

Book Review – [*Children of the Occupation: Japan's Untold Story*](#), Walter Hamilton, New South Books, Sydney NSW, 2012 ISBN 9781742233314 paperback, 304 pp

This book was sent to me for review by [New South Books](#) in July 2012 but as we have been travelling for the last few months it's been in the 'to read' pile for longer than usual. However once I started reading *Children of the Occupation* I found that I could hardly put it down and finished it within a couple of days. The book is very thought provoking, deeply moving and more than once I had tears in my eyes.

Why?

I have to say that it isn't a topic that I had any real personal interest in although I do like all things historical. There are a number of reasons why I found it hard to put down and so moving.

Firstly I found that it was a whole aspect of war that I had never really considered before in any depth. *Children of the Occupation* tells the stories of the thousands of mixed race children born during the occupation in Japan at the end of World War Two. It is also probably a story that applies to every war or colonisation throughout history.

These mixed race children were born as a result of prostitution, casual liaisons, longer term relationships, marriages and rape and involved all the occupying forces but mainly the Australians and the Americans. Many of the mothers were rejected by their Japanese families, abandoned by their soldier partners after the occupation and some were lucky enough to go home with them after their tour of duty. Many of the children were abandoned or ended up in institutions and orphanages where some were adopted. There are many variations throughout the book but what comes across is just how hard it was for these children and their mothers, and occasionally for the fathers.

I was surprised to learn that many of the Australian/Japanese babies were adopted by American couples but when you remember that we had the White Australia policy during this time, it is easy to see how mixed race children would not be allowed into Australia. This also went for Japanese war brides when some soldiers did try to bring their partners back home with them.

The book is a mix of historical account interspersed with personal stories from some of these children, now adults remembering back. Their memories can be quite sad reading and some did manage to overcome the prejudice and hardships they experienced as children through no fault of their own. The children of African American soldiers seem to have had a harder time because they looked even more different.

This is where my second reason for liking this book comes into play. With my family history interest it was not hard to swap these stories for similar ones where Chinese miners married European or Australian women or Indigenous women had children to Europeans. It would have been equally hard for the children of these relationships to deal with prejudice in colonial Australia. Today I know people who are proud of their mixed heritage but it would have been so different back then.

It also made me wonder about descendants of the Australia/Japanese children who went to America. Did these children marry and have children? Do their descendants know their heritage? Some of the children knew who their fathers were but many did not. If DNA testing continues to become popular in family history, it will be interesting to see if long lost lines are reunited.

But getting back to this review, the author has also given a very good analysis of the political times during and after the occupation of Japan. Although familiar with the White Australia policy, I hadn't realised just how hard they tried to keep Asians out of Australia. Given the policy wasn't repealed until the Whitlam government in 1972 it is well and truly within part of my own lifetime. Having read this book, I'm dismayed by our politician's response to the Australian/Japanese children born as a result of the occupation of Japan. But in the intervening years, Australia has become much more multicultural and I think today's society would react quite differently.

It's probably too late to do anything for these children of the occupation now as most have probably reached retirement age or have died. It was interesting to read a few stories where some have tried to track down their Australian relatives with mixed success.

Through the publication of this book, at least some of their personal stories have been told, as well as the history of the various projects set up to try and help them during their childhood and teenage years. There is now a greater awareness of their history and I'm really glad that I had the opportunity to read this book and broaden my understanding of the impact of war on all those involved.

For me it's a must read. Check your local library catalogue and see if it's available for loan or if you want to buy a copy, it should be available for \$39.99 from your local bookstore or online from [New South Books](#).

Happy reading.

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