

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are warned that the following article may contain images of deceased persons

Judging a book by its cover: some reflexions on the portrayal of betrayal

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the process of viewing and constructing meaning about a book cover illustration which appears on a collection of Stolen Generation stories edited by Carmel Bird. The grainy black and white photograph, portraying six young girls of part Aboriginal descent, originally appeared under the heading “Homes are sought for these children” in a Darwin newspaper during the 1930s. It is an iconic representation of the betrayal of innocence, signifying the human suffering caused by the inherent racism of the then Australian government’s Aboriginal assimilation policies. It is also an ironic image, communicating the incongruence between the meaning of social justice at the beginning of the twentieth century and at its end. Guided by Michel Foucault’s oft-repeated caution that, “not everything is bad, but everything is dangerous” (Foucault 1991: 343), my intention is to share a subjective reflexion, and thereby raise some issues about the way we interact with, and invest truth in visual objects, such as photographs and the discourses which embed them in historical, social, political and cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Photography, Indigenous Australian children, Stolen Generation, reflective research.*

Fore note:

I am aware of the problems inherent in assuming I have any right to comment on the subjects of this picture. As a ‘white’ Australian, I readily accept that any authority I might appear to assume in speaking about, or on behalf of, the Indigenous children represented, or of the experience of Aborigines in general is highly problematic. In this regard I feel it necessary to stress that I make no assumptions to speak for Indigenous people, or members of the Stolen Generation. Rather my concern here is to reflect on a photographic image and its usage from the position in which I am unavoidably located – that of a privileged non-Indigenous woman, with every intention that my words do not contribute to further objectification, demeaning treatment, or oppression of those who are directly and indirectly represented. I also acknowledge that there is no assurance this will not be the case. In anticipation of the possibility of this occurring, I sincerely apologise. That said, I remain committed to the anti-racist practice philosophy which stresses that to do or say nothing is equally racist, because to succeed a tyrannical regime only requires silence, and thus complicity, from (would be) opponents.

Portrayal *n.* the action or product of portraying; delineation, picturing; a picture, a portrait. (The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary)

Betrayal *n.* the act of betraying; a treacherous or disloyal act; a disclosure.

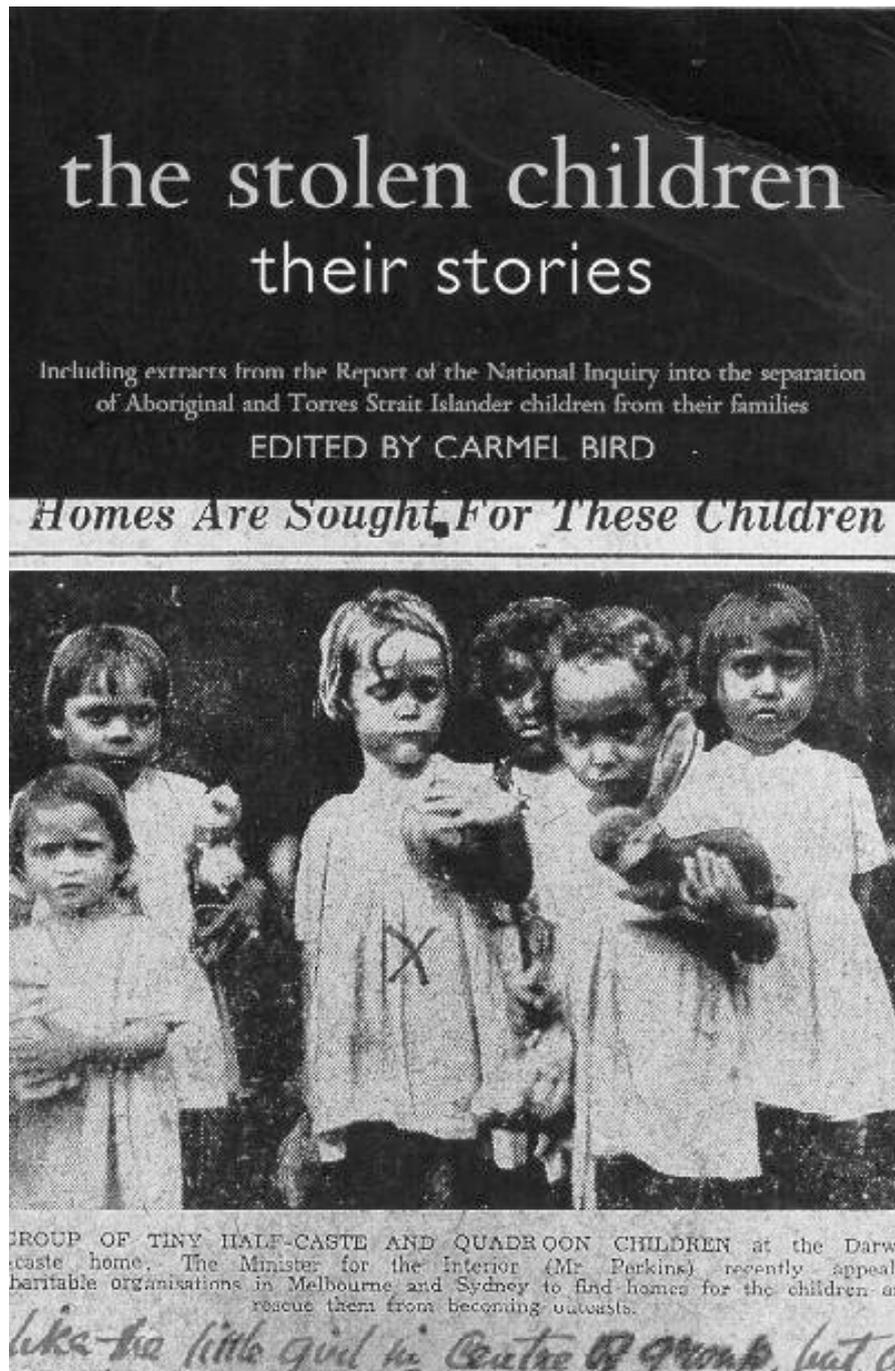


Figure 1

“Homes Are Sought For These Children”

Front cover of an edited volume of Stolen Generation stories by Carmel Bird.

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My approach to inquiry in this paper draws on ideas and methods offered by poststructural theory, discourse analysis and reflective research. I do not assume to adopt the position of presenting an ‘authorised’ academic argument in pursuit of revealing and establishing ‘as yet’ unrealised ‘truths’ about social ‘facts’. Rather, my commitment here is to engage in a self-consciously reflexive process – aware that I am producing meaning as I seek meaning (Silverman, 1985:118) – by offering one possible reading in a flow of perpetual meaning-making activities (Kellehear, 1993:25).

In the attempt to understand how “the meanings of social phenomena are constructed” (Sarantakos, 2005:311) through a discursive text, such as an old newspaper photograph used as a book cover illustration, I have adopted the principles of reflective research which “affirm the importance of experiential and interconnected ways of knowing the world [and] blur the traditional boundaries and separations between ‘knowing and doing’, ‘values and facts’, ‘art and science’, ‘theory and ‘practice’ ‘subjectivity and objectivity’” (Fook, 1996:5). Thus, the observations contained within, and the act itself of writing this paper, become research and knowledge–production activities. In addition, although as I write this I am in the position of observer, my words, (and the construct of ‘my’ self that this discourse presents to you) become the objects of your observations as you read these words.

A broad aim is to draw into focus the discursive ‘burst’, or flow of thoughts that occurs in ‘split-second’ textual encounters such as looking at a book cover illustration and attempting to make sense of what it represents. How do we receive, shape and process the messages that are communicated by this inert hand-sized object? How do we retrieve and select information from our own life contexts and bring this to bear in the act of sense-making? How and why does the text urge us to seek more information? How are decisions made about whether or not to look beyond the cover, and to purchase or read the book? Closer to the practice level, my aim is to further understanding about how we, as individuals and as practitioners in the social, welfare and community fields comprehend, construct and thus respond to injustice through the discursive objects which inform us about social causes. As Patrick Fuery observes, “[m]eaning and processes of signification are artifices. It is therefore imperative that we develop methods of analysis in order to see how things come to mean and have signification, rather than merely what they mean and signify” (Fuery, 1995:39). It is my hope that this paper will make some contribution to this endeavour.

Six young girls in white dresses, all standing to face the photographer, they must be no older than four or five years (figure 1). Four of these girl children, positioned in pairs at either end of the image, look warily out at their observer/s. Mid-picture two girls stand one in front of the other; the face of the child at the back is half obscured, both look down at the ball the front girl has gripped in her left arm. All six children seem to have been given a toy to hold for the photographic event, one has a stuffed rabbit, another has a doll, two also appear to have a bag, possibly containing food of some kind. The image is too unclear to discern details with certainty. Not one face bears a smile. The headline boldly states, “*Homes Are Sought For These Children*”. Beneath the picture, the partially visible newspaper text reads, “GROUP OF TINY

HALF-CASTE AND QUADROON CHILDREN at the Darwin [hal]f-caste home. The Minister for the Interior (Mr Perkins) recently appealed [to] charitable organisations in Melbourne and Sydney to find homes for the children and rescue them from becoming outcasts” (Bird 1998: front cover). Under the typeset are handwritten words, “I like the little girl in centre of group, but i[f taken by anyone else, any of the others would do, as long as they are strong]”¹ (Bird 1998:1). There is a cross drawn in ink on the dress of the child to which this note refers.

The child marked with a cross appears to be the fairest, her face and hand are pale skinned, and her hair seems blonde-streaked and slightly wavy. A lock curls onto her forehead, drawing connections with the girl in the English nursery rhyme, ‘who had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead’. Her attention averted from the photographer, she appears submissive and at the same time curiously defiant. Carmel Bird reflects, “this beautiful child is carelessly and so distinctly marked with a cross at the centre of her being, as if to signify the ruthless severing of the umbilicus that connects her to her mother and her race” (Bird 1998:1). With these words the image adopts yet another dimension, becoming emblematic of the “systemic genocide” practised in the implementation of Australia’s assimilation policies (Bird 1998:1).

The limited information provided in the publisher’s acknowledgements reveals the image is housed in the Australian Archives under the subject and category: “Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the removal of Aboriginal Children of part descent in the Northern Territory” (Bird 1998: publisher’s note). In this text the children are redefined as, ‘of part descent’, a contemporary, more politically correct term, arguably less racist, and as such less demeaning and insulting than ‘half-caste’ or ‘quadroon’, but still not rid of the will to establish racial difference based on biology.

Wider reading reveals that in 1934 J.A. Perkins, as the Minister of the Interior, took out a number of advertisements in newspapers “seeking people or institutions willing to take on the care and education of some fifty fair complexioned part-Aboriginals, mostly girls” (McGregor 1997:155). His strategy was to relocate ‘mixed-race’ children who had been taken from their ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal families and housed in over-crowded half-caste homes in the Northern Territory, in the belief that these children would have greater chances of assimilation interstate. Perkins’ actions were supported by others, such as J.W. Bleakley, who conducted a government inquiry in 1928 titled *The Aboriginals and Half-castes of Central Australia and North Australia*. This report, together with recommending the relocation of children interstate, also proposed that:

[C]ategories of part-Aboriginals should receive differential treatment according to their percentage of white blood ... [with a view to solving] ... the half-caste problem by encouraging the marriage of mixed blood women to white men, so

¹ On the book cover the words are framed out, Carmel Bird provides the full text in the introduction.

that within a few generations all apparent traces of Aboriginal descent would be 'bred out'. (McGregor 1997:153).

On the other hand, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Cecil Cook, argued against this relocation scheme, claiming that ultimately the assimilation of Aborigines in the Northern Territory would be undermined. His view was that 'half-caste' girls needed to be retained as potential wives for the Territory's white men. At the same time, neither Perkins, Bleakley, nor Cook saw the assimilation program itself as problematic.

This book cover illustration is likely to be at least the fifth reproduction in a chain of transpositions which can be traced from the original negative, to this newspaper illustration, to the place where I am viewing it now as the cover illustration of an edited collection of stories and excerpts from *Bringing Them Home, The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (1997). The digital reproduction which you are viewing constitutes yet another version of this visual data. Between my position as the writer/reader and your own, as the reader/writer, we share in a convolution of viewing, reading and writing about a reproduction of a representation of a moment in the lives of six young girls, a split second that enabled (amongst other deficit labels) their definition and advertisement as homeless and without race or family.

To which category of image making does this photograph belong? It could lie anywhere on the continuum between photojournalism, and social documentary. Although it is a newspaper illustration, it could also be seen as a mass-media version of a snapshot or a *catalogue* image displaying *available* homeless children; it seems, after all to be one of Perkin's 'advertisements'. More pertinent, perhaps are the different meanings that operated about this photographic document between the mid-1930s and the late 1990s when it became a political statement on a book cover. There are significant grounds for doubting whether this visual object should even continue to be considered a photograph. Viewing this reproduction – a piece of light and pigment affected paper archived in an Australian Government library – from the ideological, political, cultural and moral locations of the twenty-first century, its functions can reasonably be argued to have included social, evidentiary, promotional and political purposes. As such, in each guise credibility is dependant on the viewer/reader accepting what they see before them as evidence of particular human and social needs. My response as a viewer self-righteously positioned in sympathy with members of the Stolen Generation, is to accept that much is revealed here about early twentieth century attitudes of Australians of European descent towards Aborigines. I anticipate and therefore read: racism, paternalism, xenophobia, colonial imperialism, inhumanity and misguided philanthropic intentions.

Looking at the book-cover propped up to the left of my computer screen I am simultaneously reminded of portrayals of emancipated slave children², cupids in

² See for example, the photograph titled *Emancipated Slaves brought from Louisiana by Col. Geo. H. Hanks* in Kimball (1985) 'Portraits of Emancipated Slave Children' in *History of Photography*, 9(3) p.191.

Renaissance and Romantic artworks, and the allegorical child subjects of Julia Margaret Cameron's pictorialist Victorian photographs. Any romantic wistfulness however is halted by the hesitant wariness and slightly fearful but still potentially challenging curiosity of the four girls who look out at their observers, and instead associations shift to the faces of Indigenous people depicted in colonial anthropological photographs³. This assembly of small girls also evokes other memories of flickering documentary film and newspaper images showing Jewish war orphans huddled together; children with nothing to smile about and everything to dread. In spite of the text telling the reader it is the children who require assistance, it is as if together the young girls are saying, 'Who are you? What do you want?' I wonder whether the photographer encouraged them to adopt unsmiling poses, whether their joylessness reflects their grief, or perhaps simply their first experience of being posed for a photograph.

The 1930s newspaper image labels each of the six girls as homeless, in need of 'rescue from becoming outcasts', threatened with exclusion because of their partial Aboriginality. The *fin de siècle* book cover illustration suggests that the reporter's forecast was realised – many of these children were socially excluded, they did become outcasts. This was not the worst of their experience, these children were made race-less, family-less – they were 'stolen' and robbed of kin, community and place – dispossessed in order to be rescued by the regime that fixed them in these photographic images, that purported truths about their present and future existence. According to the news story of *then*, they were to be damned *and* saved by the portion – the half, or the three-quarters, that was *not* Aboriginal. Taken from their mothers, and thus families and communities, each child was then to be permitted (an always partial) access to the culture of 'white' Australia, and thus notionally rescued by the benevolence of its power to obliterate by absorption. Viewing this image/text object *now*, having read and heard the testimonies of women with similar histories to the girls in the photograph, I know the gateway into Australian society via white families led to a path far different from that promised, or even imagined by the 'Protectors' of Aborigines.

The gender divisions revealed by this image and its context also warrant consideration. Female rather than male children were selected for public advertisement and display, even though the newspaper alludes to both genders; "tiny half-caste and quadroon children" [my emphasis]. Russell McGregor (1997) explains that females outnumbered males in the half-caste homes, as boys were often cared for and employed on pastoral stations, while girls, on the other hand, were institutionally confined, because, "their chances of respectable employment were small, the likelihood of them falling victim to male lust was high, and their role in the procreation of the next generation of part-Aboriginals [was] a concern" (McGregor 1997:154). The person who marked the central child with a cross seemed less concerned with which girl was sent, as long as they were 'strong', suggesting that whomever was chosen would be destined for physical work, supporting Humphrey

³ See for example, *Anthropological Study of South Australian Aboriginal Woman*, in Hamilton and Hargreaves (2001) *The Beautiful and the Damned*, p.9.

McQueen's claim that the reluctance of 'white' Australian families to take in 'black' children was overcome by placing girls in domestic service (McQueen 2002:7).

Already dressed in the clothing and hairstyles of non-Indigenous children, holding European children's toys, these tiny girls are displayed as already partially assimilated. The blackness of their bodies is obscured by the white dresses, and also by the technical in/efficiencies of the photographic and printing process. In their imagined future as women, 'rescued from becoming outcasts' these girls' bodies carry the potential to annihilate their own race, even as their faces and bodies are used as signifiers of vulnerability, need, potential and hope. The image and its layered messages express and expose this neo-Darwinist state paternalism that was mobilised in the early twentieth century through a confluence of patriarchal, colonial and maternal desires. Emotive appeals are directed at both personal and collective levels, tapping into readers' notions of parental and national responsibility. Additionally, the use of this image in both of the historical contexts discussed here supports the observation that 'documentary' photographs which portray women and children as innocent, and at the same time physically and emotionally strong victims, are most likely to arouse middle-class sympathies (Eisinger 1995:88).

The view that Aborigines were a dying 'race' was supported by the commonly held 'truth' in the early twentieth century that the Aboriginal blood-line constituted an early stage of Caucasian evolution which, already surpassed by the Europeans, would disappear through interbreeding (McGregor 1997:157-158). In 1925 Herbert Basedow claimed that "Aborigines represented the root stock of the Caucasian race" (cited in McGregor 1997:157). Perhaps these views, ridiculous to us now because science has since disproved its own findings, helped relieve anxieties about children of mixed Aboriginal and Caucasian parentage. That said, although unions between European men and Aboriginal (or mixed descent) women were tolerated, encouraged even, as seen here, and the marriage of 'half-caste' girls to 'white' men was a governmental strategy, relationships between Aboriginal men and European women were considered shameful and taboo (McGregor 1997).

The black-and-white newsprint format authorises this image as actual, telling us that the children are real, the moment happened. In its use as a contemporary book cover illustration, age – the passing of time – is signified by the newsprint's fuzzy texture. Facial details, parts of the girls' bodies, and the background, obscured by shadow (darkness) are contrasted against the white dresses, the lightness of their toys, the highlights in their hair and their (mostly) pale faces. Although the text tells us the children are from the 'Darwin half-caste home', visually the group exists in no place, they have no definable environment either encircling and protecting, or claiming them. The face of the girl half hidden at the far back blends with the indefinite background, and contrasts against the fairness of the child marked with a cross, creating the impression that she is the darkest of the six. It is as if the girls are caught in limbo, and must either be drawn *further* into the place of the viewer, or recede into some dark and threatening no-place (the place of outcasts, Aborigines).

The distraction of the two middle girls, their absorption with their *gifts* creates movement and tension. Disengagement from the observer's gaze assures the viewer of the authenticity, and thus the seriousness of this moment, and establishes the

photographic event in a real time space. There is some comfort in the knowledge that the 1930s function of this image would not be tolerated by contemporary society, this being clearly an intention behind its usage on Bird's text. What this image and its accompanying text portray now is popularly considered inappropriate and unacceptable. An informed contemporary audience participates in its viewing, because we can at the same time reject what it represents. The image is invalidated as its meaning is validated. One only has to pick up a weekend newspaper, particularly the tabloids, however to see that contemporary media perpetuates this legitimised hypocrisy, in which we are safely able to renounce as rapidly as we confirm. The desire to photographically document and look upon distressing human circumstances has seen little diminishment⁴. 'Human' documents in the mass media do not represent everyday trauma, but rather events that are unusual or abnormal. This allows the reader to be emotionally responsive and at the same time reassured that it is not likely to be a circumstance they will experience. Self and otherness are simultaneously re/confirmed while the reader is able to face a horror that is likely to be worse than anything they might have to confront (Stott 1973:17).

The reality this message relies upon is already a representation of reality, a construction. On *the* day when this image was produced and publicly circulated, it carried the overt purpose of eliciting public sympathy for children experiencing the scripted misfortune of being without family, and of 'mixed race'. The covert meaning is more insidious, its imbedded message is that these children would not be accepted, in fact had been rejected, by their Aboriginal parents. Thus the other is deliberately constructed and positioned as physically *and* morally inferior. The imagined reader, as a European Australian, is able to *save* these children not only by providing them with 'white' homes and lives, but also by rescuing them from their Indigenous family's alleged rejection; a circumstance as potentially fictional as it is real in relation to their non-Aboriginal parentage. Where are their European fathers? Why do they not support them? Why have they not claimed them?

As the Stolen Generation testimonials made so abundantly clear, Aborigines were far from passive over the removal of their children. The documentation of the Aboriginal Protection Board, who advocated for, and enacted the removal of children from Aboriginal families, describes the resistance to this systemic State-driven child abuse. Thomas Garvin (of the Aboriginal Protection Board), when arguing for greater legislative power to remove children wrote on the 9th of June, 1912 – "there will be great heart-burning and opposition to the separation of children from their parents, who will not give them up unless compelled by law to do so" (Garvin cited in Goodall 1996:127). Goodall further observes that the first Aboriginal political organisation to cover a wide area in New South Wales, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA), considered its first imperative was to "try to help the children who had been taken from their families" (Goodall 1996:151). One of the AAPA's

⁴ For example, on Saturday August 18, 2001, the front page of the *Herald Sun* displayed in colour a two year old boy with Down's Syndrome under the headline, I NEED A HOME. The article appealed for adoptive parents for William, 'because after weeks of agonizing, William's natural parents decided they could not give him the care he needed'.

most active campaigners, Elizabeth Hatton⁵ wrote of the distress of the parents of young girls who had been ‘apprenticed’ into domestic service:

Day after day, letters come from the people, pleading for their children, asking me to find their girls, long lost to them – in service somewhere in the State – taken away in some cases seven years ago and no word or line from them.

(Hatton cited in Goodall 1996:153)

It is reasonable to assume these six young girls were forcibly removed from their mothers and communities, and would join those described above, streamed into a system and culture with little or no respect for their Aboriginal culture and heritage.

As Derrida (1978) insists, the text cannot be extracted from either the context in which it is read or out of which it derives, at the same time these sites are never stable, they continually fold back on themselves. The antithetical use of *Homes are sought for these children* as a book cover illustration over seventy years after it was first published in a newspaper, makes it difficult to comprehend the intention in using the image as a political comment in the present as anything other than testimony to the history of racism in Australia. Comprehension by a contemporary readership of the meaning of this image as it operated in the 1930s is circumscribed by interpretations which call for difference from the present. This is in part achieved by promoting the belief that at the time European Australians were acting under the authority of misguided good-will based on ill-advised ‘truths’ and scientific ‘facts’ which were driven by the enduring culture and power of colonial imperialism and/or white supremacism. At the same time, there are some parallels in the moral and affective currency of this image between the 1930s *and* the present. In both locations the image uses⁶ the bodies and faces of non-white, homeless, family-less ‘stolen’ girl children to elicit emotional reaction, moral indignation and social obligation. While moral attitudes and social values may have shifted, the portrayal of unhappy, ‘half-caste’ girls/children/babies condemned to social exclusion calls for moral action and emotional response, whether the year of its viewing is 1934 or 2006. At the end of the second millennium, as a re-presented visual document introducing a volume of Stolen Generation stories, the photograph confronts us with the past *in* the present. The reassurance of difference in social beliefs (we are not racist like they were) and the discomforting suggestion of similarity in practice (or are we?) hang suspended in discursive tension.

The political knowledge which now surrounds this representation, in combination with the emotive force of the children’s evident innocence – another feature which does not vary between the two time periods – produces a cultural sign denoting the

⁵ Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton was a ‘sympathetic white-woman’, who joined with the AAPA in the early 1920s. Goodall describes her as a ‘stalwart and vigorous member of the Association, and apparently the only one who was not aboriginal’ (Goodall, 1996, p. 151).

⁶ I am only discussing the image as news illustration and book cover here, but as indicated, it was also used for selecting a suitable child.

‘systemic genocide’ committed by the Australian government, its institutions and its non-Aboriginal population. As a moderately well-informed viewer, and *responsible* adult/citizen, it is difficult to contain my own *protective* emotions. Although reticent, even at this point to accuse and blame, I feel anger at, not only the Australian Government of then, but also the Government of now – the one that still will not take responsibility by saying sorry. As I write this, the second child from the right catches my gaze; foremost on the picture plane with inclined head she appears to be staring directly out at me. Wide-eyed, questioning, she seems to be appealing for reassurance of some kind, and it is directly to her that I want to apologise, gravely, deeply and regretfully. Thus, essentially through its affective power, this image of these white-frosted angelic girl children becomes (for me) an icon of Indigenous people’s experience of dispossession and colonisation.

Lucie-Smith argues that the power of photography lies in the camera’s ability to “simply halt the flow of time at a chosen moment”, and thereby afford the image with emblematic significance (Lucie-Smith 1975:65). The transportation of this image across seventy years requires faith in this time-arresting quality. As a viewer, and potential reader of Carmel Bird’s book, I need to be convinced that *the* moment I see before me, *the* day that *this* picture appeared in the newspaper and the appeal made by the Minister of the Interior for homes for these children and others like them, really did happen. From the temporal location of now, confidence in the image’s authenticity enables me to experience and express anger, indignation, regret and sorrow. At the same time I am allowed a safe distance from any direct association with the injustices that were committed. I can choose not to open the book and read its contents. And this I am tempted to do, recalling the pain of reading similar accounts of human suffering.

This image also represents the welfare system established in Australia for accommodating children who were destitute, neglected and from poverty-stricken homes⁷. In keeping with practices throughout the modernising world, Australia’s response to child destitution included the provision of large-scale institutional homes and foster care or ‘boarding-out’ for unaccommodated babies and infants (Dickey 1980: 59). Boarding-out or ‘baby-farming’ (Jaggs 1986:73; James 1969:195) was a common and often preferred response to the sizeable, unmanageable population of destitute children in Australia at the time. Contemporary notions of ‘child welfare’ however were far from the concerns of the Victorians who, according to Donella Jaggs, acted primarily to protect the interests of the middle-classes:

They had no intention of protecting children from ill-treatment or setting up a public child-rearing system. Their aim was to prevent the proliferation of a class

⁷ Some kind of patriotism urges me to believe the very concept of ‘homeless’ children in a country where everyone is entitled to a ‘fair go’ would have challenged the *Australian* identity as a generous and inclusive nation (no matter how flawed this really was), and yet as Jaggs points out, the colony was faced with the problem of large numbers of destitute and orphaned children from its early days (Jaggs 1986, p.19). For further discussion on child destitution in the early years of Australia’s settlement see also van Krieken, 1991, pp.45-60.

of criminal slum-dwellers similar to those which had plagued other advanced urban countries ... Like their counterparts in those countries, they were motivated by fear of the dangers which idle and disaffected lower classes posed for society, as much, if not more, than compassion for the young concerned.

(Jaggs 1986: 2)

Robert van Krieken, on the other hand argues that these institutional responses to child welfare were driven not only by middle-class ideals, but also by divisions within the colonial working classes themselves, between those who were considered 'respectable' and the 'non-respectable' (van Krieken 1991:24). Despite the real effects and motivations of Australian policy makers, even during the depression years between the first and second world wars, the nature of an Australian national identity required the illusion of generosity, inclusion and certainly not heartlessness. The Australian government still provides care for 'unwanted' and neglected children through the foster-care system, a system still wanting in many respects, despite principles of culturally appropriate placement.

The social and political climates in which this image/object is read allows certain interpretations and silences others. Looking at it again, I want to believe that no amount of technical interference or recontextualisation can conceal the apprehension and mistrust these girl-children express as they gaze out at their observers. On the book cover their image sits beneath the title, which tells us that these children were 'stolen children' and that this text contains 'their stories'. Thus the Australian government and those complicit with its policies become child abductors. The child who stands second from the right, holding the toy rabbit and the two girls on the far left deliver this accusation with their furrowed gazes. As much as one might will it, however there is no possibility of the last say remaining here with these tiny subjects, they are messengers only of these possible discursive constructs. This assembly of 'homeless' children is an invitation to read further about the betrayals and abuses to which children such as they were subjected.⁸ And, because I have faith in the image's facticity as a document I believe that each of these girls stood in front of a camera roughly seventy years ago, leaving behind "something like an essence of the photograph[ic]" moment (Barthes 1993:72). It is highly probable some of the women are no longer alive, and those that are will be close to eighty years old. Perhaps they were able to tell their stories in the Stolen Generation testimonies, I hope so. Through this desire for the representation to speak the narrative that constructs it, looking at this reproduction of a reproduction becomes simultaneously an act of authorship and listening. In that convergence I become a willing participant in the political narrative of Carmel Bird's edited book, and open the cover to read further about the betrayals that this text portrays. As I do so, however I find myself wondering how this image

⁸ For further discussion on the resistances enacted by Indigenous people through photographic representations see Lydon, *Regarding Coranderrk: Photography at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station*, May 2000, PhD Thesis, The Australian National University.

and its text might be read and used seventy years from now, how this discourse might be implicated as evidence of further prejudice, ignorance and injustice.

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