

Rabbit proof fence film analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Mahealani Subad When watching films that are based on true stories, the storyline is more sentimental to the audience as they realise that an individual's life is being presented to them. The movie, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Noyce et al. 2003), is based upon the lives of three mixed-race Australian Indigenous girls who were taken from their families and placed in a camp called the Moore River Native Settlement in 1931. Knowing that the interpretation from non-Indigenous people may lead towards the misrepresentations of Indigenous culture, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* captures the realities of the mistreatment Indigenous people throughout history. The film also captures the identity of indigenous people as the filmmakers took careful consideration into producing the film, such as casting Australian Indigenous actors and being mindful of the storyline they are telling throughout the film.

In the beginning of the film, the filmmakers presented brief information about an act made in Australia called the Aborigines Act of 1905 (Noyce et al. 2003). The Aborigines Act 1905 allowed for the government to authorize forcible removal of aboriginal or half-caste children for beneficial reasons such as to provide protection and/or care (Aborigines Act 1905). As the film continues, the three young female protagonists Molly, Daisy, and Gracie are seen interacting with their family speaking in their native language, Marduwanika (Quin 2002). However, the government has authorized for the removal of the girls and are to be placed in Moore River Native Settlement. In the scene where the girls are taken away by their mother and grandmother had a very emotional impact, especially on myself. The emotions on the mother and grandmother's face is heart breaking as they

plead for the officer not to take them. However, what made it emotional for myself is seeing the mother trying to run after the girls when they are driven away from their home, mourning the loss of their children as they lay on the ground crying, while the grandmother shows emotion of remorse and blame as she is seen hitting herself on the head with a rock. The impact of witnessing the government forcibly removing Indigenous children being taken away taken away from their family, it creates a new perspective for an audience to view Indigenous culture as it brought attention to viewers of the realities of the treatment Indigenous people struggled through during this time period.

In addition to capturing the realities of the mistreatment Indigenous people experienced, the production of the film made an impression that allowed Indigenous identity to be shown. The film's storyline was inspired and based on the novel, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, written by Doris Pilkington, in which, was based on Pilkington's mother, Molly Kelly, who had escaped Moore River Native Settlement, along with her sister Daisy and cousin Gracie, who had walked over 40 miles to return home (Quin 2002). As Pilkington published her mother's story and production for the film had begun, the screenwriter, Christine Olsen, and director, Phillip Noyce, had done intensive research and work to produce the story of properly. The screen writing process became a collaboration between Olsen and Pilkington, as Olsen traveled to Jigalong with Pilkington who introduced her to Molly and Daisy in attempt to perfect the script in order to tell their story correctly (Quin 2002). As for directing, Olsen wanted Noyce to direct her screenplay as one film in particular that Noyce directed called, *Backroads*, caught her

attention, in which, she stated, “[H]e treated the Aboriginal people as people, nothing more, nothing less” (Quin 2002). This quote and Olsen’s research into attempting to perfect the script stood out in my opinion as they took into consideration of how the community of Indigenous people felt when producing this film. Unlike film production such as *The Ridiculous Six*, in which, insulted Indigenous actors from the misinterpretations of Apache culture (Shilling 2015). Although the film was to be a satirical comedy, the filmmakers ignored the actors concerns for the offensive jokes stating, “ If you guys are so sensitive, you should leave” (Shilling 2015). In producing a film that presents a culture, whether if it is Indigenous culture or not, there must be a collaboration between the filmmakers and a representative of someone from that culture to gain an accurate presentation of the culture. Misrepresentations of cultures can lead into stereotyping the culture as that is what is being portrayed to audiences who have no prior knowledge of the culture being portrayed to them.

With the film facing the realities of the mistreatment Indigenous people experienced to collaborating with the Indigenous community to present this film, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, I believe was a well represented film that brought up an issue within history that many people did not know of. In comparison to Canadian Indigenous people, the Aborigine Act 1905 resembled a law in Canada that allowed the Canadian government to establish the Indian Residential School System to force Indigenous families to send their children to these schools in order to civilize the children into Canadian society (Elias et al. 2012). Although *Rabbit-Proof Fence* depicted a successful escape made by Molly and her sister from Moore River Settlement, the realities of

removing Indigenous children from their families had a traumatic experience. For those who were residential school survivors, they had formed a legacy of “ alcohol and drug abuse problems, feelings of hopelessness, dependency, isolation, low self-esteem, suicide behaviours, prostitution, gambling, homelessness, sexual abuse, and violence” (Elias et al. 2012). Knowledge of the residential schools in Canada are not taught or exposed as it is apart of history that the Canadian government is trying to diminish. For which, in my opinion, the government should require the school curriculum to teach about indigenous studies and the history about them to have future generation know of the real representations of Indigenous people and their culture, instead of learning from stereotypes through different forms of media.

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