



White Haze - Racism In Modern Australia

First Nations people of Australia continue to live with racism and genocide in a country too white to see. Often in discussion on racism in our country we point directly to the statistical discrepancies between our people and those from the dominant culture – statistics on incarceration, health, stolen children, poverty and education – and use those as indicators of racism.

These are indeed important points to make and they are evidence of racism in policy making and unthinking commentary. They are human rights or social justice issues arguably underpinned by racists attitudes but they are not the whole story. They are the outward evidence of an inner and hidden neo-colonial wilful blindness on behalf of those in power and the wider Australian population – both those of European descent and those who have come here from other places in recent times.

Staying with issues as the evidence of racism allows people to get off the hook. They can talk about improvements against government targets, programs to assist aboriginal people heroic and to tell heroic white bloke stories of themselves or family members as teachers or nurses in remote areas. They can do this without being challenged to see that they and theirs are part of a problem that didn't exist B.C (before Cook).

Racism in Australia today is much more civilised and palatable than in previous years. No longer are we hunted down, poisoned or removed to missions where our language, culture and spirituality was replaced by English, the western canon or Christianity. We are still incarcerated at levels way beyond the rest of the population, our children are being removed from their families at rates greater than previously, our health and education lag far behind and our levels of poverty, particularly in remote communities remains deplorable.

Katherine Murphy, in an article entitled *"Australia entering 'second convict age' as imprisonment rates soar"* in today's Guardian online newspaper, quotes research by Andrew Leigh which finds that:

"For Indigenous Australians, the incarceration trends are even more worrying. The research shows that over the past three decades, the share of Indigenous adults in prison has more than doubled, from 1,124 per 100,000 adults in 1990 to 2,481 per 100,000 adults in 2018. "Indigenous Australians are more likely to be in jail than African-Americans," the working paper says."

These things continue but under a polite haze of whiteness that nods respectfully and then says one or more of the following:

- 'That was a long time ago and I wasn't involved.'
- "That's sad. Yet bad things happened to (and they add the descriptor of their choice) women, LGBTQI people, disabled people etc, etc"
- "What about.. (and they add names of high profile FNP Australians) they are doing well?" The implication is why can't all the rest of you?
- "Yes, I know, I spent time with FNP in Central Australia so I know about this.'

The fact that the majority of FNP live (70+%) in the midst of the white haze in urban and major cities and not in in Central Australia is overlooked because we don't necessarily look like the stereotypical aboriginal and our art contains few dots. The fact is that the majority of our people now look a little more like me than the stereotypical understanding that we all have dark skin!

Behind me is a self-portrait entitled *"Living in a White Haze - Being Black in Australia"*. It is a commentary on both my own experience, the experience of other individuals and our people as a whole.

We are not seen but we can see what is happening. We are not heard because we have no voice, our mouth has been painted over, and no one talks with us because our ears have been painted out, they don't want us to hear. This painting reflects the wilful blindness of Australia to the invitation by our people as articulated in the Statement of the Heart for Voice, Treaty, Truth-telling and Reconciliation (Makaratta) which was dismissed out of hand by our Prime Minister in 2017 and again in 2019 by the Federal Government.

The white haze is a much more difficult form of racism to address. It's nice, outwardly respectful and reflects the over whelming view mainstream Australians have of them selves; they are good people and good people can not and do not do bad things, especially to the underdog or down and out, a concept that underpins the Australian identity myth, myth of fairness and fair go.

It allows people to view the world and those in it from a certain point of place in time and space - colonialism without the guilt. It prevents them from seeing others for who they are and for what they have and are experiencing. It is both an individual not seeing and a systemic not seeing. Each empowers the other to ensure white hegemony remains central to the forming of an acceptable understanding of Aboriginal identity.

It permeates how societies see aboriginal people – they can be successful sportsmen and women but they can not have a voice that challenges stereotypes (Nicky Winmar, Adam Goodes and others); they can be successful movie stars but are questioned when they choose to live a traditional life; they can be successful journalists, lawyers, professors but they will always have the prefix Aboriginal or similar attached to their name to show they are different, not the same; aboriginal art is identified as such by what white people like reducing artists to the exotic outsider and more.

The white haze covers up the authenticity and being-ness of Aboriginal people, individually and as a whole, in order to maintain power and control over the disputed and unresolved issues of sovereignty in this country. It is a continuation of the process of no one being here (Terra Nullius) when the land

was stolen, and if there was some one here, then and now, we can't see them, except through a white haze that renders them out of view and irrelevant.

The white haze did not and does not value our languages, spiritualities, cultures and land use and has forcibly replaced them with English, Christianity, western culture and land use practices from other places, all with tragic results for our people. We are the replaced people and we continue to be replaced by identity politics, political manoeuvring and denial of both our existence and our place as the sovereign people who have never ceded that sovereignty to whiteness.

The white haze covers up the potentiality of our people to be unless they become like the dominant culture in every way and disappear completely from sight. That seems to be the ongoing plan of white Australia.