

Harrison's Stolen: Addressing Aboriginal and Indigenous Islanders Human Rights

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Abstract : According to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, every human being is entitled to rights in life that should be respected by others and protected by the state and community. Such rights are inherent regardless of colour, ethnicity, gender, religion or otherwise, and it is expected that all humans alike have the right to live without discrimination of any sort. However, that has not been the case with Aborigines in Australia. Over a long period of time, the governments of the State and the Territories and the Australian Commonwealth denied the Aboriginal and Indigenous inhabitants of the Torres Strait Islands such rights. Past Australian governments set policies and laws that enabled them to forcefully remove Indigenous children from their parents, which resulted in creating lost generations living the trauma of the loss of cultural identity, alienation and even their own selfhood. Intending to reduce that population of natives and their Aboriginal culture while, on the other hand, assimilate them into mainstream society, they gave themselves the right to remove them from their families with no hope of return. That practice has led to tragic consequences due to the trauma that has affected those children, an experience that is depicted by Jane Harrison in her play *Stolen*. The drama is the outcome of a six-year project on lost children and which was first performed in 1997 in Melbourne. Five actors only appear on the stage, playing the role of all the different characters, whether the main protagonists or the remaining cast, present or non-present ones as voices. The play outlines the life of five children who have been taken from their parents at an early age, entailing a disastrous negative impact that differs from one to the other. Unknown to each other, what connects between them is being put in a children's home. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the play's text in light of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, using it as a lens that reflects the atrocities practiced against the Aborigines. It highlights how such practices formed an outrageous violation of those natives' rights as human beings. Harrison's dramatic technique in conveying the children's experiences is through a non-linear structure, fluctuating between past and present that are linked together within each of the five characters, reflecting their suffering and pain to create an emotional link between them and the audience. Her dramatic handling of the issue by fusing tragedy with humour as well as symbolism is a successful technique in revealing the traumatic memory of those children and their present life. The play has made a difference in commencing to address the problem of the right of all children to be with their families, which renders the real meaning of having a home and an identity as people.

Keywords : aboriginal, audience, Australia, children, culture, drama, home, human rights, identity, Indigenous, Jane Harrison, memory, scenic effects, setting, stage, stage directions, *Stolen*, trauma

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