

Beyond Public Acknowledgement to Action: The Role of Government in Supporting Recovery from Trauma for Indigenous People as a Result of Past Policies of Forcible Separation and Assimilation

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Ten years have passed since Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered his famous apology to the generations of Indigenous Australians who were removed from their families and communities when they were children as the result of racist and ill-informed government policy guided by the principles of assimilation (Russell, 2018). At this time, the importance of acknowledgement and formal government apology was becoming better understood, not only in Australia but also in other colonized nations, as essential to public understanding of the collective, historical and intergenerational trauma that exists within Indigenous communities and facilitating healing (operationalized by the Australian government as improvement in health, education and employment outcomes). Formal acknowledgement opens the way for the nation to bear witness to its shared national history, and to prioritise government action in response.

The importance of societal endorsement is central to the two fundamental elements in the recovery from trauma. The purpose of 'public acknowledgement' seeks to gain public recognition of harm and define the experience or event as trauma at a societal level because the reaction from the wider society has a powerful influence and can ultimately shape the resolution of trauma (Herman, 1992,). The next critical element in the recovery of trauma is 'community action' whereby the society takes responsibility for the provision of assistance and support services to aid the recovery (Herman, 1992,). The success of an individual or group's recovery from trauma can be measured by two things: 'an accepting climate of public opinion which fosters the integration of trauma survivors and an absence of a rejecting climate of opinions compounding their isolation' (Herman, 1992, p.71).

This paper positions the Rudd apology in the context of growing international understanding of how past government policies have evoked significant trauma in Indigenous people, which is evident in the profound inequities that currently exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in colonized nations. It argues that acknowledgement and apology, whilst essential, is insufficient to repair the hurt and harm, and that non-collaborative, and victim blaming philosophical undercurrents in strategies to address the

inequities that exist within the Australian context have led to a situation where, a decade on, there has been very little meaningful change.

PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRAUMA AS THE RESULT OF RACIST POLICY

Traumatized individuals and groups require social acceptance and recognition of their suffering. Healing from trauma requires a societal response that defines those events as traumatic, declares the need for restitution, and seeks to gain widespread public recognition of the trauma that has been experienced (Herman, 1992). However, the exposure of traumatic events in the public arena is not only associated with healing, but also with some risk because it may not always be possible to predict how the public will respond to these declarations. Exposure can be met with denial, repression and dissociation, which negatively impact on the individuals who have been affected, especially when they are from already marginalised groups (Herman, 1992). These unhelpful reactions towards the casualties of trauma serve to victimize the group. According to Hirschberger (2018) the victimization of a group 'may even raise questions like why do these people and many others cling to their traumatic memory and why do they not want to move on and let bygones be bygones' (p.4).

Acts of remembrance are important in the recovery from historical trauma and social acceptance can promote recovery from traumatic experiences and events. Perhaps one of the most notable historical traumas has been the Holocaust and the post -World War II reactions and responses. Hirschberger, Kende, & Weinstein, (2016b) work explores current attitudes about the Holocaust, nationalism, and antisemitism in Hungary. Their work discusses how a 'defensive representation of history seeks to modify the group's narrative with regards to its culpability in past atrocities committed against another group' (Hirschberger, Gilad;Kende, Anna;Weinstein, Shoshana, 2016b, p.33). The ultimate goal is to understand how to move beyond a defensive position and acknowledge the maltreatment resulting from historical atrocities and human rights violations

and repair the injuries and wounds. The challenges in acknowledging the trauma may be confronting to some because ‘it requires a change in the national narrative and the incorporation of the victim’s narrative’ (Hirschberger, 2018, p. 10) which is often absent because the victim has no voice. Challenging and changing the dominant discourse to give victims a voice may be met with resistance by those who seek to maintain control and power over marginalized individuals and groups.

On an individual level, vulnerable members in society who have experienced interpersonal trauma are often denied even minimal social support and community assistance. For instance, it is not uncommon for rape victims to experience condemnation and blame, even from police officers, particularly if they have characteristics that are seen as undermining their credibility, such as unusual emotional expression, belonging to a minority racial group, or if they were intoxicated at the time of the rape (Katz, Merrilees, Motisi & Horneier, 2017; Sleath and Bull, 2017). Similarly, whole groups of people can be blamed for their own trauma, as we have seen for Indigenous peoples around the world. It is more than simply denial of support. There is often a corresponding judgment by the dominant culture of those traumatized as “not worthy” to be seen as traumatized or afforded the compassion that would normally be offered to harmed individuals. Like the example of rape provided above in which the victims are often seen as having ‘invited’ the assault, marginalised groups can be seen as inviting poor treatment, and having their trauma-related behaviours labeled as cultural characteristics. For example, Browne (2009) identified the dominance of colonizing assumptions and blame in the narratives of Canadian nurses in relation to Aboriginal people. In response to discussions about poor birth outcomes for Aboriginal infants, nurses spoke about negligent and incompetent care provided by Aboriginal mothers and described inferior mothering as a cultural characteristic: ‘She didn’t look after her own children. Now, I know that is a cultural thing’ (p. 75). Another nurse spoke of violence as being a cultural characteristic: ‘It is in their culture to have a lot of violence, stabbing, alcohol abuse...’ (p.75). Starting with the assumption that there is something intrinsically violent or incompetent about Aboriginal people and their culture, and so they bring their problems on themselves, is rampant across service settings. There is an extensive literature demonstrating this attitude in health (e.g. Browne, 2009), in the legal system (e.g. Cunneen, 2005), in the welfare sector (Green, 2008), and in relation to educational outcomes (e.g. Riley and Ungerleider, 2012).

Indigenous peoples are widely viewed as possessing cultural characteristics that undermine their credibility as victims. This makes public acknowledgement by national, non-Indigenous leaders even more important as this potentially builds social credibility. The resistance to the truth and the denial of traumatic experiences of Indigenous survivors may be fought against by non-Indigenous people. Reactions to historical horrors by non-Indigenous groups may

include ‘denying the events took place, disowning them, refusing to take any responsibility’ and minimizing culpability for wrongdoing (Hirschberger, 2018, p.2). Other ways perpetrator groups may respond to trauma victims and survivors is by ‘reconstructing the trauma in a manner that is more palatable, representing the trauma in a manner that reduces collective responsibility’ (Hirschberger, 2018, p.2).

FIRST OF ALL, HEARING THE TRUTH

The formal reporting of what has taken place within Indigenous communities is essential as a first step. Not only does this give voice to those who have first-hand, lived experience of injustice and its sequelae on the basis of race, but it also documents events that have generally been omitted from a nation’s history books. Internationally, over the last couple of decades, we have seen increasing government interest in hearing the truth about the experiences of Indigenous peoples. For example, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up in 1994 to respond to the deaths, dehumanisation and devastating consequences of the apartheid regime. The need for transparency and truth fundamentally underpinned the work of this South African body. Priscilla Hayner, an investigator with the Commission, argued in her book *Unspeakable Truths* (2002) that it is paramount that a society recognises the truth about the wrongs of historical abuses and human rights violations, in the aftermath of repression, before progressive action and movements like reconciliation take place.

The Chilean National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (United States Institute of Peace, 1993), which examined human rights violations under the former dictatorship of President Pinochet, demanded honesty, truth and an acknowledgement of injustices within the nation. To quote from José Zalaquett:

‘Society cannot simply black out a chapter of its history . . . The void would be filled with lies or with conflicting versions. The unity of a nation depends on a shared identity, which, in turn, depends largely on a shared memory. The truth also brings a measure of social catharsis and helps to prevent the past from reoccurring . . . although the truth cannot really in itself dispense justice, it does put an end to many a continued injustice – it does not bring the dead back to life, but it brings them out from silence’.

Providing a platform for a trauma survivor who is ‘speaking the unspeakable’ offers others the opportunity to bear witness to the experience of survival.

In Australia, public understanding of the past and present trauma of Aboriginal people as a result of forced separation and assimilation has been slow, and met with some resistance. The ‘Bringing Them Home’ report was released by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in May, 1997. This report documented the National Inquiry on the state-enforced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander children from their families and communities from 1883 to 1969 (HREOC, 1997). The children who were removed under law have become known as the ‘Stolen Generations’. Immediately following the release of the report, there were divisive attempts to deny and dilute the testimonies of abuse, harm, grief, loss and trauma. The Howard Government had recently come into office, having argued in their election campaign that they would not take responsibility for past actions and policies as this related to Aboriginal people. For eight months after the report was released the government made no response at all, except to say that there would be no apology and no compensation. Senior Government Ministers denied there had been harm, asserting that the numbers of Aboriginal children who had been separated from their families had been exaggerated (Bond, 2007). The Howard Government persisted in their defiance to the need for recognition and reparation by attacking those who expressed compassion and regret as giving in to ‘political correctness’, and a ‘black armband’ view of history (Buti, 2007). The government argued that Aboriginal children had, in fact, been ‘rescued’ because they were at risk of psychological and physical harm, not because of their cultural or racial origins (Haebich, 2000). The Howard government ignored the report’s recommendation to officially and publicly acknowledge the responsibility of previous governments in the forced removal of Indigenous children. Under public pressure, they did, however, offer a ‘statement of sincere and deep regret’ (Howard, 1999) and invest \$63M in counselling and Link-Up services, which helped those who had been removed find and reconnect with their families. This amount of money was wholly inadequate and paled in comparison to the hundreds of millions invested by the Canadian government when they were faced with a similar challenge (Bond, 2007).

Prominent Australian leaders condemned the former Howard administration’s inaction in response to the ‘*Bringing Them Home*’ Report. Then Sydney Anglican Archbishop, Dr. Peter Jensen condemned the government’s failure to apologise as inconsistent with Christian understanding (West, 2005). Former Governor General, Sir William Deane, referred to Australia’s version of historical denialism as “our legacy of unutterable shame” (Manne, 2001, p. 105).

IS THE GRIEF OF A WHITE MOTHER DIFFERENT TO THAT OF A BLACK MOTHER?

It is difficult to reconcile the public outpouring of distress at the disappearance of a white child with the apparent apathy that can surround the stories of disappearance and removal for Aboriginal families. To quote Professor Beverley Raphael, an international trauma expert:

‘If there is a child taken away from a parent, it is a massive news event. Yet here we have generations of [Aboriginal] children taken away from both their parents and people are wanting to deny the reality but, perhaps more importantly, the ongoing impact’(as

cited by de Vries, Macdonald, Mears and Nettheim, 2012, p. 36).

There is a very well-known case in Australia of a 13 year old non-Indigenous Queensland boy, Daniel Morcombe, who went missing in 2003 (Courier Mail, 2013). This case received extensive national media coverage, and there were regular public appeals for information about his whereabouts. The agonizing and unbearable torment for his family who were forced to endure weeks, months, even years of not knowing whether their beloved son and brother was alive, or dead was beyond heartbreaking to witness, and the entire country mourned with them (Durber, 2007).

The ‘Bringing Them Home’ Report (HREOC, 1997) provides first-hand accounts of how Indigenous mothers were left with the anguish and torment of not knowing whether they would ever see their child again or if their child was safe and well. When the testimonies of Indigenous Australians were made public, this should have resulted in parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family and community members having their ‘Morcombe moment’. That is, the opportunity for the nation to bear witness to their suffering and acknowledge the devastation of child loss. Indigenous Australians should have been consoled and comforted for the agony they had experienced when government and welfare officials took children away from their families with no warning and most often for no reason other than race. Instead the ‘Morcombe moment’ of mourning as a nation for the loss of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was largely absent.

The differences in public response goes directly to perceptions of victim credibility as described earlier - who is deserving of compassion, and who the majority can relate to as ‘same’ compared to ‘other’. Also underlying the public response is the belief by those who are privileged within policy and social systems that if the government took action and removed children, there must have been a good reason - Aboriginal people must somehow have provoked this response. The public minimization of child loss for Aboriginal Australians, and the profound impact of this bereavement, has had serious implications for their recovery from trauma. Lift on (cited in Herman, 1992, p.69) observes, “unresolved or incomplete mourning results in stasis and entrapment in the traumatic process”. Failure to complete the normal processes of grieving perpetuates the traumatic reaction. Kleber, Figley and Gersons (1995, p. 2) also emphasised the negative consequences of societal denial:

“It is not only the event itself that causes the characteristic symptoms [of trauma]. The psychological atmosphere in a society is clearly a factor that facilitates or hinders the process of coping with stressful life events. It may be precisely this climate that will enlarge or even cause the problems of victims or survivors.”

Denialism is a strong theme in Anglo-Australian history and society and has allowed non-Aboriginal Australia to remain largely ignorant of the injustices suffered by Aboriginal people (Haebich, 2000). The reality of the life-stories of members of the Stolen Generations is confronting because white and black Australia share this history. It is not Aboriginal history. It is not Anglo or European history. It is the history of Australia. Understanding our nation's history is important for all Australians as we 'need to be able to honestly and openly own our shared history. Our sense of who we are and what we hope to be can never be securely held if it is based on a false and incomplete history'(McMullan, 2001.). All Australians should be able to have access to accurate historical knowledge and understand the story of Australia.

SAYING SORRY

In the Australian context, there have been significant moments of recognition and apology by government leaders. Former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, was the first to speak plainly about the injustices experienced by Aboriginal people. In 1992, at the Australian launch of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, Keating gave what has become known as the 'Redfern speech'. An excerpt from this speech appears below.

'And, as I say, the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask - how would I feel if this were done to me?'(Keating, 2012).

Soon after gaining Federal office in February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a formal apology to the members of the Stolen Generations. His speech provided the long-awaited acknowledgement of injustice, grief and trauma experienced by Aboriginal

Australians. Rudd (2008), in part, said:

'The uncomfortable truth for us all is that the parliaments of the nation, individually and collectively, enacted statutes and delegated authority under those statutes that made the forced removal of children on racial grounds fully lawful...To the Stolen Generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry.

On behalf of the parliament of Australia, I am sorry'.

Other nations with colonized Indigenous populations have also offered formal public apologies. For example, Stephen Harper, then Prime Minister of Canada, offered a statement of Apology to the First Nations people of Canada in June 2008 for the removal of their children into residential schools from the 1840's to the 1990's, and for the abuse and mistreatment that many experienced as a result (Harper, 2008). In his speech, Harper acknowledged that the 'absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation'. In 1993, the US congress devoted a resolution to apologising to native Hawaiians for overthrowing their kingdom (US Congress, 1993).

A short apology to Native Americans was included as section 8113 in the Defence Appropriations Act of 2010 (US Congress, 2010), although this was never announced or publicised and is buried deep within the document, and so it did not provide the public acknowledgement required. The US government made it clear in both the above acts that an apology did not equate to liability, and would not support any claim against the United States.

POST-APOLOGY ACTION AND COMPENSATION: OR THE LACK THERE OF

While the US was quick to extinguish the possibility of any compensation for Native Americans, the symbolic gesture and apparently sincere nature of the Rudd apology in Australia appeared to give new hope for the future. The landmark speech signalled a very different approach to Aboriginal affairs from the previous Howard administration, and the potential for significant government action to address the trauma evident within Aboriginal communities. Prime Minister Rudd utilised a framework for measuring Indigenous disadvantage called 'Close the Gap'. The policy framework was conceptualized in the 2005 Social Justice Report under the guidance of former Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, and with the support Australia's peak Indigenous and non-Indigenous health bodies, non-government organisations and human rights organisations and the work received bipartisan support in 2008 (AHRC, 2008). The 'Close the Gap' policy seeks address Indigenous health inequities and reduce the gap life expectancy rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia by the year 2030 (AHRC, 2008). The holistic policy framework concentrates on education, health and welfare strategies in the targeted areas of early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, health homes, safe communities, governance and leadership to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AHRC, 2008). While this framework has received criticism because of the focus on the challenges rather than the strengths within Indigenous communities and lack of funding, there is widespread acknowledgement that it was useful to establish and invest in nationwide goals relating to improving Indigenous health, education and socio-economic outcomes.

There was euphoria on the day of the National Apology, evidenced by jubilant scenes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people inside and outside parliament house, schools and workplaces (Short, 2012, p.298; Creative Spirits, n. d.-a), however this early optimism has slowly waned. The ‘fleeting feel-good moment’ (Robertson, 2015) was short lived and it has become clear that the Prime Minister’s speech failed to include any announcement of implementation strategies which would address the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home Report. Many listening to the apology speech heard Prime Minister Rudd speak about Stolen Generations with evocative and emotive statements:

‘The pain is searing; it screams from the pages. The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity’ (Rudd, 2008:p.168).

The important question that was not answered, either on, or since, that day is how will reparation take place? There is clear evidence that the measures the Federal Government have taken to implement the restorative justice recommendations in the Bringing Them Home Report have been inadequate and unsatisfactory. The issue of financial compensation was part of the apology recommendation number 5A based on the Van Boven principles of restorative justice outlined in the Bringing Them Home Report (HREOC, 1997). It stated reparations should consist of: 1) Acknowledgement and apology; 2) Guarantees against repetition; 3) Measures of restitution; 4) Measures of rehabilitation; and 5) Monetary compensation (HREOC, 1997). There was no mention of this in the apology commitments by Prime Minister Rudd. Furthermore, the Prime Minister’s decision to divert the discussion toward the Close the Gap policy ignored the issues central and relevant to Stolen Generations. A key pledge made in the apology was to introduce ‘an effective housing strategy for remote communities over the next five years’ (Rudd 2008, p.171).

No doubt many would welcome this public policy; however an effective housing strategy does not explicitly address the Van Boven human rights framework of reparation (HREOC, 1997). There has been no policy to provide holistic trauma informed services that are culturally sensitive, staffed by culturally responsive professionals who have a sophisticated understanding about the impacts and the manifestation of trauma and an intimate working knowledge of the issues affecting the members of the Stolen Generations (Wall, Higgins & Hunter 2016; Haythornthwaite & Hirvonen 2015; Browne, 2012; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008).

A more in-depth understanding of trauma could assist those working in education, health, legal and welfare sectors to develop better responses in terms of early intervention and treatment programs designed to support and engage individuals and their families. Improved conceptualization of

the impact and the origins of trauma may also assist workers to change insufficient or inappropriate service delivery (Atkinson 2013, Browne 2012). Public policy aimed at improving housing alone, while an important initiative is unlikely to aid the recovery without a concentrated focus on the underlying trauma. According to Harris and Fallout, (2001b, p. 3)

‘human service systems such as the mental health and alcohol and drug sectors often served survivors of trauma without treating them for the consequences of that trauma, and, more significantly, without even being aware of the trauma that occurred’.

Service providers in all human services working with trauma survivors need to be aware of the root causes of trauma and address these, not just work with the trauma-related behaviours.

Seven years post the apology former Prime Minister, Rudd himself commented:

‘The truth is, our achievements have been meagre’ (Robertson, 2015). He expressed regret at the lack of sustained collective energy and political unity that surrounded the apology. A member of the Stolen Generations, Jean Bartley, said: ‘...government officials are not doing anything . . . to clean the wounds of years of maltreatment’ (Robertson, 2015). Reparations associated with financial compensation and other measures of restorative justice have still not been implemented. The Rudd Government and following governments have rejected moves such as the Stolen Generations Compensation Bill and the later Stolen Generations Reparations Tribunal Bill 2008 (Graham, 2018).The Bills included provisions that would significantly mirror Herman’s model to address trauma and aid the recovery from trauma by establishing ‘healing centres, community education projects, funding for funerals, community genealogy projects, funding for access to counselling services, health services, language and culture training, ex-gratia payments for the historical injustice of the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their families and creating a forum and process for truth and reconciliation’ (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008, p.4) to name a few.

CURRENT SITUATION

Rates of removal of Australian Indigenous children from their families remain very high and are increasing. In fact, Indigenous children are currently ten times more likely to be removed into out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016). Young Aboriginal people are also significantly more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system. While only 5% of young people in Australia are Indigenous, 39% of the young people under supervision orders in the Juvenile Justice system are Indigenous (AIHW, 2018). Indigenous young people aged 10-17 were 17 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people to be under supervision. (Australian Institute of

Health and Welfare 2017) Indigenous young people are convicted earlier and stay under supervision orders for longer (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012).

Front-line child protection workers receive limited training in understanding cultural competence and the quality of this training varies significantly with little evaluation of its quality (Finan, Bromfield, Arney and Moore, 2018). Cultural competence training needs to consider issues related such as Indigenous culture, collective experiences, historical events and diverse viewpoints, which 'not only requires empathy and understanding but also a commitment to diversity and the capacity to negotiate, work through differences and resolve conflicts'(Menzies & Gilbert, 2013, p.66). While an Australian national history curriculum has been developed with specific content about the Stolen Generations for secondary students, this content has been criticized as tokenistic and limited in its availability to students of different ages (Lowe and Yunkaporta, 2013).

The health and socioeconomic inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians remains stark. The most recent Prime Ministers Close the Gap report indicates that Australia is not on track to meet any of its targets for reducing health and socio-economic inequities (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017). A long campaign to constitutionally recognize Indigenous Australians as the first people of Australia remains unresolved. There have been cuts to Indigenous funding, and the Indigenous Affairs Minister has a tense and non-collaborative relationship with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (Butson, 2018; Keane, 2018; Thorpe, 2018; Higgins 2018; National Congress of Australia's First People, 2018). To date, there is no national Australian compensation scheme for members of the Stolen Generations, despite this recommendation from the Human Rights Commission. Australian states in Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales have set up compensation funds (Creative Spirits, n.d.-a). As recently as 2017, the New South Wales state Government introduced the 'Stolen Generations Reparations Scheme in recognition of the harm caused by forcible removal and provides ex gratia payments of \$75,000 Stolen Generations survivors' (NSW Government, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 2018). The inadequacy of the Australian Government response forms a marked contrast to that of the Canadian Government, who announced in October 2017 an \$800M compensation package for Indigenous people who had been removed from their families to residential schools (Tasker, 2017).

EXAMPLES OF OTHER TRAUMATISED AUSTRALIANS WHO HAVE RECEIVED PUBLIC APOLOGIES AND FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

The reluctance to financially compensate members of the Stolen Generations by the Federal Government is even more dispiriting when we draw comparisons with another group of Australians who have been recently awarded financial compensation for the suffering of their traumatic

experiences. In 2013, the Australian Government introduced retrospective legislation, to pay financial compensation to those Australians who were directly harmed in overseas terror attacks (Klapdor, 2013). The legislation was back-dated to include the US September 2001 terror events along with ongoing terror incidents and pays a lump sum of \$75,000 through the Australian Victims of Overseas Terrorism Payment (AVTOP) Scheme (Australian Government, 2013). The Federal Coalition Government's decision to acknowledge the trauma of international terror attacks around the globe is commendable. However, the blatant disregard for the Stolen Generations is at best, mean spirited and at worst, highly offensive. The Australian Government's refusal to apply the same standards of restitution demonstrates the contrasting principles underlying national policy as it applies to non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. Of course, recognition for those impacted by terrorism abroad should be addressed and managed through compensation programs, but so too should the members of the Stolen Generations. The incongruous nature of the restorative justice scheme raises questions about the Australian Government's unwillingness to take responsibility for state endorsed actions of human harm that have taken (and continue to take) place in our own backyard. The decision to pay victims of overseas terrorism also brings into question why the Australian Government has taken responsibility for international terror attacks rather than holding to account the various foreign countries who failed to protect Australian citizens.

The Federal Government awarded compensation to another group of people who as children were separated from their families, who also experienced the trauma of appalling conditions along with ongoing physical, psychological and sexual abuse at the Fairbridge Farm School (Creative Spirits, n.d.-b). The Federal and State Government acknowledged 'that they failed in their duty to protect the children', paid out a record 24 million dollars, the largest settlement to victims of institutional abuse in Australian history (Creative Spirits, n.d.-b). The experiences of both the children at Fairbridge Farm School and Stolen Generations are not dissimilar as each cohort of children were deprived of their families and often isolated in environments where they were treated like slaves (Creative Spirits, n.d.-b). However, financial compensation from the Australian Government continues to be denied to the Stolen Generations just as they were denied protection as children.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Report was released in December 2017. Less than a year later Prime Minister Scott Morrison made a formal national apology to the victims and survivors. In fact, twelve months before the Commission tabled the report; the Government gave assurance that there would be a redress scheme and announced financial compensation for victims of up to \$150,000 (Conifer & Beech, 2016). Decisions to confront the horrors of past child sexual abuse with a formal apology and strategies for implementing reparations is critical in the recovery from trauma for all victims and

survivors. However, the lack of action on the part of the Federal Government continues to plague the members of the Stolen Generations. The Federal Government needs to respond to the trauma of assimilation and child removals and must urgently move beyond symbolic gestures by implementing the Van Boven principles of reparation, including financial compensation payouts and introduce relevant services to aid the recovery. Moreover, if the Federal Government is genuinely committed to improving the health outcomes and life expectancy rates for Indigenous people, then it must view 'trauma as the key to Closing the Gap because trauma-informed practice is essential to making sure our people have access to health services to treat complex health needs' (Milroy, 2018).

CONCLUSION

To quote the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1999): 'without adequate reparation and rehabilitation measures, there can be no healing and reconciliation, either at an individual or a community level' (HREOC 1997 p.55). The momentum that built in Australia following Keating's 'Redfern speech' towards addressing the injustices and cruelties of past policies seems to have climaxed with the Rudd apology in 2008. Policy changes and statements declaring the importance of addressing inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians since then have been positive, and yet the general public discourse challenging victim credibility and worthiness of support remains strong, as does the widespread assumption that the symptoms of trauma, such as substance abuse, are cultural characteristics. Ideological policy has an important role to play, however it is only the first step in bringing about change, and is no substitute for meaningful collaboration, ongoing engagement, evidence-based and culturally appropriate strategies, and leadership in respectful dialogue.

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