Colonial Powers' Removal of Indigenous Peoples: Forcibly Resettled North American Navajos and the "Stolen Generation" of Australian Aborigines

Ayane KIMURA

Graduate School International Studies, Kobe University, Kobe, Japan

This paper examines mobility as violence against indigenous peoples within the context of colonial history, offering case studies of North American Navajos and the Stolen Generation of Australian Aborigines. Colonization by Western countries has led to momentous changes in indigenous societies. Forcible removal from motherlands and kin is not an exception, but a typical feature of indigenous societies' colonial domination. Navajo people have suffered forced relocation twice, once in each of the 19th and 20th centuries. This is particularly egregious because Navajos have a special bond with their land, created by and springing from their distinctive custom of burying the umbilical cord shortly after a child's birth. Forcible relocation from the motherland thus means eliminating a relationship that the Navajo view as that between mother and child. Another case is the Stolen Generation of Australian Aborigines, who were taken from their original families when they were infants or small children. They were mostly removed from Aboriginal families to assimilate them into "white" society. Most were forced to abandon their culture and learn Western culture and English to be more "white," but they still experienced racial discrimination. Forcible separation from their original families deprived them of not only their families, but also their culture, language, and Aboriginal identities. These cases illuminate the violence of the mobility imposed upon them by colonial powers. The bondage with ancestral land, and the culture based upon it, is a crucial factor in both cases. Forcible separation from ancestral lands weakens spiritual connections and cultural identities. Further studies of mobility as violence against indigenous peoples would reveal greater detail of the impacts of colonial domination over indigenous societies.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, Navajo, Aborigine, Forcible relocation, mobility

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores colonial powers' forcible removals of indigenous peoples in two cases, the forcibly resettled North American Navajo and the Stolen Generation of Australian Aborigines. Throughout their history, indigenous peoples have experienced enormous changes after encountering European colonial powers, including being forced to move from their motherlands or be separated from their kin. Indigenous peoples usually have a spiritual connection to their motherlands, and their religions, habits, and lifestyles are often based on that connection. Forcible removal from the motherland can thus rob them of it, leaving them "orphaned" and marginalized. In addition, indigenous peoples tend to have social networks based on kinship and their cultural habits, values, and practices work through that kinship system. Separation from kin means they miss opportunities to learn their cultures and cannot position themselves within their social network. In these circumstances, forcible relocation is an act of violence perpetrated upon them.

Therefore, this paper examines two case studies to describe how forced migration has impacted indigenous peoples. The first is the case of the forcibly resettled North American native tribe, the Navajo—a somewhat typical case of taking indigenous people's land to obtain profits from their motherland, ignoring their cultural and historical context. The second case is a little different from the first—the Stolen Generation of Aborigines, Australian indigenous peoples taken away or kidnapped from their Aboriginal parents or other kin by state governments or Christian missionaries, in order to assimilate them into white European society in Australia [Read 1981; 1999]. Through these case studies, this paper describes how colonial power's forced mobility affected these indigenous peoples and what its meaning was to them.

Case 1—North American Navajo forcibly resettled

The Navajo are a Native American tribe of the deserts of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. Navajo experienced the first forcible relocation from their homeland in 1863, the "The Long Walk" in which the U.S. army forced approximately 8,500 Navajo people, including women, children, and elders, to walk more than 400 miles from Arizona to Fort Summer, a reservation in eastern New Mexico. This forcible relocation project was too unreasonable to complete, however. The procession was so hard that many Navajos perished from cold, illness, and starvation. During the Long Walk, the U.S. army abandoned Navajo captives in northern Arizona and northwest New Mexico in 1868, and this displacement largely changed the distribution of their population.

In 1882, a reservation for another Native American tribe, the Hopi, was also established in Arizona because the Hopi Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Department of the Interior, required two white missionaries' eviction from the Hopi's traditional territory. Thus, it was necessary to define their territory officially for that eviction.[1] President Chester A. Arthur issued an executive order granting the land "for the use and occupancy of the Moqui (Hopi) and other such Indians as the Secretary of the interior may see fit to settle thereon." This order required that not only the Hopi, but also "other such Indians" settled together within that reserve. In fact, approximately 300 to 600 Navajos were already there, and the government did not take into account historical contexts and cultural differences between these two Native American tribes.

These historical contexts caused a second forcible relocation. The Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act (Public Law 93–531) was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1974. With this law, an artificial boundary was established, and it split into halves the 1.8

[1] It is said that the reservation did not include much of Hopi's traditional land and significant spots for their ceremonies.

million acres of jointly owned Navajo-Hopi reservation, which had been formed in 1882. Then 15,000 Navajo living in the area, established as Hopi land with this law, were forced to relocate. These actions were ostensibly aimed at resolving the land dispute between the Navajo and the Hopi, a clash over land since 1882.

However, as Lacerenza pointed out, "It was actually the result of an ongoing effort to develop mineral resources in the area." The State of Arizona looked to the coal reserves located on the Navajo and Hopi reservation lands as a solution to its growing energy needs in the mid-1950s. A coalition of 21 utility companies from Arizona, California, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and Texas joined forces as Western Energy Supply and Transmission Associates (WESTA) to proceed with the "Grand Plan," including construction of massive coal and nuclear power plants fueled by the vast supply of coal and uranium around the Navajo and Hopi reservation [Lacerenza 1988]. Therefore, the Grand Plan necessitated relocation of the Navajo and Hopi from the land WESTA intended to develop. Just after The Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act passed, many Navajo resisted orders to relocate because they had strong attachment to the land. For instance, one cultural practice that solidifies the connection between a Navajo individual and a place is burying in the motherland their infant's umbilical cord shortly after birth. This practice anchors a Navajo individual to a particular place, and they explain that anchoring in terms of the relationship between a mother and a child. Schwarz pointed out that this attachment to the land differs totally from Euro-centric attachment. This aspect of the Navajo rationale offered by relocated people and resisters has been strangely muted despite the topic's media visibility and the foregrounding of Navajo narratives in several works on the subject [Schwarz 1997: 43–44]. Relocation from the place where this umbilical connection has been formed can be very brutal. One Navajo individual defined relocation as "dying a slow death." Schwarz says, "Such slow death results from being

cut off from the personal renewal attained from communion with one's special area within Navajo sacred space" [Schwarz 1997: 50].

Thus, the Navajo have established culturally profound connections with their motherland. Through burying the umbilical cord and other practices, relations between the Navajo and their motherland manifest their beliefs and cosmology. They regard human beings as an integral part of nature, which includes air, animals, plants, mountains, and all other natural elements in a single entity: Everything was born from "Mother Earth." Therefore, taking their mother from them constitutes "dying a slow death."

Another Navajo land problem is pasturing. The Navajo pasture livestock for a living, but this became difficult to continue after forcible relocation because the act of 1974 robbed them of enough space to pasture their livestock as they had done previously. As a result, many Navajo, especially elders who were unfamiliar with modern lifestyles and vocations, lost a way to earn their livelihood and were compelled to rely on public assistance.

In such a case, forcible separation means the power to compel indigenous peoples *not to exist physically on the land with which they have a profound bond*, thus depriving them not only of their vocation, but worse, of the historical and cultural bases that form their identity. Many Navajos who experienced forcible relocation faced pain, grief, and even social problems, such as alcohol addiction: "I think of home a lot.… I think and dream about that place where I once had my sleep.… I also think about my ancestors that walked that land. This worries me, this troubles me" [Aberle 1993: 170].

Case 2—Stolen Generation of Australian Aborigines

The Stolen Generation are Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, most of whom have partial European ancestry, who were forcibly removed from their original families by Australian authorities and Christian missionaries when they were infants or small children [Read 1981; 1999]. Taking indigenous children from their parents began just after colonization began in 1788, and continued until the 1970s. How many indigenous children were taken during this period is uncertain. According to the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, approximately 8% of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders aged 15 or older (26,900 people) answered that they had experienced forcible removal from their families of birth, and 38% had relatives who experienced forcible removal [Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010].[2] However, Read pointed out the difficulties of reaching an informed estimate of the number of Aboriginal children removed from their communities in the 20th century [Read 2003: 155].

The removal purpose was mainly to assimilate them into white European society.[3] In the mid-19th century, Australian authorities expected that Aboriginal people would be wiped out because of violence by colonial settlers and externally originating

[2] Even after 1970, which is officially the time that all acts and laws related to forcible removal of Aboriginal children were repealed, it seems that some Aboriginal children were taken away from their biological families to protect them from violence and neglect from by parents, ostensibly by child welfare acts. Aboriginal social activists who work for Aboriginal child welfare insist that Aboriginal children who have been forcibly separated from their families are a Second Stolen Generation because non-Aboriginal people, mostly white people still control the child welfare of Aborigines.

[3] In the first days of colonization, white colonists took Aboriginal children away from their families to obtain a workforce. Boys were mostly trained as farmers and unskilled laborers, and girls were trained as housemaids.

diseases to which they had no immunity. *Bringing Them Home*, a prime report on the history of Aboriginal children's forcible removal, states, "The violence and disease associated with colonization was characterized, in the language of social Darwinism, as a natural process of 'survival of the fittest.' According to this analysis, the future of Aboriginal people was inevitably doomed; what was needed from governments and missionaries was to 'smooth the dying pillow'" [National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children from Their Families 1997: 23]. The government decided to establish reserves for Aboriginal people, in order to segregate and protect full-blooded Aborigines from violence and disease. This meant that their lives were subject to nearly total control. Contrary to expectations, however, the population of children of mixed Aborigine/European heritage grew larger and larger during the 1930s. This situation required the Federal Government to convert their policy direction for indigenous peoples' issues. In 1937, the Commonwealth-State Native Welfare Conference was attended by regional representatives, such as Chief Protectors of all States except Tasmania and the Northern Territory. In the conference, all attendees agreed with the assimilation policy for indigenous peoples of mixed descent, signaling the beginning of national-scale forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their Aboriginal families. After analyzing assimilation policy in Australia, Moran pointed out that it was regarded as a proposed method of upholding a white Australia and at the same time resolving the Aboriginal "problem" despite the controversy [Moran 2005: 177].

In most cases, these children were adopted into white families or institutionalized in dormitories, such as child welfare homes, administered by white people. With their names changed from Aboriginal to Western, the children were usually taught English, European history, and culture as a Western way of life. In other words, they were trained to be "white" and to look down upon Aboriginal people and culture.

On the other hand, they faced racial discrimination for being "half-caste" because they could become neither completely "white" nor "Aborigine." As a result, they did not belong to either community and lost any opportunity to learn Aboriginal culture and language through their original families [Read 1999; Bird 1998]. One of the Stolen Generation, taken from his family at five and a half months and adopted into a non-indigenous family, recalled: "I have no identity. I always knew I was different. During my schooling years, I was forever asked what nationality I was, and I'd reply, 'I don't know.' I used to be laughed at, and was the object of jokes" [Bird 1998: 22]. Even if these children knew the location of their motherland or who their family members were, they would have had difficulty becoming acculturated after living in institutions and/or foster homes because Aboriginal culture is also based on the motherland and learned gradually as children mature.

Forcible removal has caused many physical and mental issues for children of the Stolen Generation. One case is that of Australian James Savage. In 1988, he committed a grisly murder in Florida in the United States. In Australia, Savage had been taken from his mother shortly after his birth and adopted by a white missionary couple. His adopted family emigrated from Australia to the United States, and he grew up there. He longed to know about his heritage and birth family, but was unable to find any information. Instead, he experienced acute racial prejudice at school, in church, and even within his home from his adoptive father. When he was 15, he began drinking and committing crimes. Finally, he perpetrated a murder in 1988 [Jacobs 2014]. This murder provoked great controversy about how forcible removal had affected the Stolen Generation mentally. Many Australians blamed the crime on the Australian government because the case suggested that Savage's forcible removal from his biological family and his childhood without any affection had clearly and deeply influenced him. Molly Dyer, a descendent of the Stolen

Generation and an Aboriginal social activist, bore witness to the situation Savage shared with other members of the Stolen Generation.

Taking indigenous children from their families is forced mobility by a colonial power, and the Stolen Generation were taken not only from their families, but also from their origin, their motherland. Since, for the most part, their records were lost and they have difficulty proving the location of their motherland, they usually cannot claim land rights. A national inquiry into the Stolen Generation implied that even if a claim were successful, it would be entirely up to traditional owners to decide whether they would accept a person taken in childhood and permit him or her to share in the enjoyment of the land. One member of the Stolen Generation, removed at 2 years old in the 1940s, said, "We can't even claim for that [our land], because we're not living on it. But that's not our fault. The government took us off our land, so how can we get land rights when this is what the government has done to us?" [National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children from Their Families 1997: 179].

Forcible removal by colonial powers against indigenous peoples

We have explored two cases of indigenous peoples' forcible removal by colonial powers. Clearly, such undesired mobility—from both family and place of origin—is perpetration of violence upon indigenous peoples. This would be a form of violence in any case—forcibly taking children away from their families or of relocating entire families and tribes. In both these cases, however, breaking the people's bonds with their ancestral lands and their cultures based directly on the land is a key factor for indigenous peoples: Forcible separation from ancestral lands weakens spiritual connections and cultural identities.

Such violence had not been publicly recognized until 2007, when the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples made clear in Article 7 that indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace, and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group. The Declaration also states in Article 10 that indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories, and no relocation shall take place without free, prior, and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return [UN 2007]. Obviously, the United Nations regards such force as acts of genocide and/or violence. In other words, indigenous peoples have the right to maintain their cultural identities, traditions, and customs inherited through their kinship and based on their motherland. Of course, these lessons derive globally from histories of indigenous peoples encountering colonial powers, not only Native Americans and Aborigines, but also the Inuit in Canada and the Maori in New Zealand. Most colonized peoples' histories share similar factors: violence, separation, and assimilation, including forcible removal from the motherland and families.

In the case of the Navajo, forcible relocation deprived them not only of the motherland inherited from their ancestors, but also their traditional vocations such as pasturing. This means they lost both cultural and economic bases after forced relocation from their lands. The Stolen Generation were taken not only from their motherland, but also from their families, culture, and societal structure. Forcible removal of children also stole opportunities for them to be "culturally Aborigine" in their own social network. Simultaneously, these children often faced racial discrimination in "white" society because they were "biologically Aborigine." Being neither "white people" or "Aborigines," they were marginalized.

Such forcible actions, however, do not mean that separation from motherlands or families *always* deprives indigenous peoples of their cultural identity. Some could maintain cultural connections with motherlands because, even after forcible relocation, they managed to find and reunite their families. We must note, however, that being relocated away from an original homeland and family without wanting to do so can damage indigenous peoples more seriously than non-indigenous people because they have different rationales for relations between human beings and their ancestral lands. Indigenous peoples often bond with the motherland far more strongly than non-indigenous people. Breaking this bond amounts to violence that can devastate their culture and communities, which are based on traditional lands and kinship. Such violence must be examined in relation to colonial powers and practices.

Another notable point is that in the two cases of forcible relocation explored here, the peoples ceased to be physically in their motherlands. For the Stolen Generation, however, many were so young that they do not know their own origins. Theirs was forced relocation without an origin, without a homeland, and this is a most disruptive form of violence against indigenous peoples. In addition, mobility without origin might give new perspective to immigrant studies, which usually discuss relations between an original place and a new land.

Finally, the relationship between an indigenous people and their land (or family) must be carefully examined, for each bond differs according to the historical and cultural context. Even though such cases share many aspects, careful examination of each cultural situation is essential.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined mobility as violence against indigenous peoples through two cases, forcible relocation of North American native Navajos and the Stolen Generation of Australian Aborigines. The Navajo were forcibly separated from their motherland, and the Stolen Generation were taken or even kidnapped from their families of origin in infancy or childhood. In addition to these two cases, indigenous peoples' histories usually share some characteristics, for instance, parallels in colonial domination and its aftermath. Mobility as violence is one of the most important factors in this context.

In many respects, this paper oversimplified the two cases and ignored their differences. As indicated, however, indigenous peoples all over the world have experienced parallels in colonization. An interesting study would be to compare experiences and describe commonalities in colonization.

Relations between indigenous peoples' attachment to place or kinship and mobility imposed by colonial—and now modern—powers should be further researched and discussed to offer fresh viewpoints not only on indigenous peoples, but also on human migrations.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the JSPS Core-to-Core Program (A. Advanced Research Networks), "Research on the Public Policies of Migration, Multiculturalization and Welfare for the Regeneration of Communities in European, Asian and Japanese Societies."

References

Aberle, David

1993 The Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute and Navajo Relocation Anthropological Approaches to Resettlement: Policy, Practice, and Theory. Michael Cernea and Scott Guggenheim, eds. Pp. 153-200. Boulder, Co: Westview Press.

Bird, Carmel

1998 The Stolen Children: Their Stories Extracts from the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. Random House Australia.

Jacobs, Margaret D.

2014 A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Lacerenza, Deborah

1988 An Historical Overview of the Navajo Relocation. Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine Vol 12 (3). Cambridge.

Moran, Anthony

2005 White Australia, Settler Nationalism and Aboriginal Assimilation. Australian Journal of Politics and History Vol 51 (2): 168-193. The University of Queensland and Blackwell Publishing Asia.

National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children from Their Families

1997 Bringing them Home: A guide to the Findings and Recommendations of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. East Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Read, Peter

1981 The Stolen Generations: The Removal Aboriginal Children in New South Wales 1883 to 1969. Occasional Paper. New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

1999 A Rape of The Soul so Profound: The Return of The Stolen Generations. Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.

2003 How Many Separated Aboriginal Children? Australian Journal of Politics and History: Vol 49 (2): 155-163.

Schwarz, Maureen Trudelle

1997 Unraveling the Anchoring Cord Navajo Relocation, 1974 to 1996. American Anthropologist 99(1):43-55.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

2010 Social and Emotional Wellbeing: Removal from Natural Family, The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oct 2010, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

United Nations

2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.