. Those being that Beryl's mother and sister were always the most important people in her life; that her removal ruined so much of her life; and that her antagonistic stepfather managed to torment her for all of her life. In her testimony, we hear the themes of the loss of culture and body dysphoria. Her story turns time and time again to emphasise the loss of love and connection to her family that was never recoverable. That being said, when considering her life, Beryl believed she had had a good life and that others around her had suffered more than she. She believed 'you've got to talk about things otherwise you never get to the end'<sup>64</sup> Beryl got to the end and at her funeral and in the media, people spoke of all that she had given others. She was a truly inspiring person who rose from the mess made of her young life to serve others.

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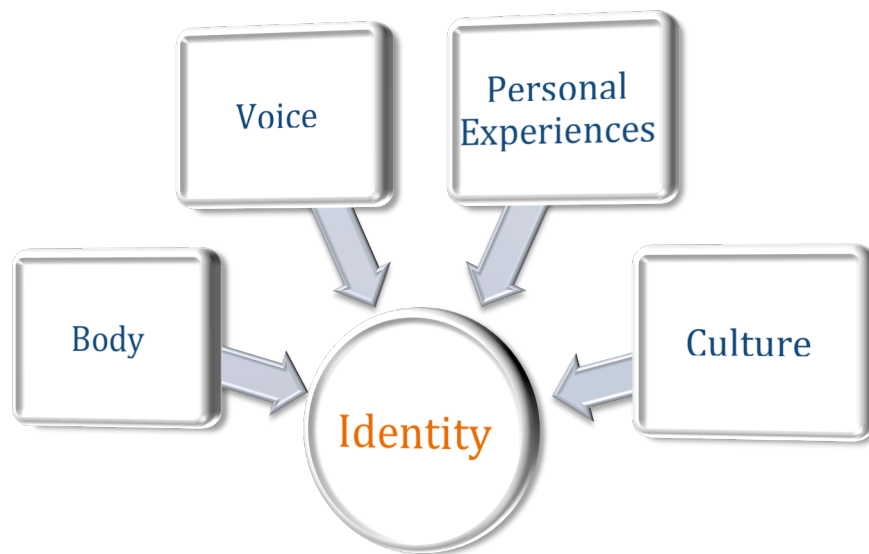
<sup>64</sup> Interview 1, p. 19.

**PART THREE:**

**REFLECTING ON THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF STOLEN IDENTITIES**

## CHAPTER 9: PULLING THE THREADS OF STOLEN LIVES TOGETHER— LEARNING FROM THE NARRATIVES

This chapter's function is to draw together the many points made in the three previous chapters focused specifically on Stolen Generations narratives. It would be easy to split this discussion into the three parts that have constituted so much of the theory of this thesis: identity, body, and culture. If this approach were taken though, there would be a failure to fulfil a very essential obligation to honour and respect each of these people and the emotional journey each of them has been through. They each were given little or no choice over what happened to them and remained nameless and faceless until the telling of these stories started happening more widely. There has been a great public pressure for them to share their stories and at times they were encouraged to do so to lead to their healing. There has been no guarantee of healing in this sharing process and indeed the public debate following the *Inquiry* may have lead many have felt akin to punishment for having done so. This thesis honours those individuals for their resilience and courage, for telling their stories and their struggle to live fulfilling lives.



**Figure 7: Learning from the narratives**

In Figure 7, it is proposed that in discussing and constructing ideas of identity, it is necessary to consider the concepts of body, voice and culture but crucially the discussion must include the each person's experiences over their life. So what can be learnt from the three chapters examined in this thesis? The discussion of the interviews collected in the *Bringing Them Home Collection* was split into the two sections of during 'care' and after 'care'. Sherry's narrative can also be split easily into these two sections. Perhaps the most difficult to identify in this

mould is Beryl's story, because she was taken from her family and placed immediately in more work-based placements rather than a foster care arrangement. Nevertheless, it will be argued here that the themes identified in the other chapters run true within her narrative.

In Chapter 5, there were four general groupings of aspects endured by Stolen Generations that were used to explain the end state of bodily and cultural dysphoria: the physical removal of Aboriginal bodies; the impacts upon the minds or psyche of the removed; those left behind; and the impacts of the Australian nation and its non-Aboriginal peoples on the implementation of assimilation. These categories can assist the drawing together of themes in this section.

The first analysis was the effects of the physical removal of bodies that lead, it is argued, to bodily and cultural dysphoria. In the analysis in Chapter 5, it was argued that bodies were physically removed from their families and, between Homes and placements, they were potentially exposed to abuse and every aspect of their lives was controlled. Crucially and tragically, the children's ability to see their own bodies as Aboriginal was corrupted. In each of the three chapters, this is played out in the lives of these children both as children and then later as adults. The bodily dysphoria of being Aboriginal and often looking 'Aboriginal' was active in the minds of the children as they were inculcated to believe they were white, sought and punished to act 'white' but came up against others who often brutally did not agree with this body reading. Sherry talked about actively as Anglo-Scottish and had no idea she had an Aboriginal heritage at all. Both Sherry and Beryl had to tackle coming to grips with being managed as Aboriginal but other people not recognising them physically as Aboriginal. In Beryl's case, she knew she was Aboriginal but 'didn't look it'. However, Sherry had no idea until she was told in her teenage years and then was managed as 'Aboriginal' even though she violently rejected such labelling.

One goal of assimilation was to stop children living Aboriginal culture by placing them in another culture. Sometimes children experienced growing up as the only visibly Aboriginal person in the community or school. As discussed in Beryl's chapter, she proudly stated remembering so much of her early education within her Aboriginal community but Sherry took many years after coming to the knowledge she had an Aboriginal heritage to take up actively what that might mean for her life. Living between two ways of being and feeling a full part of neither culture was a common experience post-'care'. There are differing levels of wellness within the narratives in the collection with many expressing despair and emptiness through to an uneasy resignation to get on with it. The original project of assimilation to make these children white appears to have failed on the basis of this evidence, and consequently, it has often and tragically created havoc for their sense of self and the rest of their lives.

For Beryl, going home to find that her family was Aboriginal was never an issue. For Sherry though, and for so many in the collection, it was immense. She had no idea that her mother was Aboriginal and when first shown family photos, she rejected such a concept. As she said, she thought her mother would look like her that is fair skinned. When she went to meet her family, she had reaffirmed the sense of rejection she had internalised from the two removals she had already experienced: as a baby and then from her foster parents at 13. Her new rejection was on the basis that her mother had kept another four children since Sherry's removal. The overwhelming sense of loss, rejection, loneliness and lovelessness are clear themes in the lives of these now adult Stolen Children.

Simultaneously with the previous category are the impacts upon the minds or the psyche of the removed. In this section was discussed assimilation or attempting to get Aborigines to live as whites; control over what people did thus they lose self-determination; the loss of Aboriginality as lived culture and identity; and Aboriginality itself devalued as a way of being. This led to their cultural dysphoria with no culture practiced by these children being acceptable to either community: white or Aboriginal.

They continue to show the bodily dysphoria that was created by the processes of removal and attempted assimilation. When going home, for instance, they were required to acknowledge that in spite of their own self-concept, their families were made up of Aboriginal people. The idea of cultural dysphoria is also clearly played out particularly in the reunion processes that see such a disjuncture between the lived life of the removed children and families and communities they left behind.

The children's minds were impacted upon to attempt to obliterate familial and cultural identification and hence we see immense pain and suffering when the children attempt to go 'Home'. Sherry talks about initially meeting total strangers who seemed to know quite a lot about her and indeed who had celebrated her birthday every year. She was unable to connect with her mother and through the welfare authorities' ineptness, she faced these experiences alone. They also tried to move her far too quickly to get to know them and indeed pushed her to go and live with them. She was overwhelmed by another sense of potential loss then of the relationships with her foster family from whom she had been brutally removed after 13 years of family life. In her mind, they were her only family. In response, she managed to re-alienate her birth family until she was able to reconnect on her own terms.

In the stories of the children, we see currents of loss running through their experiences. The loss of their birth family, then the loss of relationships they create with other children or families, for instance, with Beryl she had a caring relationship between herself and the old lady she cared for, Grandma P. When this lady died, Beryl ran away from the farm a number of times to try to find her family and was bought back to the farm each time. For all of her adult life, Beryl was tortured by the loss of memory of around four years of her removal. She was unable to account for what had happened during that time and was greatly disturbed by its loss. It is impossible to tell what may have happened during that time but at the very least, Beryl's mind was able to operate in such a way as to shelter her from whatever those memories might have been.

Perhaps the saddest and moving part of the impact upon the minds was the struggle of coming to a culture that fitted each child and later adult. During and after care, children struggled between having been bought up white and all the messages that said Aboriginal culture and people had no value. This was then disturbed when they left care and 'went home' to Aboriginal families. In those instances, like Beryl, where there was no home to go to, the attempt to reconnect with family was even more troubled. For Beryl, her attempts to draw the family together as a family continued for the rest of her life. It was as if the seven odd years of removal defined or constructed every family interaction from then on. She was always struggling to make sure her family was together and cared for. She attempted this in the face of overwhelming obstructions. Part of this struggle was to impart to her children their heritage and she reported being shocked when her grandchildren claimed a tribal heritage that was not traditionally theirs. (She came from another geographic area and their Aboriginal heritage came through her).

Chapter 5 also discussed the struggles faced by those who remained at home. For Sherry, her mother was a second generation Stolen Generations person who then lost her own child to the same authorities. She went on to have other children who were not removed. This meant for the whole family that they were constructed within the three generational removals process. They knew pain and disjuncture in family structures. It is a testament to all involved that they were able to reconnect to Sherry at all. Part of what Sherry had to learn was all of the family structures and relationships and how they each worked. Sherry talked about learning from her aunt some information her mother was unable to talk about. This role of cultural interpreter for the returning children is an important as they are often able to do as what done with Sherry and that is talk about how things work. For Beryl, this person was Margaret, even though Margaret herself was sent from the family. She stayed a great deal longer than Beryl and acted as the older sister to the younger siblings who looked up to her.

Unfortunately, going home did not guarantee open arms to greet them. Families were also damaged by the removals process and in some instance, did not even speak the same language anymore. The families sometimes assumed the child had had an easier life than they had had facing poverty and prejudice. The families found it very difficult to relate sometimes to this stranger who came looking for answers to often unanswerable questions. Part of the difficulty was that the people coming home often did not know how to act like siblings or daughters or sons. Beryl talked about the time when she invited her sister to live with her while she was pregnant rather than living under the bridge with her mother and the hated stepfather. She cannot understand why her mother would not also come and leave the stepfather. By then, the mother had been in a relationship with the stepfather for over 10 years, but Beryl is unable to comprehend why she stayed.

The relationship with the children's mothers is always a critical one. As we see in both Beryl and Sherry's lives, the relationship with their mother is constructed with the overwhelming influence of other people. For Beryl, it was the other children but crucially also the abusive stepfather. For Sherry, there were the other children who knew their mother everyday of their lives and was their *mother*. Overhanging this relationship with her biological mother though was the absent and unnameable father. The other people who hold influence in this relationship was the foster family and more particularly the foster mother who triggers for Sherry questions of trust, reliance and loyalty. She has to answer for herself whether creating a relationship with her biological mother is an act of disloyalty against her foster mother who has been her *only* mother until that point in time. The questions for the mother though are just as difficult as she lost to the welfare an eight month old baby and got an angry, fully grown young woman in return after 16 odd years of pain, loss and indeed, silence. So many in the collection lost their mother for ever. She had died before they returned or she died soon after and before they had any real connection or they just could find their family because there were no memories or information help them work out who they were and where they came from.

Finally, it is worth noting that sometimes someone came home was who was able to work and had resources that were previously unavailable to the family. For both Beryl and Sherry, paid and voluntary work has been a crucial site for their commitment to social justice and equity. Sherry has been able to share the wealth of knowledge and resources with her multiple families to bring a greater level of good to them all. This has been done with some awareness to the levels of pain family has endured with her. For Beryl, she was able to bring some comfort when able to her brothers and her sister when they have had times of struggle. She worked to save for clothes for her nursing home bound brother, managed her sister's care and many other actions to both care for her family including her children and grandchildren but also her nieces or great-

nieces or nephews. In the telling of this story, we must recognise the good that could come via reunions with previously lost family members. Sometimes having the person back was what the family had needed.

The final category that was discussed in Chapter 5 was the wider impact of the policies of assimilation. Both Sherry and Beryl were able to articulate very clearly coming to a realisation as an adult that the goal of assimilation and the acts taken against them individually and their families was a conscious, structured attempt through policy and action to get rid of Aboriginal people. This realisation was also present in interviews of the *Bringing Them Home Collection*. This sits alongside the experiences created by the resistance of non-Aboriginal Australians to living complete assimilation. The complete acceptance of assimilation would have meant that Stolen Generations along with Aboriginal people could live the mainstream Australian culture and been free to fulfil the roles and responsibilities of citizenship while also enjoying the privileges citizenship endows. The reality is that this did not happen. After being forced from family, culture and home, Stolen Generations children were often left abandoned at the edges of both communities. It is only the resilience of the people themselves that saw any success made of this situation. Individuals regularly downplayed their differences, pain or loss and attempted to make the best of it. In Sherry's case, we saw a young woman who threw herself into her created identity of sporting high-flyer. Beryl went about reclaiming her Aboriginal identity and lit a path for Aboriginal young people to learn the knowledge she had from her early life. She became an unofficial teacher and certainly a leader in the Aboriginal community where she lived. Beryl won awards in recognition of her community contributions and her life's work was celebrated and commemorated at her funeral.

Finally, to wrap up this discussion, it is necessary to note the aspect of pain so present in these narratives. The presence of pain, loneliness and heartbreak has been noted in the sections above but the final examination of this pain is as an almost unknowable pain. This pain sits with a perception of the Stolen Generations as a group of people cast as an 'unknowable other', as will be discussed in Chapter 10. This pain and suffering and hence also the grouping is too difficult or unconscionable and hence almost impossible for the observer to grasp.<sup>1</sup> This chapter and the chapters it discusses have attempted to illuminate this pain. It is the responsibility of all Australians to attempt to understand what happened in the lives of the Stolen Generations at the very least to understand the capacity of humans to cause real pain, suffering and lifelong trauma in the name of doing what is right.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 10.



The final point is given to Beryl to make who presents us with a great challenge. She said:

I like an ending, not necessarily it happens that it's always a good one. ... But if it's resolved to me it's good, whether it be a bad one, or at least it's the end of that... the answers are the important part, that's the resolution of it.<sup>2</sup>

So how do we now make this end and give a reasonable chance to those now known as the Stolen Generations?

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<sup>2</sup> Interview 2, p. 8.

## CHAPTER 10: HOW TO CONSTRUCT IDENTITY NOW

### Introduction

This chapter now turns to examining the identity constructions available for Stolen Generations individuals to take up. It seems appropriate to contextualise this material, at least initially, within a self-reflective framework. In this chapter, the ideas of body and cultural dysphoria are discussed within the context of theory on Aboriginal women's identity, pain, voice and hybridity. While appearing in some way disparate with each other, these aspects assist in the further development of a response to the question of whether the Stolen Generations can remember an Aboriginal identity or whether they have other identity options available to them. Firstly, in this chapter, the self-reflective framework will be set up to begin this examination.

### My Journey

When I was a young adult, I had the opportunity to ask Professor Errol West at James Cook University of North Queensland, foundation Professor of Aboriginal Studies, whether he thought I had a right to identify as an Aboriginal person, given my removal and subsequent adoption to non-Aboriginal parents. His answer that day has informed my perspectives ever since. It has also helped both myself, and many others, struggling with similar sorts of questions many times since that day. What he said to me is that my life story is a *legitimate Aboriginal* story. There are many such stories but nobody gets to deny me mine. It was the very motive of assimilation of Aboriginal children to create people like me. From that, I took that I could take up Aboriginality as an identity if I chose. The authorities may have wished me to never do so but I had the ability to do so. I have since come to believe that he was right about the legitimacy of my story. As an individual who lives life actively identifying as an Aborigine, in the politicised context of Aboriginality, I know my public Aboriginality is always contestable.

Moreton-Robinson and Huggins, as examined in Chapter 3 are very important theorists in the area of Aboriginal women's perspectives, for Aboriginal Australia and indeed for the broader polity. As Fredericks and Croft, contemporary Aboriginal women in the field of Aboriginal studies, state in their work:

We look towards ... Australian Aboriginal women like Aileen Moreton- Robinson (2000), Tracey Bunda (2007), Jackie Huggins (1998), Wendy Brady (2007; 1999) and numerous others for inspiration and support. We also know that it is useful to reflect on what our ancestors might have done, how they might have acted, and how we might honour them in our behaviour. It is when we are experiencing particularly

hard times that we draw on the courage of our ancestors to strengthen ourselves as intellectual warrior.<sup>1</sup>

In this quotation, we see the elevation of theorists like Huggins and Moreton-Robinson to an equivalency, in their wisdom, to that of the ancestor warriors. When I was a younger woman, I started to read the work of Huggins and then a little later, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, and as with Professor West, used them to try to understand my identity position. I found it useful but conflicting to look to their writings as a way to examine my own, but also other, Stolen Generations women's relationship to Aboriginality. To highlight this conflict, I want to look more closely at Moreton-Robinson's work to show the sorts of messages I received from them.

In her article '*When the object speaks*', Moreton-Robinson examines a number of Aboriginal women's autobiographies in order to critique both feminist and anthropological constructions of Aboriginal women. She contends that the model for examination used by female anthropologists locks Aboriginal women into a theoretical model that only allows for those women to be understood as one of two opposite lifestyles: 'traditional' or 'contemporary'. 'Contemporary' women, she says, are seen as living an ambiguous culture and authenticity. Their measure is 'between how they are like or unlike their "traditional" sisters or how they are like or unlike their White sisters in their behaviour and practices'.<sup>2</sup> She argues that the 'contemporary' Aboriginal women as described by anthropologists should not be constructed as being somewhere on a journey towards assimilation. Rather than assimilating, Aboriginal women are initiating cultural changes in the face of competing demands including those from the colonisers.<sup>3</sup>

What is important for the analysis in this thesis, and for the discussion of my own journey, is Moreton-Robinson's construction of Aboriginal women. In '*When The Object Speaks*', she argues that she does not seek to provide a definitive statement on who is an Aboriginal woman, but that she believes the women's narratives presented in her article can be understood as Aboriginal, even where they self-define as otherwise. She says that their overt denial of Aboriginality does not change that the socio-cultural practices or multiple subject positions they enact in other contexts, embody Aboriginality. Moreton-Robinson contends:

The constitution of their complex and multiple subject positions is produced by the practices associated with the definitions and representations of Aboriginality

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<sup>1</sup> B. Fredericks and P. Croft 'Finding a Space to Make an Impact within the Contemporary World', *Studies in Learning, Evaluation Innovation and Development* 5, no. 1 (2008), 10, <http://sleid.cqu.edu.au>.

<sup>2</sup> Moreton-Robinson, 'When the Object Speaks, a Postcolonial Encounter: Anthropological Representations and Aboriginal Women's Self-Presentations', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 19, no. 3 (1998): 277.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 277.

developed in public and legal discourses as much as it is shaped by an Aboriginal discourse of self-definition and denial. Daisy, Gladys and Ella [discussed in article] may have resisted definitions of the dominant culture in particular contexts by denying Aboriginality but that did not change the view of the state, their White bosses or their socio-cultural practices.<sup>4</sup>

More than this though, she says, the narratives show that for Aboriginal women, their most important relationships are with their surrogate or extended families. Aboriginal women are taught from birth by older Aboriginal people, and thus practice what she calls an ethic of relationality. In this ethic of relationality, women prioritise in their lives' personal relationships based on 'principles of generosity, empathy and care, which connote ideals of respect, consideration, understanding, politeness and nurturing'.<sup>5</sup> As for those women removed as children from their families, Moreton-Robinson contends they learn their ethics of relationality from the older children in their mission dormitories.<sup>6</sup>

In her conclusion, Moreton-Robinson argues that all the narratives she examined reveal that in their behaviour and social relationships, the women can be seen to be operating in Aboriginal domains:

The body for Aboriginal women is the link to people, country, spirits, herstory and the future and is a positive site of value and affirmation as well as a site of resistance.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Moreton-Robinson's argument appears to be that, even though a woman may be subjected to an assimilation process via their removal, and then choose to identify as other than Aboriginal, they *are* Aboriginal because they have an 'Aboriginal body' and will have been acculturated still within the Aboriginal women's ethics of relationality. Moreton-Robinson reaffirms this position in *Talkin' up to the White Woman*, adding that while there is a diversity of Indigenous women's experiences, there are certain identifiable core, shared themes:

They include sharing an inalienable connection to land; a legacy of dispossession, racism and sexism; resisting and replacing disparaging images of ourselves with self-defined images; continuing our activism as mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters, grandmothers and community leaders, as well as negotiating sexual politics across and within cultures.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 285.

<sup>8</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, xvi.

It seems appropriate to assume that given Moreton-Robinson's earlier argument that as the biologically Aboriginal woman removed from her family of origin remains an 'Aboriginal woman', Moreton-Robinson would argue she would also share these other core themes. If Moreton-Robinson's perspective is inverted, could it be that she would also argue that without either connection to land or the other aspects she has identified that, in fact, Aboriginality is not performable?



**Figure 8: Moreton-Robinson's 'Aboriginal Woman'**

When Moreton-Robinson talks about the way Aboriginal people introduce themselves, the perspective posited is that the way you introduce yourself is another performative act of Aboriginality. Moreton-Robinson says that by providing information in an introduction to others about one's cultural location, Aboriginal cultural connections can be made. These locators could include the name of grandparents, and the 'country' you belong to. For Moreton-Robinson, this is known as Quandamooka.<sup>9</sup> Other examples can look like: in the work written by Pamela Croft and Bronwyn Fredericks, Crofts says 'I am of the Kooma clan of the Uralarai people, South West Queensland and live in Keppel Sands on The Capricorn Coast in Central Queensland'.<sup>10</sup> Wendy Brady writes she is from the Wiradjuri Aboriginal Nation.<sup>11</sup> Karen Martin says:

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, xv.

<sup>10</sup> B. Fredericks, 'A Counselling Journey to Health, Healing and Empowerment', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 30, no. 3 (2006): 30.

<sup>11</sup> W. Brady, 'Observing the Other', *Eureka Street* 9, no. 1 (1999): 28–30.

I am the youngest of seven children in the family of George and Ruby Martin (nee Holt). My father is a Noonuccal man from Minjeripah—the land, waterways, skies and spiritual systems of North Stradbroke Island. My Mother is a Bidjara woman whose ancestral land is the north eastern area of Carnarvon Gorge, Central Queensland. I am a Noonuccal woman with ancestral ties to Bidjara land and come from a tradition of artists, weavers, educators, storytellers, healers and law people.<sup>12</sup>

Any introduction in the form suggested by Moreton-Robinson challenges my wellbeing precisely because I live within the context created for me by my removal. This was the intent of my removal; to not have my Aboriginal mother to teach me; to not know or live in my birth name and to not know ‘country’. In the end, I am left with two facts: I was removed and I go into the world without the name or embeddedness either of my birth parents or birth family could have given me. The cultural locators most available to the Stolen are that they were removed, fostered, adopted and/or institutionalised. As a removed child, I have often constructed identity positions or performed that act of cultural introduction to fit the expectation identified by Aboriginal authors but this was with the knowledge that any representation was only part of the story and neglected parts of my narrative.

I have a set of lived life facts that include that I was born in Moree in early 1967. After my removal from my parents and a period being held in the Moree Hospital, I was then adopted at eight months to English immigrant parents. Between then and when I reconnected with my biological family at approximately 20 years old, I was adopted, fostered and institutionalised. Since my ‘return’, I have since learnt my biological mother’s family has responsibility to and native title to land in Wiradjuri territories and my father has other culturally based responsibilities in the north of NSW. But what story do I tell and what voice do I use? This is where pain and suffering and struggle of being between and of neither, comes to bear. I never went home. I have no ‘Home’. I cannot say ‘I am a Wiradjuri woman from Dubbo’. I cannot say that ‘country’ or where I was born makes me who I am. I cannot perform that and indeed do not know how that performance even looks. These are my personal lived experience of the earlier posited body and cultural dysphoria.

Moreton-Robinson makes a very important point in her work when she writes that the narratives of black and Indigenous women’s are crucial to ‘challenge the universality of the subject

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<sup>12</sup> K. Martin, ‘Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing: A Theoretical Framework and Methods for Indigenous and Indigenist Re-search’, *The Australian Public Intellectual Network*, 30 April 2012, viewed 1 May 2012, [http://www.api-network.com/main/index.php?apply=scholars&webpage=default&flexedit=&flex\\_password=&menu\\_label=&menuID=homely&menubox=&scholar=105](http://www.api-network.com/main/index.php?apply=scholars&webpage=default&flexedit=&flex_password=&menu_label=&menuID=homely&menubox=&scholar=105).

position middle-class white women', which had been so central in feminism.<sup>13</sup> So too it is crucial that this thesis present the narrative of Stolen Generations women in order to challenge the universality of the subject position known as 'Aboriginal woman' as well as responding within the context of body and cultural dysphoria.

### **Speaking from the within the Stolen Body: Body and Cultural Dysphoria**

The earlier chapters have mapped the impact of removal on Stolen or removed children and identity of these children. In earlier chapters, some of the processes put into place to enact the removal were discussed including in Chapter 5, an examination of assimilation at work. In this section, the position that those now adult removed children inhabit in Australia and the position they speak from is examined. A colleague at the University of Newcastle is exploring the possibility of psychological genocide. She proposes that psychological genocide might be:

The deliberate act to erode the psyche; it is the breaking of the will, the systematic methods used by the Imperial power to cause destruction of identity with the objective to dismantle a culture. It is aimed at the degradation of a person's or group's sense of worth. It is the damaging of the spirit and of the 'self'. It is the purposeful act to inflict pain and suffering upon a particular group or race of peoples through the mental wounding of the mind with the intent to psychologically destroy that particular group or race. It is the killing of the mind, will, and spirit.<sup>14</sup>

It is possible then that applying this idea to the removal of Aboriginal children could hence be considered an example of this process. The evidence for this perspective has been presented in the earlier sections of this thesis. A further examination of this experience is required and in this section, the implications of deliberately attempting to damage the spirit of people, of deliberately enacting a process that mentally wounds them, forcing the questioning their very being is considered.

The inculcation of culture involves a mixture of education and ways of living. Culture can involve a common language, inheritance, educational system, shared values and the like, which work together to create social unity and commonality.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the Stolen Children, the aim was to brutally replace a sense of Aboriginality with a sense of the wider Anglo-Australian cultural ways. Unfortunately, people in part because of the spectre of racialised bodies, were left in the space between the two.

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<sup>13</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, 151.

<sup>14</sup> M. Kirby, personal communication email, 6 September 2008.

<sup>15</sup> T. Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000).

It easy to believe that a woman in this space might say:

And if I had been alright, if I hadn't had this identity problem... And I get very angry, you know, because why should I, why, I shouldn't have had to have an identity crisis.<sup>16</sup>

But what do we, the rest of Australian society, now expect from this Stolen voice/body? In the aftermath of the release of the *Bringing Them Home Report*, there were many removal stories told publicly and those stories in part, involved speaking of pain, of losing family, of not being able to get 'home', being lost. It could be argued an expectation of a discourse of dysfunction was created.<sup>17</sup> The Stolen were not and now are not expected to speak of success or wellness. They are expected to be 'just surviving', not thriving. The Stolen lost 'home' but never got to the promised 'whiteness' or assimilated position of 'Australian'.

It is necessary though to come to an understanding that the so-called failure to achieve these 'goals' does not mean that speaking as Stolen can only be as sufferer or as a failure. In arguing this position, it is important to not get confused with the idea that in anyway removal was justified and that people got the better life they were taken on the promise of receiving. The *Bringing Them Home Report* is very clear on this point. The bulk of the evidence received did document damaging and negative effects of removals but that evidence was received from individuals acknowledging their experiences of love and support from adoptive and foster families. The Report does note though that all witnesses expressed they wished this had not been at the cost of losing their family of origin: 'How do you know where you're going if you don't know where you've come from?'<sup>18</sup>

David B. Morris offers two ideas to assist understand this characterisation from the Stolen position. The first he notes is the idea of suffering and the loss of voice; and the other he proposes, is pain. Morris says:

The basic opposition between voice and silence matters ... because suffering, like pain, with which it so often intermingles, exists in part beyond language. Suffering is voiceless in the metaphorical sense that silence becomes a sign of something ultimately unknowable.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Record 4, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> L. Briskman, *Social Work with Indigenous Communities* (Annandale: Federation Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> HREOC, *Bringing Them Home*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> D. B. Morris, 'About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community', in *Social suffering: Essays*, A. Kleinman, V. Das and M. Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 27.



It exists in a realm beyond language. Indeed suffering tends to make people inarticulate, he says. Many people who suffer routine misery have almost no status beyond the role of victim. A loss of voice, further, proves to be almost built-in to the interpersonal structure within which suffering usually occurs. That is, even when words prove at least partially adequate, even when speech occurs, communication fails.<sup>20</sup> This concept is interesting to the position put here that the Stolen Generations story is expected to be a story of pain before it is even heard, but these individuals are rarely asked how they describe themselves or the best portrayal of themselves. Earlier in this thesis, it was said that individuals have never told the stories of their lives before being asked to do so by Link-Up, the Aboriginal Legal Services or for the *Inquiry* itself. This highlights that this in many respects has been an unknown story because the ‘removed’ have not told their stories if at all, outside of their peers. In that regard, it is an unknowable pain and experience and difficult if not impossible to voice. As Morris indicates, it is suffering without a voice.

Morris goes on to say that, ‘culture shapes human pain’. He relates, ‘Pain is an experience in search of an interpretation’.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, neurosurgeon John Loeser posits that ‘the organ responsible for all pain’ is the brain. Conscious and unconscious mental activity can control or alter our sensory phenomena.<sup>22</sup> The fight to gain some justice and some public understanding of the removal of mixed-race children from their families of origin has meant what was private suffering and pain became public, and hearing it, knowing it, experiencing it became an act of culture. The Coming Home conference in 1994, the collecting of narratives for, and then the *Inquiry* itself, constructed the way that each performative act of Stolen or ‘removed’ could be enacted. Stolen or ‘removed’ became acts of cultural situatedness and interpretation. The removed children got little input into those constructions. They were constructed by those Aboriginal communities welcoming Stolen Generations ‘home’ or by the ‘healers’ involved in the care of Stolen Generations or by the legal services who collected information for the *Inquiry* or indeed by the *Inquiry* itself. What Stolen Generations did get was the decision to either construct their narratives in the manner expected or continue to remain silent.

In Chapter 3, the point was made that the evidentiary requirements for an *Inquiry* were not at the highest level as for a Royal Commission, which requires the fulfilment of a legal burden of proof. SNAICC say they argued for the *Inquiry* rather than a Royal Commission to avoid the implications of Stolen Generations being cross-examined and requiring proof of their narratives.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>21</sup> D. B. Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> D. B. Morris, ‘Belief and Narrative: An Understanding of Pain, Bereft of its Cultural Dimensions, is Woefully Incomplete’, *The Scientist*, viewed 3 July 2008, <http://www.the-scientist.com/2005/03/28/S14/1/>.

The unfortunate consequence was that the stories can still be challenged as their 'truth' remains untested.

The *Bringing Them Home Inquiry* meant the Stolen were asked to speak about that which they had maybe never spoken. It also asked them to put those stories or experiences into words that would communicate to a non-Stolen audience the nature of their abuse or dis-empowerment. The greater Australian public gained a broader and easier access to the 'Stolen voice' than ever before. The unfortunate outcome of that process though has resulted in their 'truth' remaining questioned and those who spoke potentially experience the pain of rejection again.

While the consequences of removal existed both before the *Inquiry* and after, what was new was the performance of the cultural act of Stolen as understood by the wider community. The Stolen became constructed in popular Australian culture and known as a voice that speaks of pain. When the *Bringing Them Home Report* was tabled in Parliament in May 1997, the Federal Opposition leader, the Hon. Kim Beazley, responded in the days following and was seen to be crying in reaction to the stories within the *Report* and encouraged people to read it themselves: '*For those things that we are responsible for, I apologise, as Leader of the Australian Labor Party. This is a terrible, terrible record*'.<sup>23</sup>

Bornstein says 'my identity becomes my body which becomes my fashion which becomes my writing style. Then I perform what I've written in an effort to integrate my life, and that becomes my identity, after a fashion.'<sup>24</sup> People known to be removed children were and still are asked to speak about their experience in public of being removed. They are situated as 'in pain' irrespective of their own construction of their narrative. The application of Bornstein's idea could be interpreted to mean that the performative act by Stolen Generations to be heard and recognised has led to a belief that their narratives have to be constructed within the parameters available and required by the listeners. Perhaps now they have become such an embedded performance that they now construct lives or beliefs of themselves within these same parameters.

This becomes the place where the body and the mind of the removed or Stolen must disrupt and redirect the narrative practices increasingly entrenched since the *Bringing Them Home Report* was released. Speaking of cultural and bodily dysphoria should not become prescriptive for the narrative told. Any examination of this issue must attend to developing the awareness of the

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<sup>23</sup> NSW HSC Online, *The Stolen Children: Their Stories*, accessed 3 June 2012, <http://www.hsc.csu.edu.au/english/esl/experience/elect1/4040/stolen.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> K. Bornstein, 'Gender Outlaw', 1995, quoted in Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998): 35.

impacts on parts of the Stolen and removed and not just be a story of physical removal or cultural assimilation alone. This is the importance of women's autobiography and hence the use of the self-reflection, the narratives in the *Bringing Them Home Collection* and the interviews carried out for the thesis.<sup>25</sup>

### **The 'Aboriginal' Voice**

This thesis has proposed understanding Aboriginal bodies and identity as always having been politicised. In Australia, to this day, to speak of Aboriginality, whether lived culture or identity, is to carry out a political act. Aboriginal bodies are contested. The contestation reflects the long history of slave influenced language and eugenicist ideas like blood quantum utilised to determine Aboriginal people's treatment and futures. Whether those bodies were removed or whether they stayed home, they remain in the same contested space and hence influence the voice they speak with. For all humans, the body they inhabit is the result of the actions of others. I did not choose my ancestors but they are the reason for my physical form and for the body that I now go into the world with. My body that was removed and then further interrupted in the ways earlier discussed.

The non-Stolen Aboriginal voice is also politicised and, as Moreton-Robinson says, they choose a voice constructed to perform acts to connect culturally. From the interrelated parts of their lives they also create a narrative. There are at least two parts to this process in an interaction. The first is the audience. It must be questioned who is their audience for this performance or is it assumed that the audience is only comprised of Aboriginal people. Questioning these assumptions can help construct the performance of Aboriginality that was chosen. What form of connections can be made? What shared understandings will there be? The second then is the choice of voice used to put this construction. What narrative will be told? Will it be shared understandings and cultural strength and resilience? Will it be narratives of pain as is expected by the Stolen voice? As Aboriginal identity is contested, this act is at times an act of resistance.

This conversation for Stolen bodies and identity must be partnered to the discussion of Aboriginal bodies and Aboriginal cultural survival, at least in part because Stolen Generations people come from Aboriginal people and culture. Brady tells us of Aboriginal lives and bodies inscribed with the history of invasion and colonisation: 'We carry it in and on our bodies. We range in colour, form, attitude across a complexity and multiplicity of layers'.<sup>26</sup> These are complex layers created by multi-generational knowledge and influenced by the simplistic

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<sup>25</sup> Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 36.

<sup>26</sup> W. Brady, 'Observing the Other', *Eureka Street* 9, no. 1 (1999): 28.

descriptors and imposed notions used to describe Aboriginal people. Brady proposes a repositioning of Aboriginal people must occur that crosses the borderlines of race and gender.<sup>27</sup>

Part of that repositioning proposed by Brady is giving recognition to the fact that the history of Aborigines includes the experience of the displacement common to Indigenous people across the world. That is, Aboriginal people are made homeless in their own homeland. The discourse associated with this process of displacement has complicated the Aboriginal identity by Aborigines also becoming branded as 'other'. This complicates even further the Stolen Generations development of identity with both Stolen Generations and in some way, all Aboriginal Australians seeking to go 'Home' in a land where they already are at Home.

Those who, in terms of homeland, commenced on this continent as 'other' have enacted the oppression of Aborigines. Dispossessing Aborigines of their land and reconstituting the Australian continent as their own has led to the current construction of Aboriginal people as the 'other'. The importation and application of ideas like Social Darwinism, paternalism and all colonising acts carried out have been premised on, at the very least, an unconscious understanding that every Australian who is not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander initially had their 'homeplace' somewhere else.<sup>28</sup> In the process of politicising Aboriginality, the distinctive claim Aborigines have to the Australian land was contested by using such arguments as archaeological 'evidence' to show Aborigines themselves had come here from another continent and that other Australians having been on this land for so many generations can now claim Australia as their homeplace.<sup>29</sup>

Another way Aboriginal contestation for homeland is impacted is by the argument that Aboriginal people have been displaced from their 'traditional homelands'. Spark argues the existence of what she terms the 'emplacement-displacement dialectic'. She explains this as the displacement of many Aboriginal people from their traditional lands. They then reside in a new place, which does not have the same connectedness that their traditional lands hold. They do not lose their relationship to their traditional homeplace but rather their displacement becomes more a perception of a 'matter of degree' rather than a totality of dislocation. They argue the retention of a unique connectedness to the homeplace while still be able to articulate their 'inherited/expropriated histories'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 28–30.

<sup>28</sup> C. Spark, 'Home on 'the Block': Rethinking Aboriginal Emplacement(1), *Journal of Australian Studies* 63 (1999): 56–63.

<sup>29</sup> J. B. Birdsell, *Microevolutionary Patterns in Aboriginal Australia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> C. Spark, 'Rethinking Emplacement, Displacement and Indigeneity: Radiance, Auntie Rita and Don't Take Your Love to Town, *Journal of Australian Studies* no. 75 (2002): 96.

A diaspora has been carried out on the Aboriginal population and with the introduction of the 2007 'Northern Territory Intervention'; this destructive Australian diasporic tradition has continued to move people from their traditional homelands and encourage them to lose their relationships to them. At the same time though, they create a new home where they live. These can be anywhere in the Australian landscape and again poses an interesting aspect to this 'home' discussion.

In enacting segregation for the 'full-bloods' and hoping that assimilation would force mixed-heritage peoples to disperse out of existence, the essentialised and marginalised dominant discourse presented the only 'true' Aboriginals (i.e. 'full-bloods') as being in the 'outback'. The dynamic and discourses that colonisation marks upon Aboriginal bodies are only fulfilled with the placement of Aborigines in the 'outback'. The idea that civilisation is represented in part by urban spaces means therefore that the 'uncivilised' Aborigine must be physically placed elsewhere, marginalised from civilisation, and comprehensively 'othered'.<sup>31</sup> As discussed in Chapter 5, a number of issues have become apparent that made this 'outback' discourse false. One is that the 'full-bloods' did not die out. They also did not stay 'outback' and have moved around including sometimes to more urbanised spaces. Another is that policies of assimilation did not bring out the policy's desired result of no individuals left claiming either Aboriginal racial identity or living Aboriginal culture.

Spark argues that it may be necessary to recognise that the new 'home' where Aboriginal people live creates a relationship that can also be valuable and not just that 'home' which has been lost: 'Home is here, in the relation between my body and this place'.<sup>32</sup> Fredericks says, modern Aboriginal identities have been created in response to living with the urban environment and should be seen as reflecting the dynamic nature of Aboriginal culture, and not as some unrelated identity perhaps of a hybrid nature.<sup>33</sup> Stolen Generations individuals who live with breakages in their connectedness or embeddedness may find this new non-'traditional' relationship more realisable.

In places like Brisbane's West End, Sydney's Redfern, or Melbourne's Fitzroy, the emplacement of Aboriginal people in the urban landscape enables a form of belonging. The continuity of Aboriginal people in those spaces and places has allowed them to be constructed as Aboriginal spaces and hence available as an Aboriginal Home space: an Aboriginal place for Aboriginal bodies to be in place. This does not mean that the relationships with the traditional

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<sup>31</sup> Spark, 'Home on 'the Block'', 58.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>33</sup> B. Fredericks, 'Urban Identity', *Eureka Street* 14, no. 10 (2004): 31.

lands are gone but rather there is a continuing sense of displacement in the lives in their new places. In this way, we can discern a dynamic of both change and continuity in culture even though this change may be downplayed. At the end, Aboriginal emplacement must be understood to incorporate disconnection and displacement, as well as connection and belonging.

How do Stolen Generations gain emplacement? Spark says this can happen by allowing reconnection to happen but also by articulating that emplacement is never ‘undamaged authentic and absolute’.<sup>34</sup> The aspects of disconnection and displacement, connection and belonging, occur for all Aboriginal people. For Stolen Generations, if it is accepted they have experienced the same concepts as other Aboriginal people, if not exactly the same experiences, this can create a commonality to build upon further connection and emplacement. Places themselves have a past that is always present. In *Kanyini*, Uncle Bob Randall talks about the history of the Mutijulu lands and argues that people can reconnect to that place, its past, and move on to determine their own futures.<sup>35</sup> Spark says ‘individuals can be reconnected to the past that is present in places’.<sup>36</sup> Mick Dodson though encourages us to recognise the relationship Aboriginal people have with their past as they describe it themselves and that these descriptions of relationships should ‘not to be confused with the relationships with the past that have been imposed upon us. One is an act of resistance, the other is a tool in the politics of domination and oppression’.<sup>37</sup>

Fredericks and Croft say that Aboriginal people are in a dynamic or binary relationship with those who have colonised them. Our labels reflect that dualism: Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, Australian or Other, or perhaps white or non-white. This lends an essentialism to this discussion that both contextualises it and at some level, reinforces and continues the dualism. Some people are mixtures of the binary, coloniser and colonised, within their bodies and cultural memories.<sup>38</sup> Aboriginal communities are continually in a pursuit of definition and redefinition and interacting with external forces that also want to define them. We have seen that in the way people now introduce themselves exposing a subtle shift from family name and general geographical region to tribal affiliations and ties to country. It is very important in this examination to give the recognition to the fact that often it is only the Aboriginal community that has predominately offered safer spaces for those who were Stolen. There is an acknowledged relationship and connectedness between Aboriginal people and members of the Stolen Generation. After all the Stolen Generations were removed predominantly from

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<sup>34</sup> Spark, ‘Rethinking Emplacement’, 100.

<sup>35</sup> *Kanyini*, 2006, motion picture, Hopscotch Films, Australia, starring Uncle Bob Randall, directed by Melanie Hogan.

<sup>36</sup> Spark, ‘Rethinking Emplacement’, 100.

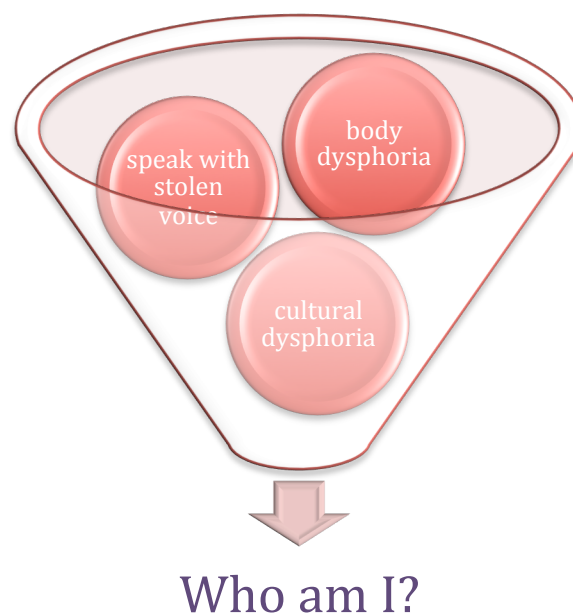
<sup>37</sup> Spark, Home on ‘the Block’, 62.

<sup>38</sup> Fredericks and Croft, ‘Finding a Space’, 3.

Aboriginal mothers and Aboriginal communities resulting in their internal and external disconnection from their Aboriginal homeplace and their Aboriginal spaces.

### Developing Stolen Generations Identities

Our political processes have metamorphosed to legitimise or at least recognise a group of individuals now known as the ‘Stolen Generations’. This raises the question of what sorts of identity positions can these ‘removed’ children take up in the Australian context. In this section, this process of legitimising the creation of another identity group will be examined. It has now become somewhat acceptable to speak as ‘Stolen Generations’. What is that voice? The argument put forward is that the identity of the Stolen voice is a uniquely *embodied* voice: the fact of their Stolen bodies has meant that the voices of the Stolen are represented as hurt, pained, suffering and in need of healing.



**Figure 9: Constructing the stolen individual**

What possible places for Stolen voices or identity positions exist? One possibility is the idea of hybridity as Fredericks noted earlier. Ien Ang talks about the space between two ‘races’ where a hybrid people exist.<sup>39</sup> Is this perspective useful to think of when considering the Stolen Generation? If the Stolen Generations were taken on grounds of the biological legacy of both ‘white’ and ‘blackness’ or ‘Aboriginality’, then do they occupy a hybrid situation? The answer to this question appears to incorporate a biological consideration as well as a cultural aspect. In this instance, it is that the removal of children was based on a perspective of the race or biology and that the children were racially/biologically hybrid. Papastergiadis hopes that discourse has

<sup>39</sup> I. Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (Sydney: Routledge, 2001).

moved hybridisation towards a more neutral zone of identity rather than race and can counter that aspect of Social Darwinist-imbued racism that ranks the 'white' as a higher race than the black or Asian for instance.<sup>40</sup> D'Arcy encourages us to understand that assimilation was created initially to remove the genetically 'defective' half-castes and their associated genetic traits.<sup>41</sup> Absorption was the answer not cultural hybridity. This issue remains that Stolen Generations people have not become one hundred per cent assimilated. So are they a hybrid of cultures? The answer to this question is yes but the reason is crucial. As Chan says, *all* people are cultural hybrids, so yes, Stolen Generations are culturally hybrid.<sup>42</sup>

The question then must be asked: why are the identity positions of the Stolen Generations so conflicted? In part, Chan can help answer this question. He argues that mainstream thinking has really got stuck within the polarised and essentialised dichotomies such as the essentialised Aborigine, and so the culturally in-between do not fit well into these structures. If, in fact, we accept that all cultures are fundamentally hybridised the fact that Stolen Generations are also hybridised can remove some of the discomfort around their lack of fit to essentialised dichotomies.<sup>43</sup>

Papastergiadis makes the interesting point that as the hybrid sits as a result of a break between the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', this breakage can be perceived to operate negatively. It can be perceived as a 'form of danger, loss and degeneration'.<sup>44</sup> In the idea that operated in Australia that the 'half-caste' was more intelligent and 'saveable' than the 'full-blood' Aborigine, we see Papastergiadis' point that sometimes hybridity can be valuable. Predominately though colonisation requires the 'the valorisation of the pure and the denigration of the hybrid'.<sup>45</sup>

Chan encourages us to think why it is that the idea of hybridisation, whether cultural or racial, is seen as somehow unique to the 'diasporic subject' or enacted in post-colonial societies.<sup>46</sup> The suggestion of the new hybridised identity and its recognition as a valid form of identity may obscure the negative experiences that have created it, as clearly experienced in the Stolen

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<sup>40</sup> N. Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', in *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory* (London: Continuum, 2005): 170.

<sup>41</sup> J. D'Arcy, 'The Same but Different': Aborigines, Eugenics, and the Harvard-Adelaide Universities' Anthropological Expedition to Cape Barren Island Reserve, January 1939', *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 12 (2007): 59–90.

<sup>42</sup> D. Chan, 'The Poetics of Cultural Theory: On Hybridity and the New Hierarchies', *Journal of Australia Studies: Special issue: Diaspora Negotiating Asian-Australia* 24, no. 65 (2000): 52–57, viewed 28 April 2012, <http://0-www.tandfonline.com.library.newcastle.edu.au/doi/abs/10.1080/14443050009387585>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>44</sup> Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', 166.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>46</sup> Chan, 'The Poetics of Cultural Theory', 55.



Generations lives discussed in earlier chapters.<sup>47</sup> Chan encourages the examination of what journey the hybrid has come through to come into existence. In this examination, we should be careful not to create another essentialised identity. For example, the creation of the Stolen Generations in the way the narrative has been constructed since the *Bringing Them Home Report* has created a new orthodoxy.<sup>48</sup>

Any new identity formation under colonisation requires both the coloniser and the colonised to create new identities. This process is carried out by selectively choosing from earlier forms of social consciousness.<sup>49</sup> For Stolen Generations, that consciousness is drawn from within their 'Aboriginal' lives and their 'non-Aboriginal' lives. In arguing for the recognition of this previously silenced voice, we run the risk of essentialising the category rather than recognising that the multi-faceted Australian identity can include Aboriginal people, Stolen Generations and all immigrants. The choice left if the idea of 'Stolen Generations' is not desirable, should not be the previously utilised essentialised categories.<sup>50</sup> The recognition of Stolen Generations is problematic in Australia's identity politics that seem to have required dualisms. Stolen Generations in this context are the 'intimate enemies' of both sides as they are both and neither, insider and outsider, of both essentialised groups.<sup>51</sup>

The notion of essentialism has a cultural aspect and seems to reflect culture as having a specific form rather than as a river with different currents and intensities. In some theory, describing culture it is argued that culture is a system that acts to determine the way individuals relate to their context, how they communicate or how behaviour is regulated for instance.<sup>52</sup> Stuart Hall, writing in the context of British post-colonial identities, offers an interesting perspective that may be useful for this discussion of the Stolen Generations identity. He says that the marginalised speak with a three-pronged strategy: 'first through an opposition to the given order; second, via recovery of broken histories and the invention of appropriate narrative forms; and third, through the definition of a position and a language from which speech will re-emerge'.<sup>53</sup>

We see each aspect of these three prongs illuminated in this thesis. The first prong Hall identifies, of creating an opposition to the given order, has been played out through the actions of many members of all communities in Australia that functioned to identify the stories of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>48</sup> Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', 166.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>50</sup> Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', 170.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>53</sup> Hall, discussed in Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', 174.

Stolen Generations people and the need for the *Inquiry* and the many other actions to draw attention to recognising the removal of children from their families as a historical event.

Prong two, according to Hall, is the recovery of broken histories and the invention of appropriate narrative forms. The *Inquiry* asked for the stories of the Stolen and since then the sharing and recovery of stories has been happening. This thesis has discussed the way that these are heard and that discussion is still in progress. The argument posited from this thesis is that the narrative form should not be determined from outside the Stolen Generations populations themselves. This narrative form should be a personal choice and not restricted to being framed in the existence of a pain story. As Chan said, all journeys to cultural hybridisation should be heard not just assumed to be negative.<sup>54</sup>

In discussing the *Bringing Them Home Collection* in the National Library, Mellor said: ‘One of our tasks in the project has been to facilitate this process of people reconstructing and interpreting their own past through their own agency, and with their own authority, linking it with their present life situation’.<sup>55</sup> It is to the past and memory that we must turn, Mellor argues, to construct an understanding of both the past but to move on to an illumination of the present and future. ‘Anticipation, hope, desire, vision—all these states of projection into the future are impossible to experience without memory and a sense of the past’.<sup>56</sup>

The third strategy identified by Hall is that ‘through the definition of a position and a language from which speech will re-emerge’.<sup>57</sup> This thesis has presented an extensive body of material that shows that Stolen Generations and their supporters have been very comprehensively attempting to define and describe their position and a language to use to understand the disparate and yet similar lived cultures, experiences and perspectives of the Stolen Generations. Mellor, once again in her discussion of the National Library’s work, says that their project brought a realisation that the contributions of the people who were not Indigenous family members to the collection were enabled as, and hence created a collective memory that operated in a detached form, creating a set of observations of events. The other contributing part of the collection was from those Indigenous family members who created an autobiographical and intimate part of the collection. Working together she notes: ‘it is very clear that although this history is shared, it is also divergent’.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Chan, ‘The Poetics of Cultural Theory’.

<sup>55</sup> Mellor, ‘Bringing Them Home’, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Hall, discussed in Papastergiadis, ‘Restless Hybrids’, 174.

<sup>58</sup> Mellor, ‘Bringing Them Home’, 7–10.

Chan tells us that mass consumer based societies now prefer sanitised and uncomplicated products. Differences are minimalised and the consumer assumes familiarity in knowledge and meanings.<sup>59</sup> Essentialism assists this sanitisation but it remains unsatisfactory to only allow the Stolen Generations to be the culturally hybrid defined within the construction of pain. Mellor gave a very good example of the limitation of this definition that was evident in those Stolen Generations who had been in dormitories. These removed children, she argued, would continue for the rest of their lives to construct their central identity within their association to both the Home and the other children who were there with them.<sup>60</sup>

Smith and Watson ask how this voice operates in spite of the constraints of Western models of identity or indeed the essentialisms discussed earlier here.<sup>61</sup> How does nationalism have a place in this debate and do the Stolen Generations have access to 'blackness' or Aboriginality as identity positions? Can the 'Stolen' or hybrid voice be known as a 'black' voice and can it use the theory developed by those who claim their country as part of the legitimisation of their voice? Can it perform Aboriginality as described by Moreton-Robinson? Like Chan, 'I'm not so naïve as to imagine that all of us can freely "play" with identity, or that inequities no longer exist, or that historical legacies no longer continue to inhabit and haunt the everyday praxis'.<sup>62</sup> But given that all cultures are hybrid then yes Stolen Generations can perform Aboriginality. They can also choose to perform other identity acts as well.

How can Stolen Generations perform Aboriginality? In part, this is as Moreton-Robinson describes: the performance of Aboriginality includes connecting with family and place. What Moreton-Robinson does not mention is that the performance of cultural connectivity is a performance of essentialism requiring some facts to be talked in and others to be talked out. When the cultural identification is verbally presented in the manner, for instance, as presented earlier in Karen Martin's statement that her father is a Noonuccal man and her Mother is a Bidjara woman, and that she herself is therefore 'a Noonuccal woman with ancestral ties to Bidjara land', we see no mention of where Martin actually lives.<sup>63</sup> Has she ever lived on Noonuccal country or has dispossession meant she has not been able to live on traditional country? The lives of all Aboriginal people have also been influenced by economic realities and the need to work and have resulted in Aboriginal people moving off traditional lands to chase employment. The outcome of living off traditional homeplaces and needing to live in a relationship with their new homeplace has meant a particular shaping of the cultural

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<sup>59</sup> Chan, 'The Poetics of Cultural Theory', 53.

<sup>60</sup> Mellor, 'Bringing Them Home', 8.

<sup>61</sup> Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Chan, 'The Poetics of Cultural Theory', 56.

<sup>63</sup> Martin, 'Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing'.

connections. This is especially true where the decision to move off traditional homeplaces occurred in the generations beforehand.

What is important is the recognition that any cultural connections are difficult where there have been breakages but that everyone talks in some history and talks out other parts. Can you perform Aboriginality when you cannot go any further than saying you have no other information than your name and even that might not be your birth name? In my case, I had my date of birth and the place I was born. Can that create an unchallengeable claim to Aboriginality? The answer to this is no. It is 'no' though because Aboriginality is always contestable. Even Martin's introduction, as has been shown here, can be contestable under the essentialist paradigm.

It is undeniable that there continues to be a need to discuss Aboriginality more widely and to advocate for Aboriginal people through utilising what could be seen as essentialising talk. This will leave out Stolen Generations to some extent because of the complete or partial destruction of their Kanyini or embeddedness. As mentioned, Uncle Bob Randall argues that cultural embeddedness can be at least in part recoverable. The awareness must be there within Aboriginal communities though not to assume cultural solidarity within the Aboriginal community: that somehow bloodlines determine or infer cultural agreement. As nations are imagined categories so too is *the* Aboriginal community. As Anderson says about nations, in the minds of the members exists an image of how they commune together even though most members of nations will never know or meet most of the rest of their fellow members.<sup>64</sup> So too this is true of both the Aboriginal community of Australia as well the Stolen Generations. Both were constructed by essentialising binaries and discourses bound up in colonisation acting upon sexuality, gender, and race among other things.<sup>65</sup> As Uncle Bob Randall says, it is a matter of trusting Aboriginal, including Stolen Generations, people to say what will work and be allowed to create their new vision. The commonalities between Aboriginal peoples, Stolen Generations, and in fact all Australians, is the commonality of being a part of the nation of Australia and so the creation of a new vision is a challenge shared by all. Climbing a ladder towards the equality of all Australians will only work if the ladder is leading to a safe place and not leading Stolen Generations or Aborigines closer to further oppression.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991): 6.

<sup>65</sup> Chan, 'The Poetics of Cultural Theory', 56.

<sup>66</sup> Fredericks and Croft, 'Finding a Space', 9.

## Conclusion

The generation of an identity position for Stolen Generations remains mired in controversy both because of the actions that have led to the creation of people who fall into this category and also due to the extreme politicisation of Aboriginal identity in the Australian identity context. Using Hall's three-pronged strategy to examine Stolen Generations' identity has proven useful to assist in identifying that the voices of the Stolen Generations themselves contradict the given order of Australian identity constructions. This thesis has assisted in the 'recovery of broken histories', but more importantly a comprehensive discussion of appropriate narrative forms including appropriate language and hence identity constructions have occurred within the thesis.<sup>67</sup>

It has been argued here that the loss of cultural embeddedness as well as lives influenced by bodily and cultural dysphoria create a unique challenge for Stolen Generations. Most importantly, what is posited here is that colonisation-influenced essentialisms should be challenged for all groups in society and not just Stolen Generations, but that the politicisation of Aboriginality and consequent challenge of redefinition allows Stolen Generations individuals to reclaim Aboriginality if they so choose.

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<sup>67</sup> Hall, discussed in Papastergiadis, 'Restless Hybrids', 174.

## CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

The journey to this thesis began a long time ago and it is not my journey alone. It was born within those like me who were targeted for intervention through biological imperatives. Most crucially though, it is constructed as the stories of ourselves: of myself as part of the Stolen Generations. Its conclusions are my own but come from *listening with heart*, from constructing understandings together with other Stolen Generations women and from breathing and sharing histories inclusive of pain and suffering, loss and torment but more crucially strength, resilience and astounding levels of humility.

Every argument within this body of work is based upon a belief that Aboriginal identities and hence the associated Stolen Generations identities have always been politicised in Australia. They have been managed via legislation, debated in the public sphere and contested at every turn of Australia's history. As has been set out here, the politicisation has included debates about the value of Aboriginal culture, the value of the genetic heritage of both Aboriginal people and also the biologically mixed children who were targeted for removals. Meeting the challenge of the feminist autobiographical manifesto we have introduced and explored a different world experiencing the 'specific confluences of social, psychological, economic, and political forces of oppression' played out in the lives of Stolen Generations women.<sup>1</sup> We have attempted, as identified in Hall's strategy, to oppose the given order by speaking of broken histories within an appropriate narrative structure and using co-constructed meanings together found a way to describe this previously unknown identity position.

Gaita said that 'the genocide against the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders was against humanity perpetrated on the body of those people'.<sup>2</sup> This story though it is argued is also a story of the mind or psyche of those removed children and the interventions carried against both body and mind. An awareness of both aspects is crucial to the theory developed here as is the embodied voice of the Stolen Generations and how it is to be heard. At the core of this thesis, is that the construction of this voice must be left to Stolen Generations themselves to decide.

This work was entitled *Women and The Construction of Re-membering: Identity Formation In the Stolen Generations* to capture the essence of this thesis and that is to answer the question what possibilities for identity are available to Stolen Generations women. Crucial to the answer to this question has been examining the question of cultural embeddedness and the way that

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 436.

<sup>2</sup> Gaita, 'Turnings of Attention', 44.

bodily and cultural dysphoria has impacted upon this. It has been argued here that body and cultural dysphoria has resulted in in varying degrees for all 'removed' individuals.

It is the core contention posited that if Stolen Generations people attempt to reclaim themselves from their physical and mental removal, they carry out a political act. Re-joining the Aboriginal community may not be a choice available to all Stolen Generations now restricted by their history, dysphoria or perhaps level of dislocation. The individuals now known as Stolen Generations must be allowed, as indeed all Australians must be allowed, to live with a plurality of voice and cultures as they determine.

This work has chosen to focus on women's experience more specifically and thanks to the ingenious writings of Huggins, Moreton-Robinson, Behrendt and other Aboriginal women in the Australian context, the particulars of the worlds inhabited by Stolen Generations' women have been able to documented and elucidated to a comprehensive level. It is undeniable that there continues to be a need to discuss Aboriginality more widely and to advocate for Aboriginal people through utilising what could be seen as essentialising talk. This conversation may well leave out Stolen Generations' women but their personal choice of identity and lived culture in the wake of the tide of assimilation-inspired acts including the misrepresentation of their voice, must be honoured and supported by both Aboriginal people and other Australians.

It has been argued consistently here that the current understandings of both Aboriginal people and Stolen Generations were constructed by essentialising binaries and discourses bound up in colonisation acting upon sexuality, gender, and race among other things.<sup>3</sup> As Uncle Bob Randall says, it is a matter now of trusting Aboriginal, including Stolen Generations, people to say what will work and be allowed to create their new vision. The commonalities between Aboriginal peoples, Stolen Generations, and in fact all Australians is the commonality of being a part of the nation of Australia and so the creation of a new vision is a challenge shared by all. Climbing a ladder towards the equality of all Australians will only work if the ladder is leading to a safe place and not leading Stolen Generations or Aborigines closer to further oppression.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chan, 'The Poetics of Cultural Theory', 56.

<sup>4</sup> Fredericks and Croft, 'Finding a Space', 9.

## Appendix 1

### **Abstract: ‘Telling it how it was’: For what?**

I am authoring a PhD on identity constructions of women removed from their families of origin due at least in part to their biological Aboriginality. Part of my data has been collected from the *Bringing Them Home Collection* in the National Library. This collection was started as a recommendation from *The Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from Their Families* to collect the stories of those who were involved in any way with the removal of Indigenous Australian children. I have accessed the collection in print form. The collection was originally in verbal form. Each interview has undergone a censoring process before and after I view it that I did not know about either as a researcher or as a contributor to the collection. I want to explore the methodology issues that process has created for my project. I think these include the question of protection of the ‘accused’ weighed against the purpose of the collection.

### **Introduction**

My name is Stephanie Gilbert. I am employed as a lecturer at the Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle. I have qualifications in social work, education, women’s studies and am currently completing a PhD in history. Now while those descriptors are demarcations that our education system uses, my studies have really always focused on those people, particularly females, who were taken from their families on the basis of their Aboriginal biological heritage. I initially explored this issue when I was an honours student in social work looking through that historical social work lens at the QLD parliamentary legislation and debates. I then explored it further in my masters through a gendered lens and now I’m back using a historical lens.

What I present in this paper is a case study exploring contributing to and then utilising the National Library’s *Bringing Them Home Oral History (BTH) collection* in print form. I want to particularly focus on a couple of areas that I have been forced to contemplate during my experiences with this collection and its managers, the National Library of Australia (NLA). I want to explore the contact that is had with contributors after the donation of an oral history and the ongoing care of that contribution and in my particular example, the process of vetting the material for privacy concerns. Another area I want to discuss here is indigenising the archival or collection processes and considering how Indigenous research methodologies and practices



influence use of the archives and collections at the time of collection, its ongoing storage/keeping and the management of access.

## **Background**

Initially, my experience of the removal of Aboriginal children was of a personal nature. As a child I was removed from the care of my biological parents, was adopted and then returned later to the care of the state children's authority as a teenager and had experiences of group homes and foster care. I contributed at least part of that story to the *BTHOHC* in the aftermath of the *National Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (1995–1997).

The *BTH Collection* came about as a recommendation from that *Inquiry*. More particularly Recommendation 1 that says:

That the Council of Australian Governments ensure the adequate funding of appropriate Indigenous agencies to record, preserve and administer access to the testimonies of Indigenous people affected by the forcible removal policies who wish to provide their histories in audio, audio-visual or written form.

The NLA says:

The project arises from the Commonwealth Government response to the recommendations of *Bringing Them Home*, the report of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. The aim of the project was to record the diverse experiences of people directly affected by Indigenous child separation and to shed light on the policy and legislative frameworks that supported the separations. Interviews were conducted with families and children who experienced separation, as well as with those who cared for them, worked in institutions, and were involved with administration, policy and implementation in a professional capacity.<sup>1</sup>

I think that central to this exploration of ideas in this paper is to say that I do have an emotional connection to the material; indeed, a very strong one. My involvement started with my own life story but in the early 1990s, as a result of my studies, I published work on the gendered removal

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<sup>1</sup> National Library of Australia, accessed 15 October 2009  
[http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/833081?lookfor=my\\_parent\\_id:%22%28AuCNL%29833081%22&offset=1&max=1](http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/833081?lookfor=my_parent_id:%22%28AuCNL%29833081%22&offset=1&max=1).

on Aboriginal people. That piece of work drew the attention of the HREOC and they asked me to be an expert witness to the *National Inquiry*. I provided them with my honours work that used essentially the same structure of analysis for listing legislation and legislative change as in used in the *Bringing Them Home Report*.

Add to this that I personally know around 30 or more of the other interviewees and interviewers in this collection I think I am well placed to give a commentary about access and use of this archive. To this date, I have read approximately 110 interviews working to the parameters of my project.

I think an interesting and relevant question to this discussion is why Stolen Generations people spoke to the *National Inquiry* in the first place and then contributed their story to this collection. My understanding from my extensive involvement and speaking to many of the players involved in the struggle to have the *Inquiry* is that there were a couple of purposes. They include stopping the removals, allowing those who had suffered from the removals to heal and perhaps the most important to gain a recognition by the wider Australian public that the deliberate removal of Indigenous children from their families had happened. In the aftermath of the *Bringing Them Home Report* in 1997 being handed to the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard we still saw a national debate whether these removals had happened or not, whether they were justified and a hijacking of the debate about whether or not this was genocide and whether people were just after monetary compensation. The *BTHOHC* was clearly the development of a body of ‘evidence’: a community of voices.

### **Accessing the *Bringing Them Home Collection* at the National Library, Canberra**

As I have mentioned, I accessed this collection for the explicit purpose of gathering material to be part of my PhD. My thesis explores the question why would somebody identify as an Aboriginal person when some might argue they should not or might choose not too? The three main collection sources for me have been the *BTH collection*, private interviews with women and published autobiographies or biographies.

My first visit to the collection early in 2008 was with the purpose of having a look at the *BTH collection* and identifying how much there was to look at and how to do that. I also accessed on that visit other autobiographical and other texts that I had not seen before. I talked with a woman who was working on the collection at that point in time. In conversations on that first visit or the next later in that year I was told that someone needed to read the records I was going to read before me and check them after I read them. They explained that the records were

having some information that identified other people removed from them. I was lead to believe that would include identifying information about people accused of perpetrating abuse. The record would also be checked after I read it. I assume this was to check if I tampered with the record. I'm not sure of what form they assumed that tampering would take. This process of editing and the limitation of records I could order made my time accessing the collection on my second visit extremely frustrating and I went home not having achieved what I thought I could have.

As I have I said, I contributed some of my own personal story to the *BTHOHC* subtitled 'Building a Community of Voices'. When volunteering for that process I was told to tell them whatever I wanted to. They would transcribe what I told them and I would get a copy to check. I could tell them what sort of access I would like people to have to the interview. The types of access outlined included: no restrictions, read only, no photocopying or no access for a period or at all. As shown by the letter dated 5 October, 2001 I received a transcript and copy of my interview *to assist in the correction process* and to keep for my own records. This correction would be restricted to typographical errors and errors of transcription or fact. To quote that letter further it says:

*We believe that it is important to preserve as fully as possible:*

*The conversational style which characterises oral history interviews;*

*Close continuity between the interview tapes and the transcript.*

Copyright in the transcript was assigned to me. I could use it for any purpose, including publication. Copyright of the audio record remained with the National Library.

That letter in 2001 was the last communication I had with the Library until visiting in 2008 for my research. As you might imagine, it was a surprise then to discover this process of vetting going on. Add to this that earlier in 2009 while planning my final trip to Canberra and the NLA I noticed an advertisement in the *Koori Mail* that left me uneasy. That advertisement was looking for someone to work at putting the whole *BTH collection* online. I wondered what was to be put online and would the NLA contact the individuals involved and give them a choice about this new form of access that had not been part of the initial negotiations with interviewees.

On my preliminary visits when I read the interviews, I was unable to tell in any of the 40 plus records I read which had been edited and which had not. My experience when accessing other records from state governments, for instance Freedom of Information, I have been able to tell clearly what was censored because it remained as blackened blocks in the record.

My final visit to the Library occurred shortly before the 2009 Joint Conference of Archivists in Australia and the wider Pacific area. In the lead up to that visit, I contacted the Library to negotiate access to the 77 records I still wanted to read. I identified the need to do this because in addition to the issue of editing, there had been the limitation of how many records I could order up at any one time. As I stated earlier, the records had been slow to appear presumably because they were only available in the time that someone was there to check them. I was forced to work within someone else's schedule. I initially also did not realise I could order the records before I left home for the first set to be sitting ready for me when I arrived. That however would still have been slowed by the fact they would not release them off my request list until the second edit had been done.

After the negotiation with the Library this time they very helpfully got the records ready with the advance notice I had given them (one month). I recognise the Library's constraints and recognise my time availability was different to theirs. The librarian mentioned to me that, as they were not sure how much the editing processes had been completed, they had had to start again at the beginning of the collection and begin checking them again. Again, I mused what were they checking them for?

The National Library make two comments on their website that I think probably structure their answer to this question. In their Reader Services Policy<sup>2</sup> on their access restrictions they say:

All responses to enquiries must be handled in accordance with:

- the *Copyright Act, 1968*
- the *Archives Act, 1983*
- the *Privacy Act, 1988*
- licence agreements covering the subscription electronic resources
- donor defined access provisions specified for non-published materials
- collection management policy for fragile materials.

I think perhaps the Privacy Act is the crucial one here for our discussion. The other statement that should inform our discussion is about publishing personal information under the NLA's Privacy Statement:

We will only publish personal information on this site if it has been collected for this purpose with your knowledge or if you have consented to the disclosure. When

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<sup>2</sup> National Library of Australia, *Information and Reader Services Policy*, accessed 21 September 2009, <http://www.nla.gov.au/policy/readerservices.html>.

giving such consent you should be aware that information published on this site is accessible to millions of users from all over the world, that it will be indexed by search engines and that it may be copied and used by any web user. This means that, once the information is published on this site, we will have no control over its subsequent use and disclosure.<sup>3</sup>

Now, I should specify here that this particular statement is again about the reader or user of the NLA's website: not about somebody named in an oral history of course until you put that record on the website.

I requested formally the NLA explain the role of the *Privacy Act 1988* (and its amendments) with the information collected in the BTH collection.<sup>4</sup> To this date, I have had no formal response. So I have attempted to answer it in two ways. The first is by dipping into the Privacy Act 1988 itself very briefly. Having little or no experience of the Act in my reading I was drawn to what seems the Acts' central idea and that is the collection of personal information ought to be only from the actual individuals themselves, or the individual should be informed.

The Privacy Principles outlined in the Act say that these sorts of information should not be kept except where:

- the individual has consented; or
- the collection is required by law; or
- the collection is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the life or health of any individual, where the individual whom the information concerns:
- is physically or legally incapable of giving consent to the collection; or
- physically cannot communicate consent to the collection.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, if an oral record is collected that mentions another person, it could contravene the *Privacy Act 1998*. Maybe this means depending on how strict a reading we make of this, we could potentially collect nothing that appears to be hearsay.

The second source for an answer to the collections procedures and practices I was encountering was provided from the NLA staff more informally when I asked the librarian in charge of the

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<sup>3</sup> National Library of Australia, *Privacy Statement*, accessed 21 September 2009, <http://www.nla.gov.au/privacy.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Question asked of the NLA collections staff on 21 September, 2009: 'I have been accessing the *Bringing Them Home Collection* and I had a question about how the Privacy Act impacts on the oral testimony and people accessing them. Does the collection have to meet particular specific requirements?'

<sup>5</sup> Australasian Legal Information Institute, *Schedule 3—National Privacy Principles*, accessed 21 September 2009, [http://austlii.edu.au/privacy/Privacy\\_Act\\_1988/index-Schedule-3.html](http://austlii.edu.au/privacy/Privacy_Act_1988/index-Schedule-3.html).

Oral History section to explain it to me. She told me all the records were being edited due to the *Privacy Act 1998* for instances where a person other than the interviewee was accused of a crime such as child abuse. The edit would appear in the text as [name deleted]. It is unfortunate that the initial collection phase did not inform people that their stories would have their abusers' names deleted. It is a difficult to hear that these stories, sometimes utterly tragic and violent, perhaps being told for the first time ever, are to be vetted to protect the so-called accused. Present in every file I read was a story of censorship and thus control: the censorship of those little girls' memories and thoughts, and their bodies. Told how to dress, how to talk, and even more cruelly that no one wanted them and now we censor them again. Where was the protection for that little child? The women's stories I read are about women who are now mostly over 50 years old. At what point, after how many years, can we let their story stand?

At the point I went for my final collection the NLA had just employed the new worker to fill that advertisement I earlier mentioned. I am told that her job includes recontacting people to negotiate the uploading of testimonies to the web. She will also look at collecting updates on people's lives now it is 10 years on after the initial collection phase. They were collecting information over the years on who had passed away and similar information and had found it very difficult to find many people when requests came in for the public use of restricted material. All of the totally open records would be looked at for uploading. I was thankfully to hear this negotiation would occur and I indicated that I would assist if possible. The person involved expressed what appeared to be a genuine care and desire to get this process right.

### **Indigenising Archival Practices**

As I intimated at the beginning of this paper, I think there are some questions here that are about research projects constructed from within Indigenous research methodologies accessing archival material. Many Indigenous research methodologies are very concerned with the generation of meaning. That research must be constructed within language and definition and description, constructed, understood and lived by the particular Indigenous group involved. Bishop (2005) says researchers 'did not have the power to make sense of the events or experiences alone'. He advocates a shift to a position Māori researchers call *Kaupapa Māori*:

Researchers in *Kaupapa Māori* contexts are repositioned in such a way that they no longer need to seek to *give voice to others*, to *empower* others, to *emancipate* others, or to refer to others as *subjugated voices*. Instead, they are able to listen to and participate with those traditionally 'othered' as constructors of meanings of their own experiences and agents of knowledge. ...The joint development of new storylines is a

collaborative effort. The researcher and the researched together rewrite the constitutive metaphors of the relationship.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, I am arguing that the construction of what, how and why information from or about Indigenous Australians is collected should have the input of those very people. And that this involvement is defined and actioned at its widest interpretation. The meanings and conceptualisation of any project could do with input from Indigenous Australians. The NLA for instance created an installation about Afghani camel drivers. The story is intertwined with Aboriginal Australians as was represented to some extent in the installation. That being said, so is the development of ballet in Australia. So we could address for instance what the Aboriginal people of the deserts said about these strange people and animals entering their living spaces. When I imagined the caravans winding their way through the deserts, I thought about setting off on those journeys from Adelaide heading north rather than looking to the south and seeing these camel caravans coming towards me. This land is Aboriginal land even now. Australia is an Aboriginal story but most often it is the forgotten story or perspective.

Another part to the Indigenous researcher's concern is rights and protocols around accessing and using information. This question is a very difficult one and the aspect I will briefly focus on is how access is managed and who decides this. Part of this question is about who gets to know what material. This is a very important issue in Aboriginal communities and is constructed within terms of gender, age, status and other considerations. It is a very different idea to that of getting a readers card and checking out what you want to look in a library or archive. The basis to access in this situation is almost as simple as if you can find it, you can see it. There is no such premise in many Aboriginal cultures. At times there is not even a right or ability to ask a question, let alone get an answer.

So what does that mean for a collection? Well, first, the individuals themselves have to be told the limitations like the Privacy Act that will shape the way their contribution is held and used. They have to have a choice then how to construct their contribution. At a management level though at the very least the holding organisation must get advice and discuss how to collect and what to collect and how from Aboriginal intellectuals and concerned others. I note that the BTH process used Aboriginal interviewers. How were the interviewees supported in this collection process? What processes were put into place to support the good mental health of these interviewees and interviewers? I'm not sure the answer to these questions and while I believe these considerations were probably done with the BTH they must be done for every project.

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<sup>6</sup> Bishop, 'Freeing Ourselves from Neocolonial Domination in Research', 123.

As a researcher, I need to ask whether I should access particular information. Should I look at particular items and should I be told particular things? For example, there are a couple of books that as a woman I have not and will not ever read. Partly that is because the informants without the knowledge that it was to be published in a book and women should not have that information involved. There was a belief the information was given to a person of the right status for their sole use. I enact these cultural sensibilities at every turn of the research process. At times almost unconsciously and all the time bow to others to teach me better and set me straight when I get it wrong. Unfortunately, if these sensibilities are unknown to the keepers, they cannot be enacted for the protection of the material and people themselves.

In a previous conference paper, I discussed accessing archives regarding particular individuals and attempting to decide at what point a researcher should interact with the family/s connected to these archives. My particular case in point at that time was Pearl Gibbs who I went to write a book chapter about<sup>7</sup>. That chapter was based on Ms Gibbs' papers donated by her family to the Mitchell Library of NSW. I believe that her family had an understanding of what and how the papers would be used and that was agreeable to the family to that level. I would argue though that beyond this, negotiations should be held with the family concerned. This is the same argument I would have with the BTH collection. The contributors have to be clear about all of these matters from the start and then kept in the loop afterwards as well. That is self-determination and embedding agency for their lives back with them.

For me, I was happy to note that the BTH stipulates that copyright of the written transcript remains with the contributor. I am not sure what the legal rights of them keeping copyright of the audio means and I hope it does not mean they have copyrighted my voice or the way I construct sentences or the story given. That said, putting the record online raises new questions for me. What I believe is important is though is that these stories are recorded. Access and hearing them is a process to be worked at and negotiated. In the case of Pearl Gibbs, I believe the family gave permission for access so that someone would write about her immense activism and contribution to the Aboriginal political movement and indeed to the Australian nation. That is the potential for all these stories.

If we consider then, as researchers and information collectors, how to go about generating meaning together it means that as a researcher, I should think about how I access and use information and how is it I honour the words my informants give me. The contributors to the BTH collection have become informants to my PhD. project. How do I generate meaning together with them? How do I respect that they own their story and I need to negotiate my

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<sup>7</sup> “‘Never forgotten’: Pearl Gibbs (Gambanyi)”, in *Uncommon Ground: White Women in Aboriginal History*, A. Cole, V. Haskins and F. Paisley (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005): 105–126.



access to it? I think part of the answer to this is to set up my project properly answering my aforementioned questions and entrenching Indigenous knowledge, processes and protocols. And that the BTH collection does the same. So we know for instance that the individuals giving the story were not doing it to instigate criminal proceedings against people. They were all asked the question what do you think about the removal of Aboriginal children. Everyone answered that the removals should stop and that nobody deserves to lose their family; let alone for all of their lives to feel like nobodies and nothing, often hating who they are and the void they live in. Their words make my project and help me illuminate and explore the feelings, hunches and loss I have felt all my life. They help me write my PhD project thus generating meaning together.

## **Conclusion**

I see what I am doing here is asking about ethics or about protocols and about respect. It is about honouring our communities of origin and developing a shared body of information about us. Not managers or researchers or librarians should decide how we do it alone. For me, in my field of work, this is core business at the heart of our research methodologies. I have shared here my research journey interacting with this stunning collection. It is a collection about Australia and its people. It and others that seek to reflect all aspects of Australia must honour the Indigenous people of this nation. Writing us into the middle rather than leaving us at the periphery.

## **Appendix 2: Information and Consent Form**

### **Women and the Construction of Re-Membering Identity Formation Project**

Dear (Name),

Thank you for responding to the invitation for this project being conducted by Stephanie Gilbert and supervised by Dr Josephine May and Dr Ann Taylor, from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at The University of Newcastle.

#### *Why am I doing this research?*

This project will look at the lives of up to 10 women who were removed from their Aboriginal biological family. This is to look at a group of women's stories as they reflect on the spirit of the journey they have taken since their removal from their families. I want to talk to women about their own experiences, memories and impressions. I am doing this project because of my own journey to answer the question: 'Why did I choose to identify as Aboriginal when some might argue that I could have chosen not to?' This project looks at these journeys even when they might not end in identification as an Aboriginal person.

#### *Who can participate in the research?*

I am seeking women to participate in this research who are of Aboriginal biological descent. The women may identify as Aboriginal or may not. I would prefer these women to be over 30 and under 60 years of age. This is to talk to a group of women like myself, who may have gone unnoticed by the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from Their Families. I want to talk to those women who may have been in foster care, adopted or were in other children's homes. Participants can choose to be anonymous or not.

#### *What would you be asked to do?*

If you agree to participate you will be asked to:

- Talk about your past, your memories of growing up and learning of your Aboriginal heritage
- Give some basic descriptive data about yourselves like general geographic area of childhood
- Have an individual interview either recorded with audio equipment which will then be transcribed or with the researcher taking notes
- Be interviewed in your own home, or at an agreed location for an agreed period (approximately 2 hours)
- Maybe attend and participate in a follow-up recorded interview or a follow-up telephone interview (approximately 2 hours).

#### *What are the risks and benefits of participating?*

This project may entail some loss of privacy because you will be sharing your story with the researchers and future readers of the thesis and journal articles. However, you will only be

identified by name in the research report if you choose to be so. If you prefer you may choose or be given an alternative name to disguise your identity. For some people, recounting past experiences may lead to emotional distress. If this occurs you will not need to continue if you do not wish to and I can talk to you about support available if you wish.

The benefits of taking part in this project include the opportunity to have your story recorded, valued and included in a large research project. Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Only those people who give their consent can be included.

*How will your privacy be protected?*

Anyone who participates in this research project will be given the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews and request changes or omissions without explanation. At the conclusion of this research you may choose to have the audio record and transcripts from this project destroyed, lodged in the Archives of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) for access by others, or lodged with any identifying remarks, or labels removed. A copy of your transcript may be kept by me but will only be used if you give your permission.

The audio record and transcripts containing your interviews will be kept by me until the thesis is fully completed but will be looked after properly so that everything remains confidential. You have the option, at any time, to withdraw your participation and your material, thus also protecting your privacy. Your confidentiality will be respected in all cases except if you give information regarding specific crimes such as crimes against children, which by law must be reported to authorities.

There may be a chance a transcriber will be employed to transcribe the audio record into text but any such transcriber will also sign a confidentiality agreement before employment. This comprehensive confidentiality agreement is available if you would like to look at it at any stage.

This research method (BNIM) encourages the use of an interpretative panel. If a panel is used to help in the analysis of any interview all identifying information will be withheld from them and all members of the panel will sign a confidentiality agreement.

I may withdraw a participant if it is considered in the participant's best interest or it is appropriate to do so for another reason. If this happens I will explain why and advise you about any follow-up procedures or alternative arrangements as appropriate.

*What do you need to do to participate?*

Please read this letter and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have any questions at all, please contact me. Once all your queries have been satisfied, and you decide to participate, please complete the consent form and return it in the envelope provided. I will then contact you to arrange a convenient time for you to be interviewed.

Thank you for reading this Information Statement and for considering participating in this project. This project is very special to us and we hope we will be able to reflect the journeys of the women involved in the project in a warm and compassionate way.<sup>8</sup>

Stephanie Gilbert  
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[Josephine.May@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Josephine.May@newcastle.edu.au)

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<sup>8</sup> Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the: Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Telephone (02) 4921 6333, Email: [Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au).

**Consent Form for the Research Project Women and the Construction of Re-Membering Identity Formation**

I have been asked to participate in the research project being conducted by Stephanie Gilbert, Dr Josephine May and Dr Ann Taylor from the University of Newcastle.

I understand that the information obtained through interviews will be used in the research project described in the Information Statement.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have kept.

I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason.

I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to be interviewed about my personal and family history.

I understand that my permission will be sought should any material provided by me be published or reproduced in any publication other than those outlined in the Information Statement.

I, ..... (INSERT YOUR NAME) agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.

Please tick one of the following:

EITHER

I agree to being identified as a participant in this research project ☐

OR

I wish to be identified using an alternative name. ☐

OR

I agree that my interview material may be quoted in publications arising out of this project but without any identifying information. ☐

Please continue over ⇒

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Agreed and accepted \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the:

Human Research Ethics Officer,  
Research Office,  
The University of Newcastle  
University Drive, Callaghan, NSW 2308,  
Telephone (02) 49216333  
Email: [Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au)

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**Appendix 3: Interviews read from the *Bringing Them Home* Collection**

<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Transcript Number</b>	<b>Name</b>
1	5000/7	Kinnear, Audrey
2	5000/12	Whetton, Joan Alice
3	5000/17	Adams, Alice
4	5000/22	Gephart, Miriam
5	5000/25	Quayle, Cleone
6	5000/36	Walker, Wilma
7	5000/37	Mills, Yvonne
8	5000/39	Baldwin, Helen
9	5000/43	Woodrow, Marjorie
10	5000/45	Johnston, Emma
11	5000/48	Everaardt, Penny
12	5000/52	Gordon, Sue
13	5000/60	Eaton, Peg
14	5000/63	Anderson, Rosemary
15	5000/64	Hill, Sandra
16	5000/67	Nicholson, Carmel
17	5000/77	McLennon, Lesley
18	5000/78	Atkins, Amy
19	5000/79	Hegarty, Ruth
20	5000/83	Dixon, Margaret & Colleen
21	5000/86	Parsons, Mary
22	5000/91	Knight, Maude (Gweneth)
23	5000/94	Edwards, Oomera (Coral)
24	5000/96	Evans, Hilda
25	5000/99	Croft, Pamela Joy,
26	5000/100	Weir, Barbara
27	5000/102	Van De Berg, Marjorie
28	5000/103	Collard, Glenys Dale
29	5000/104	Kartinyeri, Doreen
30	5000/110	Meyer, Margaret Helen
31	5000/111	Randall, Robert (Bob)
32	5000/117	James, Irene
33	5000/118	McInerney, Kunyi June-Anne
34	5000/121	Watson, Junmitja (Myra)
35	5000/123	Lynam, Kathleen Faye
36	5000/127	Scobie, Angelina
37	5000/129	Crombie, Eileen (Unkari)
38	5000/131	Fatt, Lillian
39	5000/134	Jacques, Christine Valma
40	5000/135	Coomber, Joy Lee
41	5000/139	Costello, Flo
42	5000/141	Wyles, Venus
43	5000/144	Archibald, VIC
44	5000/145	Findlay, Deborah Leeann
45	5000/146	Pole, Jane
46	5000/147	Robertson, Ethel
47	5000/148	Sibley, Jean
48	5000/152	Wright, Eunice

49	5000/153	Hill-Wall, Patricia Faye
50	5000/154	Butt, Laurette (Laure)
51	5000/157	Brown, Dawn
52	5000/158	Ozies, Annie May
53	5000/162	Frail, Jackie
54	5000/163	Marshall, Nita
55	5000/171	Linow, Valerie
56	5000/173	Trapman, Jacqueline
57	5000/174	Meehan, Donna
58	5000/175	Stubbs, Judith
59	5000/177	Doney, Daphne
60	5000/180	Bruce, Millie Alta
61	5000/200	Graham, Kathleen Mary
62	5000/201	Bowen, Ella
63	5000/205	Hinchcliffe, Elizabeth May
64	5000/210	Couthard, Clara
65	5000/214	McGee-Sippel, Lorraine
66	5000/216	Brown, Bobby and Colleena
67	5000/217	Cox, Mary
68	5000/219	Suey, Dale
69	5000/223	Kartinyeri, Doris
70	5000226	Wilson, Julie
71	5000/238	Boxer, Reda
72	5000/241	Mosely, Eileen
73	5000/242	Ronbert, Anne
74	5000/244	King, Mary
75	5000/246	Kendall, Carol
76	5000/248	Kinchela, Sharon, Kinchela, Debbie, Matthews, Rosie
77	5000/251	Neary, Sylvia
78	5000/253	Tur, Mona (Ngitji Ngitji)
79	5000/261	Wanganeen, Rosemary
80	5000/262	Gale, Avis
81	5000/264	Donovan, Kathy
82	5000/265	Willoway, Edith
83	5000/279	Chandler, Debra
84	5000/280	Mullins, Annie
85	5000/282	Edwards, Cynthia
86	5000/283	Honeychurch, Lynette
87	5000/286	Kemp-Howard, Nancy
88	5000/290	Wenberg, Rita May
89	5000/292	Furber, Margaret
90	5000/294	McWilliams, Ivy
91	5000/300	Lees, Patricia
92	5000/303	Shadford, Mary
93	5000/304	Ntjalka-Williams, Elna
94	5000/306	McLennan, Irene
95	5000/312	Ah Chee, Marita
96	5000/317	Hood, Angela Louise
97	5000/320	Gerrard, Shaan
98	5000/321	Robinson, Margaret
99	5000/322	Lewis, Jennifer
100	5000/323	Fejo, Eileen



101	5000/324	Hansen, Emily
102	500/326	Ross, Estelle
103	5000/328	Tomlin, Maria
104	5000/329	Harrison, Joanne
105	5000/331	Vincenti, Heather
106	5000/333	Hart, Marie

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