

Throe of Being Stolen in Doris Pilkington's *Caprice - The Stockman's Daughter*

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Abstract

The British controlled dominated and exploited the indigenous population in the process of colonizing Australia in the late Eighteenth Century. They appropriated the aborigines' land, resources and wealth: they also left psychic scars of stealing their children from the indigenous families under the guise of civilization. Colonial Governments saw Aboriginals not as people who had been colonized but as heathens to be converted and institutionalized. The 'Assimilation Policy' as it was called advocated in all the states of Australia in order to remove the half caste aboriginal children. This paper will foreground on the psychic scars of the Stolen Generation writer Doris Pilkington's novel *Caprice – The Stockman's Daughters*. Further this paper will discuss and analyse the fear, persecution, angst desolation and the pain felt by the stolen children and their families in the novel *Caprice – The Stockman's Daughter*.

Keywords: Colonisation, Australian Stolen Generation – Trauma – throe – Assimilation Policy – Psychic Scars, Fear – Desolation – Angst.

For these children – many just toddlers not yet weaned from their mothers’ breasts – this was no doubt the most traumatic experience in their young lives, and even more so for their bewildered mothers, grandmothers and other relatives left behind to grieve (*Caprice* 49)

When the British ships arrived in Australia in 1788 to set up a penal colony, there prevailed many contradictions between the settlers and the Aborigines. The European settlers in their places of settlement were very dominant. Violence was a recurrent problem in a century-long colonialism in Australia. Colonial governments adopted certain punitive strategies to bring the Aborigines within their reach. These included various native policies which were implemented only for the Aboriginal people. With the idea of breeding out the Aboriginal race and culture a policy called the ‘Assimilation Policy’ was implemented. Sarah Rodrigues says that, “‘Assimilation’, as the policy was called, sanctioned the forcible removal of non-full blood children from their families” (1). These children were called the stolen children. Later they were termed by Peter Read, an Australian historian as the ‘Stolen Generation’. The term refers to Australian Aborigine children forcibly taken away by the colonisers under the pretext of civilising them. Upto 50,000 aborigine children were forcibly removed from their families, causing pain and suffering leaving psychic scars on the children and their parents as well.

With the postcolonial literatures writing back to the Empire, writers have tended to portray the traumatic plight of the stolen children and their parents. Margaret Tucker in her work *If Everyone Cared* in 1977 was the first Aborigine writer to throw light on this angst using her own experience of being stolen. Then came Glenyse Ward’s *Wandering Girl* and

Sally Morgon's *My Place* in 1987. Carmel Bird, an Australian novelist in her book, *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* writes:

No two words strike deeper into the human heart than the words 'stolen children'. Nothing is more valuable to us than our children, nothing so irreplaceable, so precious, so beloved. The history of white Australians is marred by children lost in the bush, children spirited away by unknown agents. The stories of these children have become the stuff of myth, icons of horror, and they ring with the notes of darkest nightmare (10).

Doris Pilkington is one among these writers. Her debut novel *Caprice – A Stockman's Daughter* portrays the tragic search for identity and loss of the past of the stolen generation. The novel is a woman's journey backwards to trace her family heritage. Set in the towns of Western Australia it is a touching story of three generations of Yamatji women (person from the Murchison region of Western Australia).

Pilkington's novel is divided into three main parts corresponding to the names, dates and lives of three Muldune women. Book II continues with the story of Lucy's daughter, Peggy's life. Book III ends by portraying the life of the narrator and protagonist Katherine Bridgid Muldane (Kate). The story takes the reader on the trail of tears, where the generations are thieved of everything; their heritage, past and future, their family ties, and even their names. Kate narrates the entire story. It leaps backward and forward with changes in location.

The novel moves from the present day experience to the past traumas and atrocities of the colonisers. The narrator Kate shares the psychic scars of the colonized painful memories of their stolen condition. She highlights the throe experienced by the children who have lost their treasured childhood. 'Throe' in this context refers to the twinge and throb felt by the stolen children who had no trace of their family. Justin D. Edwards in his book *Postcolonial*

Literature: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism tells that, "but what happens when the memories of colonization are traumatic?... After all, the history of imperialism is also in part, a history of trauma" (132).

Kate's throe (pain) in her voice is disclosed when she tells, "For these children – many just toddlers not yet weaned from their mother's breasts – this was no doubt the most traumatic experience in their young lives, and even more so for their bewildered mothers, grandmothers and other relatives left behind to grieve" (*Caprice* 49). The wailing and the mourning went on for a very long time until time and tears wiped out all memories of their lost children. Many mothers never saw their children again. Being separated from their mothers was the worst experience of these stolen children. Carol Kendall in an interview "Having it her way: Carol Kendall" shares her views on the stolen babies: "often babies were stolen at birth, and their mothers given no chance of seeing them for the first time. They were called Blanket babies because nurses covered them with a blanket to hide them from their mothers" (46).

The testimonial sharing of the dark days continue, when Kate shares a gruesome act of ripping apart children from their family and totally from their aboriginality. The stolen children were sent to welfare houses in the name of civilization. Kate tells that, "With their mothers, grandmothers and other blood relations behind an invisible wall of silence and obscurity all traces of their existence vanished. All links to their traditional, cultural and historical past were severed forever." (*Caprice* 51). The Aborigines never imagined or perceived at that time what effects this would have on their people of Western Australia who were deprived of their history and their values. Kate Muldane laments: "All memories of the past will be forgotten. Rejection of their own culture is permanent. The process of reshaping their lives has just begun. They will become children and indeed persons with no past, the new people of tomorrow the new breed of children to be known as the settlement kids" (51).

In removing their children, white people stole Aboriginal people's future, language, tradition, knowledge and spirituality.

Kate shudders when she recalls a lengen davy saying, "But onething I shall fear and remember always is the mournful cry of the curlow or weelow. We were told that the bird was imitating the cry of a tormented demented woman searching for her lost children... I never forgot that legend" (57). The effect of the white savages' brutal act of abducting the babies from their babies effect continues even after generations have gone by. The novel *Caprice – A Stockman's Daughter* seeks to tell the truth of the three experiences by the Stolen Generation. Tracey Bruda confirms the throe of the eternal scars of the stolen generations, she writes,

But time has a way of covering all wounds with scar tissue, and the little abductees eventually settled down into their new life away from their homes and their families. And as moretime passed new abductees bearing new wounds came from near and far to join the ever-growing family with their abundant scar tissue. Some... was hidden deep inside their hearts... some was in their eyes and it caused them to cry as they awaited day after day for the ones they had lost to come and take them home. (80)

The Stolen children sad past defines them. The plight of these children is that their whole world is turned upside down. They are trapped in the misery of their own lives. They are lost in the sorrow of their own soul. Till today they are unable to see the dawn. The darkest days of their lives continue. And *Caprice: the Stockman's Daughter* is an attempt to portray the throe of these stolen children.

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