



## Origins SPSA Inc

Supporting people separated by adoption

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Submission of Elizabeth Brew on behalf of Origins SPSA Inc to the

*Environment and Public Affairs Committee*

Inquiry into past forced adoptive  
policies and practices circa  
1939 – 1983

## “White” stolen generation?: A proposed nomenclature of historic illegal forced adoptions

In recent times, scholars have employed the terms ‘White Stolen Generation,’<sup>i</sup> in effect conflating two distinct social justice issues: the [Black] ‘*Stolen Generations*’ and Australians affected by “forced adoption.” This confusion is associated with a narrative that originated in the post-adoption era claiming that adoption was the dominant culture of non-Indigenous Australians. This explanation has unfortunately been proliferated by the mainstream media.

“White” is a loaded term; it can have layers of unintentional meaning for the unsuspecting. “White” homogenizes rather than acknowledges the cultural diversity among Australians. “White” denotes British eugenics ideology and social and other 'cleansing' programs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is associated with Nazism, Fascism and far right elements, in a general sense, and more relevantly to the matter at hand, the adherents of the *White Australia Policy*. The term denies the cultural diversity of the multicultural nation that Australia was (and remains), and appears to be ignorant of the fact that Indigenous Australians were also separated from their families by 'adoption.'

We buy into a divisive agenda when we adopt the language of “us and them,” “black and white.” Importantly, we buy into the apologetic and false narrative that adoption was a product of the dominant “white” culture; that ‘adoptions’ were enforced by grandparents and desired by mothers themselves. There is an implication of moral weakness, as the narrative goes: hiding in maternity homes because they were allegedly ashamed; and the idea that the mothers concurred, or freely concurred, with the British (“white”) marriage principle that every child should have a married mother and father. Most recently, the influence of this institutional narrative was apparent in a statement by the Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth MP, respectfully, whose responsibility it is to represent our cause at the federal level. That is, a person who knows our issue, who is well-informed. However, during a speech in Canberra to survivors on the tenth anniversary of the national apology for forced adoptions in 2013, Amanda Rishworth said: ‘These practices were driven by the social judgement that children must, at all costs, be raised by married parents – always a mother, and a father.’<sup>ii</sup>

### Aboriginal adoption

The term “white” was used at the ‘Second Australian Conference on Adoption,’ which was held in 1978 in Melbourne. The unnamed Aboriginal representative expressed grounds of dissatisfaction, including: attitudes ‘reinforcing negative stereotypes of Aboriginals;’ alienation of the ‘unnecessarily bureaucratic ... adoption’ process; and ‘the imposition of white (sic) middle class values and standards.’

This historical attitude of Aboriginal people to adoption is salutary to note: ‘our children are being taken away from their families and their cultural heritage and taught to “live as whites.”’ As if adoption was a cultural practise of all Australians of pale skin and not the superimposed British ideology that it was. Understandable generalization given the history. And we are learning to unpack it in the interests of justice, reconciliation and truth.

Adoption was said to be alien to Aboriginal values, lifestyle, and resources [and by implication, not alien to “whites”]. Reflecting the British principles here identified, the Aboriginal representative said that adoptive parents were legally required to be married meaning many Aboriginal people were ineligible to adopt their own. Fostering payments to keep Aboriginal children in Aboriginal communities were said to be prohibitive. The paper also noted: ‘The need for Aboriginal children to grow up proud of their identity as Aboriginals and to transmit their cultural heritage to future generations.’<sup>iii</sup>

## “White”

The term ‘white’ today is clearly understood to be a racialized classification that refers to beliefs and practices of British colonialism, whose adherents took possession of Australia from the original inhabitants and used various approaches to the ‘problem’ of resistance, including: eradication, segregation, and assimilation (Assimilation Policy 1961).

- ⇒ Is a homogenizing term that links/parallels/equates/conflates the many cultures of multicultural Australia with the “white” British principles of marriage guidance, and *White Australia Policy*.
- ⇒ Argues that historic forced adoptions were a product of the dominant, ie, “white” culture, ie, the social mores narrative (discussed ahead).
- ⇒ Excludes Aboriginal Australians who were affected by forced adoption policies and practices, which were on a large scale in Victoria for motives including the appearance of altruism, from the late 1960s.<sup>iv</sup> In contrast, the demand for healthy Caucasian newborns was driven by market demand; it was also motivated by puritan eugenics from the 1938 establishment of Crown Street fertility clinic (psychogenic infertility hypothesis: Adoption cures sterility; expressed anecdotally as “adopt a baby and you’ll go on to have one of your own”). All references to substantiate these statements will be provided to the *Committee on Environment and Public Affairs*.

The use of the term ‘white’ to denote Australians affected by historic ‘forced adoption’ falsely attributes the eugenic ideology of British colonisers and principles of British affiliated marriage guidance councils to Australians of pale skin (Caucasian in appearance) and is a form of victim blaming.

## British affiliated marriage guidance councils

Australian social services were founded in the States and territories under the shared banner ‘Marriage Guidance Council’ following World War II,<sup>v</sup> becoming established in the 1950s.<sup>vi</sup> Founded in 1952, the former federation of Australian marriage guidance councils, the *Australian National Marriage Guidance Council* voted to rename to *Relationships Australia* (RA) in 1993 and is presently the Australian Government funded provider of forced adoption counselling services across Australia.<sup>vii</sup> The origins of the marriage guidance movement were British, Protestant and ‘secular-progressive’<sup>viii</sup> with all Australian state capitals forming British accredited councils after the principles of the *British National Marriage Guidance Council* (BNMGC) between 1948 and 1951.<sup>ix</sup>

The ten principles included the moral imperatives:

- Sexual intercourse should not take place outside of marriage;
- Babies should neither be born nor raised outside of permanent monogamous marriage;
- Everything should be done to promote fertile marriages, and bring about their racial ends;
- Broken homes and marital disharmony should be prevented.<sup>x</sup>

### People affected by historic illegal forced adoptions

The demand for babies to adopt was indeed a demand for ‘healthy Caucasian newborns; hence, the understandable but historically incorrect claim that there was a “white stolen generation too.”

The babies were to be passed off as the natural children of the alien family. These adoptions were secretive because they were criminal, and not because the mothers were ashamed (see *Murray v Mace*). The babies were taken for adoption or institutionalisation, depending on the outcome of the compulsory eugenics exam, and so the policy was one of removal since coined the ‘removalist policy’ (many historical references can be provided to the Committee; however, the policy has been confirmed even by the organisations themselves that were involved). Historical estimates are that almost one in four were passed not fit for adoption or ‘unadoptable’ but instead, were taken directly from the hospitals and placed in religious or State institutions without the knowledge of their parents; market rejects.<sup>xi</sup>

The influence of eugenics therefore did not end after WWII due to the horrors of the Holocaust, as various institutional narratives, including that of the past adoption industry have maintained. The Adoptions Branch of the *NSW Child Welfare Department (NSWCWD)*, for example, confirmed that the eugenics policy of providing healthy babies of Caucasian appearance ended in 1978.<sup>xii</sup> This was two years after the illegal practices were exposed by the *Committee on Adoption, now known as the Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care*. Incidentally, their affiliates were involved. This is a NSW case study that applies to all jurisdictions because it was the origins of the 1959 marriage of minors intervention by the Australian Government in 1959 (described in another submission to this Inquiry).

### Nomenclature

To emphasise what differentiates the marginalised groups named above, excerpts from *Australians Together: Language and terminology*<sup>xiii</sup> are cited ahead in bolded print. Each bulleted point is followed by the respective italicised commentary of this author for a proposed nomenclature of Australians affected by historic ‘forced adoption.’

- ⇒ **Many Indigenous people use the term ‘blackfella’ to refer to themselves. The term ‘black’ has both positive and negative connotations. It can signify unity and political activism; however, it has also been used to devalue and discriminate against people on the basis of their skin colour...It is recommended that non-Indigenous people don’t use these terms.**

*Some members of the forced adoptions community have proliferated the idea of the 'White Stolen Generation.' The term 'white' is aligned with Fascism and the far right, and is extremely offensive to people affected by British eugenic policies and practices, now referred to as 'forced adoption.' The term 'white' denoted colonialism and the British principles which led to the persecution and social cleansing of pregnant minors in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the establishment of Australian sterility clinics beginning with Crown Street Women's Hospital in 1938. The "white" terminology has been used to devalue and discriminate against Australian mothers and fathers on the basis of their age. It is recommended that all Australians not use this terminology.*

⇒ **Always acknowledge diversity, both among Indigenous people and the wider Australian community.**

*Concurring, and diversity is what is destroyed when the "white" terminology is employed to describe not the British colonizers and their eugenic principles but the very people that were hurt by the latter. 'White' homogenises denoting colonisation and eugenics.*

⇒ **Being Indigenous is about more than just a bloodline – it's about that person's entire sense of self and the way they understand and experience the world...It is important to respect how people choose to define themselves.**

*Being human is universally about bloodline and authentic identity; not identity that is based on coercion and fraud. A person's entire sense of self is undermined when they discover that their identity was a lie. The mental health affects reverberate throughout their lives. 'Birth' mother or father is equally offensive, an industry term that is used by organisations who receive federal funding to counsel those affected by their policies. This is a glaring conflict of interest. The term humiliates, manipulates, retraumatizes, controls, and continues to oppress the victims.*

⇒ **Where possible, specify what nation a person identifies with.**

*Concurring, do not assume that Australians who have pale skin identify with British culture.*

⇒ **Where colonisation has disintegrated culture, avoid using the term 'lost'.**

*When referring to adults who as babies were forced to bond with an alien family, who were cut off from their immediate and extended familial culture: use the word 'stolen,' 'illegally removed,' or 'kidnapped,' rather than 'adopted' or 'lost,' as 'lost' removes the hope of the living, and while there is life there is hope. Employ forensic psychologists so that reunions have some hope of success, and remove funding past providers of 'healthy Caucasian newborns,' who are compromised by Government funding.*

⇒ Use the term ‘stolen wages’ to refer to income denied Indigenous employees during the assimilation era.

*Inmates and residents of Australian Magdalene laundries, unmarried mothers continue to await the telling of truth, not to mention the thousands who were exploited for slave labour as domestics in private homes<sup>xiv</sup> or who were trafficked to and from New Zealand<sup>xv</sup> and perhaps Ireland and other Commonwealth nations from where the practices of illegitimate neonate adoption were imported.*

## Social mores

A defence and narrative of adoption as social mores originated from the post-forced adoption sector when victims first began to advocate for the opening of records in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>xvi</sup> This narrative was picked up by the mass media and governments, reemerging secondly from 2010 in the first apologies offered to Australians affected by ‘past adoption policies and practices.’ And, despite this narrative was deemed by the *Community Affairs References Committee* to be a making of excuses for past wrongs, it has been difficult to address and remains ubiquitous in popular media and public discourse. We therefore request that this current Inquiry reiterate the recommendations of the *Community Affairs References Committee* (CARC), detailed ahead.

In the final report of the inquiry into the *Role of the Commonwealth, if any, its practices and policies in contributing to forced adoptions*, the CARC recommended that future apologies should be worded with emphasis on institutional responsibility rather than be qualified by reference to values or professional practices of the times.<sup>xvii</sup> In tabling speeches in the Senate, Senator Rachel Siewert stated, ‘We have heard it said that what happened reflected the standards and the views of the time. We believe that is in fact not true.’<sup>xviii</sup> This statement was greeted by an outbreak of applause from the gallery.

## Past apologies

Following are extracts from submissions to the 2012 senate Inquiry typifying the social mores narrative that Senator Siewert censured:

The Royal Women’s Hospital (RWH) submission, for example, attributed forced adoption to a prevailing view of society, suggesting that those mothers in signing adoption consents were merely motivated by shame and social control of their families: ‘Families maintained ultimate control over the fate of their daughters, effectively endorsing society’s message of her wrongdoing and further instilling a sense of guilt and shame.’<sup>xix</sup>

Notably, the following statement by Fiona Judd, director of the Centre for Women's Mental Health at the *Royal Women’s Hospital* (RWH) - suggested that unmarried mothers were compelled to relinquish their infants by societal forces rather than any compulsion applied by practices or policies of the RWH itself: ‘We are apologising to every woman who felt that she had no choice but to relinquish her baby for adoption whilst in our care.’<sup>xx</sup> To the contrary, an intra RWH memo reproduced subsequent to Judd’s public apology during the airing of the

Four Corners episode titled 'Given or Taken,'<sup>xxi</sup> details the differential treatment unmarried mothers received at the hands of RWH staff.

Regarding the view that forced adoption's prevalence was due to a limitation of knowledge and social conditions - implying that ignorance of the law is an excuse to break it - the following extract from the submission of the Benevolent Society attributes the illegal removal of newborn babies at birth to Australian culture:

This message of sacrifice for the benefit of the child was stated and repeated: adoption could give the child a better chance, a loving two parent family, material advantages, security, freedom from the stigma of illegitimacy. At the time, however, these reasons were widely believed and could be said to be true in the knowledge and social conditions of the time.<sup>xxii</sup>

To the contrary, Australia's Westminster system of liberal democracy based on the rule of law, regards ignorance of the law as no excuse to break it. Similarly, the submission of Family Voice attributes forced adoption to a prevalent action arising from good intentions, suggesting that forced adoption was entirely a product of social forces:

It is certainly a matter of agreement today that the consent of the birth parents to adoption should be freely given on the basis of full information, a lack of coercion and an appropriate cooling off period. It is important, though, to distinguish the issue of failure to obtain fully informed and free consent from the social context in which the consensus was that, in principle, a child born out of wedlock was better off being raised by a married couple than brought up by a single mother on her own.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Although the National Apology made no reference to the social mores of the day, Government funded sources continued to promote the idea that the decline in adoptions was due to the diminishment of social pressure on young unmarried mothers to give up their infants for adoption.<sup>xxiv</sup>

## Marriage guidance councils

The federally funded, British affiliated marriage guidance councils in Australia (discussed at length in an additional submission by this author to the present Inquiry), set out to prevent the marriages of minors, placing themselves above the common law and criminal codes in their illegitimate interventions into the lives of vulnerable Australians. Their ideas were the product of an ideological blend of puritanism and eugenics, expressed in the ten British marriage guidance principles, including that: children should neither be conceived, born, nor raised outside of monogamous marriage.<sup>xxv</sup> The marriage guidance councils were affiliated with the 'Racial Hygiene Society' which was the ideological forerunner in Australia of the sterility clinics and marriage guidance councils.

## 'Forced adoption'

'Forced adoption' is ambiguous terminology. It equivocates between legal and illegal forced adoption. There was power to force an adoption under the various Acts and ordinances in the states and territories, and the legislation named this 'legal' variety of forced adoption,



‘dispensation of consent’; for example, under Division 2, Section 32 (1) of the NSW Adoption of Children Act 1965. The parental responsibilities of mothers whose newborn infants were illegally removed from their care under the aforementioned removalist policy, could not be signed away as they had already been usurped with the unauthorised removal of her baby. As the signature was taken from these mothers, the adoption was not legal forced adoption but fraudulent. Therefore, any adoptions that were procured through these unlawful means should be defined as ‘illegal’ forced as no formal consent was given.

### ‘Birth’ or ‘biological’ mother

Birthing or biological mother are industry terms that offend the maternal victims of illegal forced adoption. Rather, the ‘illegitimate’ newborn infants were illegally removed from mothers. ‘Birth’ and biological’ qualifiers dehumanize and maintain the false identities of the secretive closed adoptions era.

Not every adoption was illegal, as explained above. Therefore, not every adoption is a forced adoption. The Adoptee rights movement however objects to all adoptions because ‘no child has a choice,’ and argues that all adoptions are forced. This argument has the unfortunate consequence of equivocation, falsely equating the social justice issue of illegal forced adoptions with the very authentic but different aims of organizations such as *Adoptee Rights Australia* (ARA). Indeed, the language of ‘forced adoption’ (because no child has a choice) is also problematic due to inherent conflict of interests between stakeholders representing the illegal forced adoptions movement for social justice and that of, for example, ARA in seeking to be ‘the peak body to advocate for reform in adoption legislation, policy and services in all Government jurisdictions.’<sup>xxvi</sup> The two movements share the issue of illegal forced adoptions but not their respective primary objectives. In addition, adoptees are understandably torn between their primary caregivers with whom they attached from babyhood; whereas the maternal victims of historic illegal forced adoptions by childless married couples have no such conflict of interests. Thus, we caution against identity politics<sup>xxvii</sup> and its potential to sideline the issue of historic illegal forced adoptions, and we recommend that the two issues not be thereby conflated.

### Recommendations

- ⇒ That the racially divisive “white stolen generation” terminology be discouraged through education.
- ⇒ That ‘forced adoptions’ be defined as ‘illegal forced adoptions’ to remove any doubt that the victims were somehow deserving of abuse.
- ⇒ That the objectives of the adoptee rights movement not be conflated with those of the community impacted by the historic, illegal forced adoptions.
- ⇒ That the mothers be therefore defined as ‘people affected by historic illegal forced adoption.’



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> Merryl Moor, 'Silent violence: Australia's white stolen children.' (PhD dissertation, Griffith University, 2006). <https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/bitstream/handle/10072/365291/02Whole.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed 09/08/2023).; Christine Cole, 'Stolen babies – broken hearts: Forced adoption in Australia 1881-1987.' (PhD dissertation, University of Western Sydney, 2013). <https://apologyalliance.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/vol-ii.pdf> (accessed 13/08/2019).
- <sup>ii</sup> Minister for the Department of Social Services, 'The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP,' (accessed 3 July 2023): <<https://ministers.dss.gov.au/speeches/10676>>
- <sup>iii</sup> Proceedings of Second Australian Conference on Adoption: current concerns and alternatives for child placement and parenting, 'Aboriginal paper,' May 1978, 1.
- <sup>iv</sup> 'Aborigines, adoption and assimilation,' *Tribune*, 24 July 1968, 11.
- <sup>v</sup> The former federation of Marriage Guidance Councils, the Australian National Marriage Guidance Council voted to rename to Relationships Australia (RA) in 1993 and is presently the Australian Government funded provider of forced adoption counselling services across Australia, *In Relationships Australia, "Our history,"* (accessed 22 April 2023): <<https://relationships.org.au/about/our-history/>>.
- <sup>vi</sup> 'To have and to hold: A report of the inquiry into aspects of family services,' Chapter 8, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Parliament, Canberra: The Committee, 1998, 227.
- <sup>vii</sup> Relationships Australia, "Our history," (accessed 22 April 2023): <<https://relationships.org.au/about/our-history/>>.
- <sup>viii</sup> 'Guidance for those married,' *Canberra Times*, 30 August 1963, 23.; 'How Christian are we – part 3: Three times as moral as the US?,' *Canberra Times*, 11 August 1965, 2.
- <sup>ix</sup> Relationships Australia, 2008, Annual Report, pp.16-17.; 'Marriage guidance clinic to be formed here,' *News*, 12 August 1947, 4.
- <sup>x</sup> *The Melbourne Marriage Guidance Council*, Armadale, Victoria: The Council, 1951, (accessed 3 July 2023): <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-52836655>>.
- <sup>xi</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, 'The role of the private adoption agency in New South Wales,' *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 1971, vol. 6, no. 1, 66.; *Australian Journal of Social Work*, 'News from the field,' vol 12, iss 1 (1959), 29.
- <sup>xii</sup> Audrey Marshall, *Review of Adoption Policy and Practice in NSW* (abridged), Department of Youth and Community Services, 1984, 11.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Australians together: Language and terminology guide, version 1.3, April 2020, (accessed online 9 August 2023): <<https://australianstogether.org.au/assets/Uploads/General/AT-Language-and-Terminology-Guide-2020.pdf>>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> 'Unmarried mothers are branded and employed by wealthy families,' *Tribune*, 2 June, 1965, 5.; 'A joyous bond: The unmarried mother and her child,' *The Bulletin*, 32, 34-35.; Pamela Roberts, 'The hospital's responsibility to the unmarried mother and her child,' *Hospital Administration*, 1968, vol.16, no. 12: 11.
- <sup>xv</sup> 'The unmarried mother, baby need not be her shame: Most girls have their child adopted, but they suffer an emotional wound,' *Sun*, 23 November, 1952, 13.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Evidence is held in the Origins library and will be provided upon request.
- <sup>xvii</sup> CARC, *Commonwealth contribution*, 9.
- <sup>xviii</sup> YouTube, 'Senator Siewert tables an inquiry report into forced adoptions,' 5 March 2012, <https://youtu.be/U0cqJffQiqs?t=7m42s>, (13 August 2017).

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- <sup>xix</sup> <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=edd3e0dd-29b7-4d86-9439-017ca85b68b4>
- <sup>xx</sup> <https://thewomens.org.au/about/our-history/timeline/timeline-2000-to-now/2012-apology/>
- <sup>xxi</sup> Four Corners, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 'Given or Taken,' *video*, 2 March 2012, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19le5KpfAwM>>.
- <sup>xxii</sup> <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=82052d49-bdd2-4c7c-b4a0-0a7771a8e73e>
- <sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=e8a66638-08be-41ca-a8e3-76ebcf682559>
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Australian Social Trends,' 1998, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/c14cbc586a02bfd7ca2570ec001909fc!OpenDocument>, (12 August 2017).
- <sup>xxv</sup> The Melbourne Marriage Guidance Council Armadale, Victoria: The Council, 1951, (accessed 3 July 2023): <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-52836655>>
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Adoptee Rights Australia, <<https://adopteerightsaustralia.org.au/>>.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> According to the online dictionary 'Merriam Webster,' 'identity politics' is: politics in which groups of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger political group. *In* Merriam Webster, 'Identity politics,' (accessed online 13 August 2023): <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>>.