

The Midwich Cuckoos as a metaphor for the treatment of Indigenous Australian children as evil.

To begin with I would like to acknowledge how as a non-Indigenous speaker it is problematic that I am setting Indigenous Australian children up as other. However, I still want to speak out against structural racism toward Indigenous children in Australia in an international frame. I am not saying that Indigenous Australian children are evil. This paper is about the Australian Government's preponderance for evil laws about Indigenous Australian children. Laws involved in the Stolen Generations, the Northern Territory National Emergency Response and Don Dale Detention Centre to name a few. It is at Don Dale Detention Centre that I would like to focus on where Indigenous Australian children are being demonized.

I am reading the treatment of Indigenous Australian children as evil by the Australian Government through the novel *The Midwich Cuckoos* by John Wyndham. The film *The Village of the Damned* is based on Wyndham's novel.

A phenomenon occurs in the village of Midwich called Dayout. This is when everyone in the village falls asleep and xenogenesis occurs. Perhaps it should be called xenophobia, I will explain later. Xenogenesis is 'the implantation of fertilized ova' by aliens in all the women in Midwich of childbearing age (Wyndham, 67). Xenogenesis is defined in *The Midwich Cuckoos* as 'the production of a form that could be unlike that of the parent—or, should one perhaps say "host"?—it would not be the true parent' (Wyndham, 66).

In response to Dayout is Operation Midwich. Operation Midwich is like Operation Outreach—the Northern Territory National Emergency Response. With Operation Outreach the sexual abuse of Indigenous children is seen as a job for the army. An ambulance driver in *The Midwich Cuckoos* during Dayout says, 'Not our kind of job . . . the army's I reckon' (Wyndham, 26). According to Bernard the children born of xenogenesis represent 'not just a national danger but racial danger of a most urgent kind' (Wyndham, 207). The federal government under John Howard introduced Operation Outreach in 2007 (Wiki, N.T Emergency Response). This involved the implementation of 600 soldiers in the Northern Territory (Wiki, N.T Emergency Response). Three of the many colonizing measures involved in the Northern Territory National Emergency Response include: the mandatory possession of towns held under the Native Title Act 1993; the suspension of welfare payments to Indigenous communities; prevention of customary law and cultural practice consideration for Indigenous people in legal proceedings (Gibson, 2017). The Northern Territory Emergency Response also caused the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act on June 21st, 2007 (Gibson, 2017). The Racial Discrimination Act makes racial discrimination illegal.

The Northern Territory government implemented the publication of *Little Children Are Sacred* (Wiki, N.T National Emergency Response). Only two of the ninety-seven recommendations were implemented (Wiki, N.T National Emergency Response). The farce that the army represents in *The Midwich Cuckoos* is captured in the following quote. About Colonel Latcher and the Chief Constable Wyndham writes, 'Their grouping suggested an 18-century engraving of generals watching a battle that wasn't going too well only there was no visible battle' (34). Operation Midwich like Operation Outreach is paternalistic. Bernard from *The Midwich Cuckoos* states, 'I want a regular report on Midwich's state of health, mind and morale so that I can keep a fatherly eye on it' (Wyndham, 52).

The children spawned from xenogenesis are seen as an infliction (Wyndham, 82) and are spelt with a capital C (Wyndham, 110). The children are to blame for the 'hysteria' amongst the host mothers (Wyndham, 112). The children are to blame for causing Mrs Welt to jab herself with a pin (Wyndham, 105) and for Mr Harriman for bashing himself with his own fists (Wyndham, 106). The children are to blame for causing Jim Pawle to drive into a wall (Wyndham, 152). The children are to blame for killing David.Pawle (Wyndham, 161). The children are to blame for causing the riot at The Grange. The children are to blame for preventing the villagers from leaving Midwich. The children are to blame for killing four people and injuring thirteen during the riot. The 61 children are intruders (Wyndham, 114), invaders and the problem they present to the village of Midwich is primitive (Wyndham, 166). The children are golden eyed, fair haired and skinned (Wyndham, 114). The children are changelings (Wyndham, 113-114).

Karen J. Renner in *Evil Children in the Popular Imagination* defines changelings as the children of other species such as fairies, elves and trolls who are exchanged as human species (2016, 153). Renner says the changeling lacks two important qualities of children: 'innocence and vulnerability' (2016, 153). The changeling threatens the way adults 'control the knowledge children gain and the way that knowledge is framed' (Renner 2016, 153). The children are defined in *The Midwich Cuckoos* as animals, cuckoo-children (Wyndham, 114). Cuckoo children are seen as ruthless in their instinct for survival (Wyndham, 114-115). I see the cuckoo who lays eggs in the nests of other birds as the Midwich Cuckoos of the State which places Indigenous Australian children into foster homes in *The Stolen Generations*.

The Stolen Generations involved the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families by the Australian Federal and State government and church missions. According to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission: 'Nationally, the Inquiry concludes

that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970' (1997, 4).

The Stolen Generations could be continuing today. Gamilarai-Yawalaraay writer Lorena Allam warns how in N.S.W changes to child protection legislation could result in '810 and 815 Aboriginal children' 'on guardianship orders' being changed to adoption 'without parental consent' (2018). N.S.W Indigenous child and family services and legal centres say this will create another Stolen Generation (Allam, 2018).

The role of the host mothers in *The Midwich Cuckoos* is seen as like foster mothers (Wyndham, 113). The cuckoo chick is seen as greedy (Wyndham, 115) and as a monster (Wyndham, 121). Indigenous Australian children in the colonisation of The Stolen Generations have the hybridity of the changeling as seen by racists. Indigenous Australian people were categorised as not human, as flora and fauna by racists in Australia. The evil children in *The Midwich Cuckoos* are white skinned and blonde haired. Conversely, Indigenous Australian children that were taken in the eugenics of The Stolen Generations were often fair skinned. Although not just fair skinned children were taken. The hybridity of The Stolen Generations is often about turning black children into white children.

The evil children in *The Midwich Cuckoos* are not seen as individuals but as a group. It is believed that if one says one thing to one child then all the children will automatically know as if by telepathy. Zellaby says, 'But my point is this: it will not be an individual who answers me or performs what I ask it will be an item of the group' (Wyndham, 131).

The evil children are seen as two dimensional and indistinguishable. Wyndham writes about Zellaby studying the boys: 'the boys were so closely alike that he could not have identified them if he had tried; but he did not try; for some time, he had regarded it as a waste of effort. Most of the village—except for a few of the women seemed genuinely to be seldom in doubt—shared his inability to distinguish between them, and the children were accustomed to it' (146).

The children are seen as foreign. On the likeness of the children and their 'foreignness' Bernard says: 'As they approached, I found the likeness between them even greater than I expected. All four had the same browned complexions. The curious lucency of the skin that had been noticeable in them as babies had been greatly subdued by the sun burn, yet enough trace of it remained to attract one's notice. They shared the same dark-golden hair, straight narrow noses, and rather small mouths. The way the eyes were set was perhaps more responsible than anything for a suggestion of "foreigners" . . .' (Wyndham, 158-159).

Similarly, in the Four Corners documentary on Don Dale Detention Centre called *Australia's Shame* the misidentification of children as a group is maintained. Don Dale management misinformed the media that a group of boys had escaped their cells armed with broken light fittings and glass and started a violent riot in August 2014 (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). A group of children had not started the riot as only one fourteen-year-old Indigenous boy had escaped his cell (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). This was Jack Roper who had stolen a car when homeless (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016).

The title of a paper by Lorena Allam on May 2019 in *The Guardian* is “‘System is broken:’ all children in NT detention are Aboriginal officials say”. The evil children of Midwich are seen as youths when they are children. At nine it is said ‘They look fully sixteen or seventeen’ (Wyndham, 144). Similarly, it is groups of African or Muslim youth that are seen as the scourge of Australian society in the media.

In *The Midwich Cuckoos* the evil children are seen as having a different sense of community to the rest of the village. Bernard continues: ‘—their pattern is not, and cannot be by their nature, be the same as ours. Their ties to one another are far more important to them than any feeling for ordinary homes. Some of the homes resented them pretty much, too – they cannot really become part of the family, they’re too different; they were little good as company for the true children of the family, and the difficulties looked like growing’ (Wyndham, 140). So, they isolate the children and set up separate dormitories for them at The Grange.

Similarly, a nine-year-old Indigenous Australian boy in January 2019 in Western Australia was isolated in a storeroom after being assaulted by a vigilante for stealing a bottle of Coca Cola (Walsh, 2019). Back to Don Dale Detention Centre, the six Indigenous boys were locked in the isolation wing for twenty-three and half hours a day for fifteen days (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). The cells have no natural light or running water (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). The cells are hot with no air conditioning and smell of urine and excrement (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). Similarly, children as young as ten are being locked up in Watch houses in 2019 in Queensland (Willacy, 2019). However, this differs to the form of isolation in *The Midwich Cuckoos* as the children, male and female are being locked up with adult offenders some of which are child sex offenders (Willacy, 2019).

The evil children of Midwich are seen as a different species to the human species of the villagers. Therefore, the villagers must protect themselves from the children. Mr Leebody says: ‘Since they are another species, are we not fully entitled – indeed, have we not perhaps a duty? – to fight them in order to protect our own species’ (Wyndham, 170). Since the evil children are seen as different species to the villagers it doesn’t matter if you harm the

children. Similarly, the guards at Don Dale Detention Centre don't mind harming the six Indigenous children being held in the isolation wing. Only one boy was trying to get out of the isolation wing with a broken light fitting. The guards at Don Dale tear gassed six of the children at close range in the isolation wing (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). The six children were gassed for eight minutes and shackled (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016).

Another Indigenous boy who has been a victim of juvenile detention in the Northern Territory is Dylan Voller (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). In October 2010 Voller was tackled by guards lifted high in the air and hurled across the room (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). Two months later in Alice Springs prison guards stripped Voller naked and held him down with his buttocks exposed (Meldrum-Hanna 2016). In 2012 at Don Dale he was held down in a hog tie position (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). He was also straddled from behind by a guard who applied full body weight to his back (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). Lastly in 2015 at the age of 17 Voller was hooded and strapped into a mechanical restraint chair and left alone for two hours (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016). Children in detention at Don Dale in 2014 were moved to an adult prison which was against the law (Meldrum-Hanna, 2016).

In 2017 there was the Royal Commission into Don Dale Detention Centre. Two of the 230 recommendations were: to close Don Dale down; raise the age of criminal responsibility from ten to twelve (Allam & Davidson, 2019). Don Dale Detention centre has not been closed (Allam, 2019). Ken Davies the Northern family's chief executive said that more time was needed to raise the age of criminal responsibility. (Allam, 2019).

In fact, new legislation has been implemented for children in detention in Don Dale where the use of force is at eighteenth century standards. The new laws give guards more power to use force, restraints and separation and contradicts the findings of the 2017 Royal Commission into juvenile detention (Allam & Davidson, 2019).

The evil children of Midwich are not seen as human. Therefore, if the villagers of Midwich kill the children it is not seen as murder. Mr Leabody says, ' . . . the children do not have individual spirits . . . What, then are they? They cannot be what we know as man, for the inner image is on a different pattern—its likeness is to something else. They have the look of the genus homo, but not the nature. And since they are of another kind, and murder is by definition the killing of one's own kind, can the killing of one of them by one of us be, in fact murder? It would appear not' (Wyndham, 169-170). The evil children of Midwich are eventually murdered at the end of the novel. And that is the goal of the racist state in Australia: to kill Indigenous Australian children. Renner says, 'because changelings really are

monsters, we have a far easier time justifying our bloody retaliation against them' (2016, 154).

First there was the massacres involved in the initial colonisation of Australia and the frontier wars. Then there is the genocide of The Stolen Generations. These processes result in intergenerational trauma that causes suicide among Indigenous Australians. Lorena Allam and Nick Evershed in 'The Killing Times: the massacres of Aboriginal people Australia must confront' write, 'we have found that there were at least 270 frontier massacres over 140 years as part of a state sanctioned and organized attempt to eradicate Aboriginal people'. These massacres started in 1794 and ended in 1926 (Allam & Evershed, 2019). There have also been nine accounts of poisoning flour that was given to Indigenous Australian people (Allam and Evershed, 2019). Francis Jupurrurla Kelly states how, 'Many kartiya [whitefellas] were too greedy for our land and didn't see us as fully human' (Allam & Evershed, 2019).

The Stolen Generations are also genocide. Indigenous children were raped by white male settlers and in a horrific cycle some of those children who were the product of those rapes were removed and raped and their children removed.

Yawuru woman Shannan Dodson defines intergenerational trauma as 'The transfer of the impacts of historical trauma and grief to successive generations' (2019). Intergenerational trauma is linked to 'poor physical health, mental health problems, addiction, incarceration, domestic violence, self-harm and suicide in Indigenous communities' (Dodson, 2019). Dodson writes, 'My mob the Yawuru people from Rubibi (Broome) were often brutally dislocated from our lands and stripped of our livelihood. Our culture was desecrated, and we were used as slave labour' (Dodson, 2019). Dodson states how in 2019 'there has been at least 35 suicides of Indigenous people . . . in just 12 weeks and three were children 12 years old' (Dodson, 2019). The suicide rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 2.6 times the rate of non-Indigenous people (Dept of health, 2013). Indigenous Australian's also take their lives younger than non-Indigenous Australians where suicides occur before the age of 35 (Dept of Health, 2013).

To conclude, *The Midwich Cuckoos* is a science fiction novel and science fiction is colonizing. I acknowledge that it is ironic that I have used such a colonizing genre in conjunction with Indigenous Australian children when Indigenous Australian children are being colonized. However, there are parallels with the way the evil children of Midwich are defined as a group with the way Indigenous children are viewed at The Don Dale Detention Centre. There are also parallels with how the evil children of Midwich are seen as not human with the way Indigenous Australian people have historically been defined as flora and

fauna. Like the evil children of Midwich and the Indigenous children in Don Dale it is acceptable to harm them.

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