

Alderson, P. (2018) Review of Joanne Faulkner, *Young and Free: [Post]colonial Ontologies of Childhood, Memory and History in Australia*, London: Rowan and Littlefield. 2016. For *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 26, pp. 183-5.

The lost and stolen child is seen as central to colonial and [post]colonial Australian in *Young and Free*. Colonialist-settlers continue in their efforts to modernise the Aboriginal people by imposing their imagined ideas of proper childhood on indigenous children, the age group most easily colonised and subdued. To the colonialists-settlers, the native children were innocent and impressionable blank slates, to be recruited into projects to control and manage their knowledge in boarding schools, orphanages or as slaves in settler households. Similar policies now displace refugee children seeking asylum in Australia out to offshore detention centres.

Joanne Faulkner traces how childhood has been a symptom of the state of the nation's drifting consciousness and the site of memory and also of forgetting and of the unconscious. Until the 1970s, many colonialists were sent to Australia as unwanted children themselves through penal and "philanthropic" systems (Dr Barnardo's was particularly active). In turn, as colonialists they imposed the same trauma of abrupt forced removal from family and culture onto indigenous children with the aim to destroy their culture. Faulkner contends that these deep levels of colonialism that penetrate the hearts and minds of all concerned need to be understood partly at psychoanalytic levels of trauma, as in the settler-colonials' melancholy about the lost white child in popular literature and films. She critically examines rhetorical use of the child witness in the Holocaust catastrophe literature and in trauma theory that are used to inform current attempts to deal with the continuing legacy of the stolen generations, and she argues for a more cautious approach.

Visions of white children as embodiments of a nostalgic British past are connected to sanitised versions of Australian history, which exclude both the violence perpetrated against Aboriginal people and the possibility that they have an authentic way of life. Notions of "home" are immensely complicated when they represent the lost native country of Britain and the lost lands and heritage stolen from the Aboriginal people. "Human rights" are similarly challenged when indigenous people and especially children are seen as hardly human (pages 182-192), even by such emancipatory thinkers as Hannah Arendt, and when they are often compared to animals with no rights to their land or to control over their lives.

After analysing these and many other complex and vitally important related problems in detail, Faulkner asks what work would need to be done culturally and in terms of ontology (recognising the real nature of the human beings and societies concerned) for the settler Australians genuinely to acknowledge their past and to support the Aborigines, in ways that Aboriginal social and political movements are already developing. *Bringing them Home*, the 1997 Report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, about the stolen generations of Aboriginal children, has fuelled the history wars public debates about the morality and effects of the Aboriginal childhood programmes. Faulkner draws on a great range of psychoanalytic and political writers who can inform such debates, including Walter Benjamin's attention to past points of resistance that are neglected in national records and may be brought into new use in the present. Benjamin sees history as a means of activating a hidden past to change the present, and Faulkner applies his concepts to uncover the hidden political history in order to inform current approaches to Aboriginal dispossession.

A major barrier to political change is the general international exclusion of childhood and domestic life from politics. Faulkner contends that these concerns must be brought into critical dialogue,

which recognises that the forced removal of children has to be central to present debate and struggle and to future policy. In a useful section on effective practical protest, she highlights comedy, which can seem 'childish' and apolitical, but can be powerfully subversive and destabilising. Comedy challenges dominant, though still too often denied, racist notions of masterful 'white' grown-ups and inadequate childlike 'native' people.

The book aims to reconceptualise "child", "memory", "history", "home", "nation" and "sovereignty" in order to decolonialise these concepts, and to foreground the reality of colonial violence in discussions about what it means to be Australian. Imagined notions of childhood shape not only the nation's history but also the biopolitics of its future. A proposed postcolonial model could learn from how the vulnerability of children has been disavowed in the past, in ways that seemed to justify settlers' mastery through their fear of the indigenous people, a fear that Faulkner traces in the formation of white Australian identity. Work to reconcile the accounts of Aboriginal people and of settler-colonialists needs to involve the deeply thoughtful political, social and psychoanalytic unravelling that Faulkner presents in a model of postcolonial analysis.

Clearly and powerfully written and very well organised, this book will be valuable to all advocates, researchers, lecturers and students of children's rights, with its vivid history of atrocities that emphasises the basic meanings of rights and the essential need for them. The political-psychoanalytic analysis covers vital yet often neglected dimensions of a nation's guiding subconscious hopes and fears. Faulkner impressively connects past to present, the explicit to the subconscious and politics to psychoanalysis, for example: "The refugee child – like the lost white child and stolen Aboriginal child – is the progeny of the modern nation-state, founded as it is on birth and homelessness" (p. 203). She is exceptionally respectful of children, asking Australians not to try to "grow up" into self-reliant sovereignty, but to accept responsibility for their infancy, which involves: valuing everyone's vulnerable interdependence; accepting that at all ages our relationships and understanding are partial and ambiguous; accepting that we all inherit past colonial injustices which we could all help to remedy; like children, valuing alternative perspective, time-out and subversive comedy; and acknowledging and scrutinising our fantasies, such as fear of the "other". Otherwise, Faulkner warns, Aboriginal children will continue to be refugees in their own country.

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