



VOLUME 1

UNDER BUNJIL.

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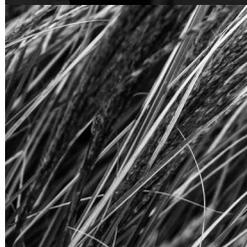
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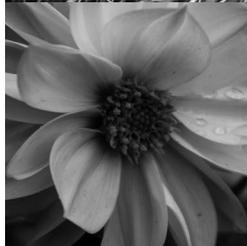
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TYSON HOLLOWAY-CLARKE, EDITOR.

Under Bunjil is the first of its kind. Named for the Creator Spirit of the Koolan Nations, this publication serves as a tool for the empowerment of Indigenous voices here at the University of Melbourne. Written and published by an Indigenous student body hailing from dozens of different nations, we all now live under the watchful gaze of the great eagle Bunjil. United in our place under Bunjil there is no greater place or way to share our stories.

Powered by the voices and drive of the Indigenous students, *Under Bunjil* serves as a place to share the thoughts and experiences of the Indigenous student body here at Melbourne. Some pieces are academic, others are creative. What is certain is that they are unique and powerful. No steps have been made to editorialise the works before you. No briefs were issued, no instructions given. The only advice given to the contributors was to be honest and write about whatever you like.

I couldn't be more proud of the magazine you hold in front of you. Every letter of every word in every article had its start in the mind of one of your Indigenous colleagues on this campus. Some of them you will know well and call a friend. Others you will never have met. Either way you will be awestruck by both their stories and their perspective on life. It is the unfortunate truth that Indigenous voices have either been muted or stifled in the past either through our own fear or the ignorance of others. Much is changing. As a people we are growing stronger and louder and people are willing to listen. While we cannot control whether others will listen, we can ensure we can be heard. I want to say thank you for picking up this magazine and listening, I am sure you will be challenged and you will embrace the works before you. I hope you enjoy.

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YOUR NEXT G...

MADE IN
MELBOURNE

GENOC...

Gen
Following

STOP
7 YEAR

PROSE.



BETWEEN TWO WORLDS.

KYLE WEBB.

Underneath all the uninspiring rubble and refuse that is the current state of Indigenous affairs, a bit of “news” has recently grabbed me by the throat and threatened to rip it out onto the steam-cleaned, white carpet of today. That is:

The rate of suicide amongst young Indigenous people is amongst the highest in the world, if not the highest, concentrated on a single demographic.

This phenomenon also happens to be a very recent development and it does not appear that the 25 or so billion invested into ‘Closing the Gap’ and the ‘Super-Special Emergency Interventionism’ are putting any dent in the entrenched poverty and marginalisation of the First Nations and their people.

Suicide has been a shadow in my life as well and I’m going to talk a little bit about it as a young Dharug man. In the last few months alone, the puffy-hot rhetoric of ‘tough love’ from the anointed dog-catchers of Indigenous affairs and the haunted look that one of my elders gave me when telling the suicide story of her god son, has had me reflecting inwardly quite a lot since I last wrote. It is not an easy topic to contend with, as a mere sidelong glance at the nexus of hurt which gives power to this heart-rending phenomena can lead one to question the very future of Indigenous identity.

Feels heavy when you let it sit on your shoulders.

In the future, I may write in more depth about that nexus, but here and now I will just share a little bit of insight from my own personal experiences as a young Indigenous man. Two experiences which stand out quite vividly both occurred within the context of education — the so called vanguard of enlightenment and prosperity for Indigenous people (to use the taxonomy of the deaf).

The first experience was in my last year of high school, where I struggled greatly. Struggled so much that I almost dropped out due to serious illness and family upheaval. Yet, I stubbornly persisted with gritted teeth, as well as making the many mistakes and fumbles. Mistakes that many of my peers are familiar with. As part of my HSC assessment and for my favorite subject, Society and Culture, I was required to complete a kind of ‘mini-thesis’. This assessment would require me to conduct research and produce original work over the course of the school year.

This was really quite daunting, but also a rather exciting prospect as it embraced the idea of critical thinking and original thought, of which there is a considerable dearth in secondary education. It also gave me the opportunity to explore a part of my identity and heritage as an Indigenous person, and very few opportunities of that sort were available to me. After watching Nicholas Roeg’s 1971 film, *Walkabout*, I thought about the noun’s use in Australian vernacular and decided that I wanted to discover the origin of the word. It was an amazing opportunity to take just a little bit of control over my life and contribute something to my Indigenous heritage. You know? Self-Determination? Stiff upper lip? Personal responsibility/accountability? All that good stuff that good little Indigenous kids are supposed to do.

I discovered that the term was historically used as slander towards Indigenous people, their perceived unreliability and lack of hard working decency displayed during the early days of invasion. An amusing idea when you consider that the First Nations were primarily nomadic in their lifestyle, and that the land was and still is, their home.

I sincerely doubt that you would take kindly to someone telling you that you’re an uncultured savage for pottering around your own backyard.

As I began to write up my research my teacher/supervisor informed me that usage of the word ‘invasion’ and other ‘controversial’ terms in the research would likely result in a loss of marks. The reason being? An examiner may take issue with that description of

(forced) European settlement. Being young, troubled and desperate for any marks to pull me through, I relented. I was not supported in telling a part of my own history, and it is an experience that I am ashamed of.

Later that year it was time to consider my potential enrollment into university. It was an exciting time, because I never personally felt that I was worthy of a ticket into higher education, and I was never encouraged otherwise by the education system until the last year of my secondary schooling. Exciting, because I had no idea what was around the corner and that I might have a stab at earning myself a little bit of achievement. Given that I was applying to The University of Melbourne through an alternative degree pathway for Indigenous students, I went through a stringent process (to top off the pain and anxiety of my HSC) of selection, because the university was ‘the elite’ and ‘open only to the best’. Included in that process was an interview in front of a panel of highly ranked staff.

I remember one of the Indigenous members of the panel asking how I associated with my heritage. I gave him an honest answer. I had known since as early as I could remember, that I was an Indigenous person. Dharug. And that it was an intrinsic part of my whole identity, despite needing a piece of paper to prove it. However, I apparently had not given a satisfactory answer, because the inquirer snapped a revised version back at me to which I did my best to respond. I was quite rattled by that experience, feeling as if my experiences as an Indigenous person were questionable. I certainly remember being teased for being a ‘coon’ and an ‘abo’ at various points in my schooling, and I didn’t need a piece of paper to earn that.

Those are just two vivid memories I have among many, which are part of a broader narrative. Vivid memories which remind me that I’m caught in the wildlands between two great cities. One city sparkles in the glow of power and privilege. The other, a fractured and crumbling grid smeared with blood and tears, with an ivory tower standing at the center of it.

Recently, I turned 24. I can honestly say that there have been many, many times in the past where I believed I would never see the next day. Indeed, at times in the past, I would have openly embraced death because such sadness eats you from the inside. Today, I have a future. I have a piece of mind after putting a great many hurts to rest. But those are all things that I have found through my own stubborn desire to live and find some bit of dignity for myself. My own stubborn willingness to question what I am presented with as reality by those who have more power than I.

I am a survivor. There’s no prize lover, no camera lights and golden confetti to show for it. Just fact and the clarity of a still, restful silence. Like sitting with a hot cup of tea during the unfurled grey of winter, with nothing but the warm fire of reflection for company. Yet, I think of all the Indigenous youth who are cutting open their veins, hanging themselves from trees and tearing their hearts out, and I have nothing but sympathy for them. Being caught between two worlds is enough to rip anyone apart. Being shouldered with the desires and political bankruptcy of the two, uninspired worlds is enough to crush anyone down like a cheap soda can. The wildlands is a place with no safe roads. A place where you will lose your innocence, harshly, one way or another. A place where you must simply survive.

A pasty-faced white boy at an academic college I attended in the early days of my degree once deadpan asked me: “what was so hard about being Aboriginal?”

I think about the wildlands, where sadly, the only way to lay down your burden is to lay down your life.

ON LOOKING ‘WITHOUT’: LOOKING WITHIN.

PIERRA VAN SPARKES.

The desperate plea “Who Am I?” has plagued people and many a melodramatic movie scene for what seems like forever. Unlike a tortured lead in the latter, however, I’m not on my knees yelling at the sky. Like you (I would imagine) I’m on the tram, I’m in a lecture, I’m in my own head constantly mediating a lifetime of assigned and autogenic identity. As such, my Aboriginality is no exception to this ipseity double-dutch. If anything – living with respect for my familial network of mooditj matriarchs, and a deep desire to contribute to the continuation of this network – this element of my identity is frequently at the forefront of my mind. As I pursue Indigenous Studies at uni and react to the plethora of racist policies insidious in current affairs, my ‘cultural background’ thrives at the foreground. When asked from where my inspiration to pursue Indigenous studies stems, I’ll often punctuate my sincere answers with a laugh: “Oh, and as a bit of a narcissistic Noongar woman I guess you could say I’m interested in myself”. At this point in the conversation more often than not I can discern a momentary shift in energy. More often than not, my companion seems a little surprised. Is it my faux self-proclaimed narcissism? No, surely they can detect my joking tone. And then it hits me: this likely has something to do with me appearing far fairer than most would primarily associate with Aboriginality.

Now I’m obviously not the first, nor the last to speak on the subject of physical traits being conflated with Aboriginality. Nor do I fancy myself any kind of authoritative voice on the matter. On the contrary, I am one of many reflecting on a series of uncertainties that have, and I suspect will continue to, craft my sense of self. In writing on the subject, I’m taking the opportunity to figure some stuff out. Crucially, I want to highlight these experiences as my own. I endeavour to distance myself from speaking on behalf of others, however I invite you to find solace in our shared anxieties and experiences if these sensations of pride and twinge are familiar to you.

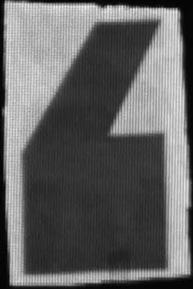
Without question, I am proudly Noongar – and I’m going to assume we’re across the notion (or rather, the Truth) that the colour of one’s skin doesn’t ‘diminish their Indigenaity’ – whatever that’s supposed to mean. At this juncture, I would usually be inclined to posit that such a superficial characteristic has nothing to do with my or your or their Aboriginality – however upon reflection I would like to further probe this assertion. Is that a red flag you see? I promise you, this isn’t Bolt writing under some wacky pseudonym. Please, stay with me while I explain. In no way do I neglect the significance and value some find in making this assertion. In some instances, especially the most infuriating of ignorant exchanges, it succeeds to combat the kinds of fixed images of Aboriginality one might find in a kitsch piece of Australiana or a Luhrmann flick. In other, less situational instances, I appreciate it might hold a great significance to individuals and families affected by immediate and ongoing repercussions of the stolen generations. However, I find this sentiment might inadvertently be reiterating rather than retiring the union between appearance and ‘authenticity’ – especially in the aforementioned efforts to challenge tokenistic projections of Aboriginal identity. While we often reject this problematic a-word ‘authenticity’ as an a-hole colonial construct, the truth is the notion very much permeates throughout internal and external visions of Aboriginality alike. As such, when we feel the need to pardon seemingly superficial elements of our lived experience in order for outsiders – and even ourselves – to understand or accept our Aboriginality, are we acknowledging the physical trait as something ‘inauthentic’? In doing so are we not also subscribing to a homogenous vision of Indigenaity? No really, I’m asking. I’m not quite sure yet.

It would be something of an oversimplification to neglect the ways in which the colour of my skin occasionally impacts my lived experience, and thus formulates my identity. This doesn’t make me any ‘more Aboriginal’ or ‘less Aboriginal’, just my experiences

different to others’. And that’s okay. Except when it’s not. One of the differences that can make things a bit complicated is my superficial encounters with that old chestnut white privilege. It would be disingenuous of me not to acknowledge that, consciously or not, I can and do profit from its effects. On the other hand, where my appearance might repel some forms of racism, it also leaves me vulnerable to others. I cannot tell you the number of times I’ve been privy to some outrageous candid racism, and often from whom you’d least suspect. I can hurl a retort ranging in eloquence from “Fuck you, bigot” to something more informed; however when not met with embarrassment, or apologies, frequently my retort is nullified with “I Don’t Mean You”, or “What Would You Know? If I care to share the fact I am one of the [insert slur or stereotype here] my present company is talking about, I am met with ardent disbelief or even worse, a sympathetic “Don’t Worry, You Can Barely Tell”. This worries me.

Being subject to invalidations of identity from both Aboriginal and settler people can leave me, and many others I’ve conversed with on the subject, in something of a cultural Catch-22. Not only are these invalidations of ‘authenticity’ eventually internalised harmful to the individual; beyond the personal these attitudes are also an insidious persistence of blood quantum rhetoric, contemporary continuation of colonisation, and the erasure of Indigenous identity.

We so often endeavour to combat the erasure of Aboriginal identity, that there is rarely appropriate opportunity to discuss how sometimes concessions of your Aboriginality can and do invade your headspace. I emphatically distance myself from subscriptions to narratives that ‘qualify’ Aboriginality by experiences of struggle – but every so often, when self-assurance falters, I am coerced by a colonial compulsion to ‘qualify’ myself outside my own terms. Every so often, I can deflect external and internalised digs at my Aboriginality with reflection that I would not in fact be having these conversations – be they with myself, an adversary, or a newspaper – if I wasn’t ‘authentically’ Noongar. Again, whatever that’s supposed to mean. Or rather, whatever that means to me.



“WE ARE ALL JUST HUMAN, WE ARE ALL EQUALS”.

A VISIBLE SILENCE TO INVISIBLE WHITENESS. BY ALEXANDER GARAY.



There is a fear that this essay will turn into a discussion solely written about and for white people and their whiteness. The essay question asks to define the arguments for making ‘whiteness’ visible. The question, also assumes that whiteness is ‘invisible’. To whom is whiteness invisible? It is not invisible to me. Braun and Clarke believe that it “is important at this point for us to acknowledge our own theoretical positions and values” (84) when undertaking our own works. I identify as a Torres Strait Islander, Puerto Rican, Malaysian person - because of my skin colour, my identity usually is labelled as black. Whiteness, as a concept will be discussed throughout this essay, as it is not something that has been invisible to my community or me. Rather, Whiteness is a very visible and prevalent part of many black people’s experiences, as discussed in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (1995), bell hooks writes of these “representations of whiteness in the black imagination” (34). Further, hooks goes on to discuss the ‘disbelief, shock and rage’ (34) of her white students, as her black students openly analyze the ‘whiteness’ of their classmates. The very fact that the white students are surprised that their black peers are studying them with ‘a critical “ethnographic” gaze’ is another form of internalized racism (hooks 34). This essay will argue that whiteness is for the most part invisible to white people and highly visible to non-white people even though it affects their lives equally. Firstly, I will discuss the definitions of whiteness and their implications but will do so reflectively from positionality that makes up my identity. Secondly, I will explore the idea of a ‘Race CV’, a way in which many white people attempt to let themselves ‘off the hook’ in discussions about race. Lastly, I will discuss the idea of colour blindness and its implications. I will use a recent conversation as an anchor to explore and unpack these ideas.

In thinking about the underlying assumptions of Whiteness – defining it can prove difficult. Much empirical research has labeled Whiteness as “complicated and multifaceted, always changing and shifting depending upon its historical context and specific social location” (419). Under this model, it is easy to see that Whiteness for some can be challenging to view or accept– while for others it is engrained within their everyday life. Therefore, this essay will contextualize an experience of whiteness as portrayed in a recent conversation I had with a friend of my partner’s. For the purposes of this essay I will call her Bev. The decision to write about this experience extends from my learnings about Whiteness, and the steps it takes to review, shape, and uncover the many challenges Whiteness holds for those who see Whiteness every day. For Bev, this was, partly, her introduction into taking off the ‘ignorant lens’ that comes with the lack of basic education and regard for the very essence of

Indigeneity, Whiteness, and indeed, racial literacy as a result of systematic oppression, and in some instances institutionalized bigotry of the ‘black bodies’.

Bev was recently in Melbourne attending a national dance festival showcasing original works by national choreographers. She participated in the National Dance Forum where different discussions were held over several days. I must mention also that Bev teaches dance in high school and tertiary institutions. Bev identifies as a white, heterosexual woman who lives and works in Perth, Australia. During the forum there were breakout discussions, with the idea that the main points would be shared in a group discussion at the end. On one of the days there was a group of Aboriginal elders and dancers who (in her words) “hijacked” the conversation. I am interested in her choice of the word hijacked as it conjures up a sense of terror. One of the young male Aboriginal dancers started to do a performance where he was physically hitting himself in anger. One of the elders explained that this was attempt to have more Aboriginal voices in the forum. Bev said that out of the many white people in the room, only two spoke out. Ironically, one was a woman from England who criticized her white peers for not listening. The other was a white Australian woman who voiced that many of the (white) attendees had been out to remote communities and worked with Aboriginal people. I like to call this a “Race CV”, when white people point out their history of involvement with Aboriginal People. They are attempting to prove their commitment to anti-racist work but are at the same time externalizing themselves from the conversation. This particular rhetoric has a crucial link to the way in which white people perceive themselves and their position within race. Frankenberg (p. 6) exposes the preconception of many white people that race is not an issue that directly affects them. They associate racism with non-white people and are therefore absolving themselves from responsibility. Frankenberg describes and asserts the implications of this below:

With this view, white women can see antiracist work as an act of compassion for an “other”, an optional, extra project, but not one intimately and organically linked to our own lives. Racism, can in short, be conceived as something external to us rather than as a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self (Frankenberg 6).

Bev’s view of the ‘hijacking’ positioned her outside of the discussion about race. She did not see how the conversation directly involved her as a white woman and how she may have benefited from silencing the “others”. Watson et al (2015) note that whiteness studies places importance on the intellectual comprehension and leaves out the way white people feel about race. As our discussions



progressed, Bev started implying that her voice wasn't being heard. She was frustrated that this group of people had more time to talk than her. Dyer (10) calls this 'me-to-ism', a feeling that non-white people are taking away the attention of white people. This is a technique employed by white people to gain back 'all the attention once again' (Dyer 10). It is a way of making the space 'safe' once again for white people to talk about and for other white people.

She began to explain to me that she would prefer to have a more colourblind approach in these forums. She said things like "we are all just human", "we are all equals". She was in fact speaking from her position as a white woman but she could not see that. She perceived her voice as neutral and the Aboriginal voices in the room as somehow biased. She was articulating the idea that we are all the same, she was investing 'in the myth of "sameness"' (hooks 35). hooks discusses this in terms of investing 'in the sense of whiteness as mystery' (35). Modica (397) talks about colour blindness as a way in which white people can dismiss 'present inequality while maintaining their status of privilege'. This rhetoric shuts down meaningful conversation about race and implies that we all share equal status in society (Modica 397-8). Perhaps this is what silenced her and her colleagues during the discussion mentioned earlier. Perhaps her ideas around colour blindness inhibited her from having a broader conversation about race. Her colour blindness made her believe that her experience was no different to the Aboriginal People in that room (DiAngelo 205). Di Angelo summarizes this by saying:

Living in segregation where we are not exposed to the perspectives of people of colour, and within a culture that centralizes the white perspective (in history, media, etc.), leads to this assumption. On the occasion that we do have the opportunity to hear the perspectives of people of color, we often don't listen, or not understanding their experiences, we minimize and discount them (DiAngelo 205)

This silence is a recurring theme in conversations with white people about race and should be researched in more depth within Australia.

Bev had some revelations during our discussion. She did not realize the patterns she was articulating. She did not see her position of privilege, her whiteness. She saw race as external to her experience when in fact it informs almost everything that she does. I think Bev would be surprised to read this essay. She would be surprised that people are interrogating and studying her whiteness. That people in similar positions to me see her whiteness all the time. Her idea that colour blindness is "liberal" and "fair" are all ways of retaining power for herself and her peers.

This conversation, although personal, feeds into a broader need to discuss these issues with one and other. It is vital that white people are participating 'in critical engagement and dialectical exchange with non-white peers' (hooks 104). I find strength from the Aboriginal people in the forum who took a huge leap of faith to begin this exchange.

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DEREGULATION, CENTRELINK AND ABORIGINAL STUDENT POVERTY.

MADDEE CLARK, BUNDJALUNG COUNTRY.



As I write this I've been on hold to Centrelink's Aboriginal line for one hour and fifteen minutes (and counting). I have a Centrelink debt after being overpaid. It was an honest mistake, I'm trying to arrange a payment plan to pay the government back the money which will be taken out of my future payments from them (unfortunately they don't pay me an allowance to stay on hold to their 1800 number for hours at the beginning of every study period), but I have this sick feeling thinking about how if I hadn't been wrongfully paid the money I'm now paying back I would have been in a lot of trouble last year. I was working as an Indigenous student representative in the University of Melbourne student union for the year, which, thankfully, is a paid job (albeit with a honorarium of around \$350 a fortnight for what is sometimes more than full time hours, less than a living wage but more than what a lot of others are paid) in addition to taking on casual and sessional work as a teacher and researcher when I could get it.

This year I've started a Ph.D at the University of Melbourne and have had my first informal meetings with my supervisor. As we were discussing my timelines for study in the next six months she mentioned to me that I probably shouldn't try to work more than two days a week because I should be working on my thesis every day full time. I was kind of stunned, even though I understood her reasoning and was aware that Ph.D's tend to, you know, take a lot of time. I have been on Newstart (the dole) since graduating in 2013 and because it has been a year since I entered the system and the multiple sources of casual and part time work that I've been sustaining all year has slowed down (aka I'm now properly really unemployed instead of just underemployed), I now have to apply for a huge amount of jobs that I can't actually do in order to get my allowance, and am threatened with the possibility that I'm going to have to go on a work for the dole program. My full-time Ph.D is, contrary to what the University has told me, not counted as work (or even as study) under Newstart.

Alongside this, I may not be accepted to be on a study allowance due to the fact that my discipline is, like lots of disciplines outside of science, medicine, and education, not considered by the Department of Human Services to be one of the vital areas to be prioritised in giving out student benefits. I have not received a commonwealth

APA scholarship (the standard Ph.D Commonwealth living allowance granted to many Ph.D students, designated through universities) despite being ranked highly within our school out of a huge amount of applications, due to the downsizing of the Arts faculty programs and higher education funding cuts over the years. Many of the senior academics have remarked to me that this increasingly pressurised situation is untenable within the Faculty of Arts and pushes even some of the more privileged students out of study.

This semester I am not able to teach in my discipline because Ph.D students within the faculty are encouraged not to teach in their first year so that they can focus on their studies, as Arts Ph.Ds tend to take a long time to complete. Universities, getting a lot of funding and research out of Ph.D cohorts, become impatient with low and/or slow completion rates because they need to balance out the costs and benefits of having the Ph.D students they take on.

Graduate students are squeezed into the university in this way all the time. We are expected to finish on time so that the university can be paid, and expected to teach, produce research, and participate in the academic community, often without being paid at all. In combination, all of this means that we are expected, at times, to be working for the university for free. The institution reaps the benefits of the work I produce, they congratulate themselves every year for meeting targets based on Indigenous presence and achievement, and ultimately they will get paid when I finish my doctorate.

Meanwhile I have no idea how I'm going to make this year financially viable. Even sessional teaching, despite how casualised it is and how insecure it leaves staff members, provides financial security during semester that I can rely on to pay some bills. I also involve myself in community work in various ways, as most Aboriginal people who are studying do, which we often do in unpaid roles.

When I first moved to Melbourne at 18 I was homeless and did not have access to Centrelink at all. I drifted in and out of houses and had intermittent periods with no income and no house of my own, couchsurfing with whoever would allow me to stay with them. When I did have a place, or was able to work, I wasn't always in a place to be able to manage my own finances. The cracks in student services at the University of Melbourne were already appearing post-the Melbourne Model, the restructure of 2008 that preceded 2014's



next big shift, the Business Improvement Plan, which made and is still making up to 500 professional staff across the whole University redundant and needlessly impacted the health and stress levels of many more. Indigenous services at the University have been patchy and unreliable at best during this 6 year period, and have been restructured 4 times. While the university funds targets like Aboriginal research, development, 'partnerships' and parity, Aboriginal students often have no support navigating study, housing, and the various bureaucracies of University life.

In 2009, when I first came to study, the University had just evicted SHAC, a housing protest by students on Faraday street against housing inequities. I was offered a place living in university housing for \$600 a month under a scheme they'd developed in response to the protest, living with five strangers. I refused in favour of my own (what turned out to be quite dangerous and illegal) housing option I'd organised after answering an ad in a Melbourne paper, desperately, which was far cheaper and seemed somehow more reassuring. Melbourne University's housing programs have since fucked over a lot of Aboriginal students I know and been partly abandoned.

One woman who had been a professional staff member remarked to me that the admin at the university was falling apart and the university with it. At 18, it surprised me. I'm the first person in my family to go to University of Melbourne and my family were very impressed with me for getting in. The University has a facade of elitism, prestige, tolerance and worldliness that it cultivates and likes to represent with. It has been hungry for numbers of Aboriginal students in the past few years, keen to demonstrate their capacity for "reconciliation" and "parity". My grandparents can proudly tell people I go to a sandstone when I sometimes had low expectations placed on me as an Aboriginal young person with mental health issues from a "troubled" family.

My Centrelink case worker has remarked to me in the past that over the last fifteen years that she has been in her job, it becomes more and more impossible. She is constantly having to force people into more and more difficult positions in order to get them their benefits, when we all know that not everyone will be able to get a job, it's just not possible.

I have not really been studying lately, mostly because I am angry that I would have to do it for free, that if I was really wealthy or really employable or had well off parents that were supporting me then doing my degree would be something that wouldn't send me broke or cause me unhealthy amounts of stress. I'm angry that I can't justify doing this at all even though elders in my community have urged me to finish. Obviously my refusal to participate in my expensive degree only hurts me.

I'm not doing so badly right now; which is what I tell myself when I have no money- I'm living day to day with no savings but I still have transport, a bed and a roof and I'm not starving, and have a strong support network, which is the biggest privilege of all. When I'm broke I am absolutely certain that people will support me. If I became homeless I know I would be able to survive that. I know that because these possibilities have been present for me for years now and I know how to work with them. I can and most likely will work this year to sustain myself. It's still hard not to have a meltdown.

This experience has reminded me how dangerous being an undergraduate student was for my health and how many times I nearly had to drop out because I was studying full time and working just enough to cover my rent, how many subjects I failed because I was too tired to read or attend class and I had no support. When I was a student representative I spoke to a lot of Indigenous students who slept rough, had really dangerous living situations, were intellectually brilliant and were treated like actual dirt by the University administration and non-Aboriginal student representative bodies.

It's not about individual difficulty or one off cases of even just about one government or University policy in isolation, many things combine to create the situation where we can take care of ourselves adequately (let alone do real, good work that we want to do for our communities and have external lives) impossible enough that we can't go to university. This is the reality for Aboriginal students who go to university. It's about our day to day experience, of having to be wary and strategic when dealing with organisations who are supposed to be making it easier. It's not just about course fees or increases in HECS debt, but as I'm learning, debt does make it worse. It's terrifying to think of how many Aboriginal students are doing worse off than I am, for longer periods of time.

INDIGENOUS EXCELLENCE, INDIGENOUS WHAT?

TODD JAMES FERNANDO.

As a country, we've gotta embrace Aboriginal success. Money and materialism shouldn't be seen as anathema to Aboriginal identity. Because it's not anathema to the rest of Australia, so why should it be anathema to the identity of Indigenous people? And there's still a lot of resistance to the idea of Aboriginal success. On the one hand we say we want it, but on the other hand there's a kind of strong cultural and social resistance to it.

- Noel Pearson, 2003

Historically, negative impacts from abusive connotations and deficit terminology, have cast Aboriginal people as "savage", "disabled", "uncivilised" and so forth. This language has progressed over time and deficit models, somewhat withdrawn, result in Indigenous success discourse and the term 'Indigenous Excellence'. This new term currently exists in a number of projects and in formal communications aimed at Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People.

In 2010, The National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) began operations using the following definition of 'Indigenous Excellence': 'An assertion that all Indigenous people inherently embody a unique and outstanding quality that is, being connected to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history, culture and community. Also, Indigenous people exhibiting excellence in any field or domain.'

The idea, proposed by the NCIE, is that 'Indigenous Excellence' is a hybrid approach to living in a modern, postcolonial society that, if adopted by Indigenous people, gives them agency in their self-representation. The use of this terminology, however, is a form of code-switching that privileges Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history, culture and community over exhibiting excellence in any field or domain. This may not be intentional but could lead to negative impacts on Indigenous youth who are confused about their identity, lacking in self-esteem and, while keen to do well, might feel inhibited by a restrictive idea of "identity" in modern Australia. Some may feel that this construct of 'Indigenous excellence' may be more confusing and even unachievable.

The anatomy of excellence at the interface between Aboriginal and mainstream Australian culture is an embodied and ever-shifting application. For non-Aboriginal people, including new migrant communities, success means aligning with aspects of their own culture and community (and inherited resources or privilege) that promote opportunity.

For Aboriginal people, the same kind of success means abandoning home cultures and communities and adopting or assimilating into aspects of the dominant culture – without the resources of inherited privilege to back this endeavour. Nevertheless, in the ever-changing face of the representations of Aboriginal identity, a shift has begun in what Aboriginal people can do and achieve.

Colonial policies and institutions appear to have become more inclusive in response to the activism of prominent Indigenous leaders. However, exclusion is still the reality, a barrier continues to exist for Indigenous people to feel comfortable in 'places of whiteness'. For Aboriginal people entering into university, boarding schools or the workforce, there is significant historical baggage and intergenerational trauma accompanying them. For many Aboriginal people, they become the first in their families to attend institutions, gain an education and participate in employment that was never available to their immediate older generation – older siblings, parents or grandparents.

Nevertheless, when Aboriginal people position their lives in relation to the values of these institutions, many fail out of fear of a cultural difference. Aboriginal participation in the academy is fraught with tension and is culturally problematic – as community affiliation inevitably comes into conflict with the projects of Westernism and progress, which define the parameters of academic endeavour.

The colonial trope of 'the last of his tribe' has now been replaced within success discourses with a new trope – 'the first of his tribe' – with Aboriginal people successfully gaining entry into elite institutions like Cambridge and Oxford on the basis of academic merit. But even within these new narratives of Indigenous success, the subtle



racism of low expectations is still present in the very fact that each instance of success is considered remarkable, the exception to the rule.

These candidates for academic success are elevated above their peers as role models, used to send the message that any individual can succeed, so therefore those experiencing poverty and oppression have only themselves to blame. In this way, Indigenous success is not used to inspire, but rather to rub the community's nose in its own dysfunction, in effect, exacerbating the problems of economic and social marginalisation.

Traditional and contemporary Aboriginal conceptions of excellence have a lot to offer Australian society and global knowledge systems. Pre- and post-invasion values of 'Indigenous Excellence' have the potential to mitigate the deficit logic that currently informs Aboriginal policy in Australia – the potential to challenge dominant beliefs that Aboriginal disadvantage, dysfunction, loss and intergenerational trauma make high achievement impossible. Additionally, it may challenge popular conceptions that Aboriginal community and cultural affiliation constitute an impediment to academic and economic success.

Excellence has always been an integral part of Aboriginal culture, as is evidenced by the presence of the cultural phenomenon of "shame" which is felt acutely when a person performs a task with possession of mastery-level skills, knowledge and status required for the task. Such cultural norms of excellence should be recognised as an intellectual strength and allowed to constitute an academic advantage, rather than being dismissed as a primitive dislike of risk-taking and hubris.

When Aboriginal people finish university or gain employment they are seen as 'Indigenous Excellence', but what really occurs is they enter into a different "class system". They enter a world that, for some, is unknown to their family and community, because of the new trope, 'first of his tribe', simulated in 'Indigenous Excellence'. Forgoing lateral violence that occurs in communities when Aborig-

inal people "succeed" and "become white", because of education or employment, what occurs is individual Aboriginal people become more sustainable.

However, the impact of this shift comes without the privileged resource and understanding that is available to many white people. The impact of this sustainability is "individualism" – a moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that emphasises the moral worth of the individual.

The impacts on this individualisation of Aboriginal Australians is difficult to define, but one could argue is similar to impacts of racism and bigotry. It is emerged that 'Indigenous Excellence' is seen as "individual" and "personal" and is not indicative of a community approach. "I've gone to university", "I made it there on my own", "I achieved this" and so forth.

The paradigm of Aboriginal success discourse as emerged throughout the research is unrelated to community – but can this really be sustainable?

The agenda behind the promotion of Indigenous Excellence is about shifting the paradigm of Indigenous disadvantage, to go beyond primitivism and become educated, successful within employment or achieve individual goals – the chance to not be marginalised socially and economically.

Understanding the shifting ideologies that Western culture impedes on Aboriginal existence is difficult. But it is also comforting to know that many academics, sports stars and business heads are discussing, challenging and paving the way for Indigenous young people to break a cycle of social and economic marginalisation.

To gain the privilege of living in a society that values all aspects of one's culture without feeling guilty within the space of university and your home community. To redefine our ideologies about what makes us smart, worthy or successful, and indeed excellent, without institutionalised limitations would mean we would all benefit within that privilege.

STUDYING INDIGENOUS STUDIES.

EMILY KATE JAMES.

When I first started at Melbourne Uni, Indigenous Studies was never really on my radar. Then, in the second semester of my first year, I enrolled in the Foundations Studies subject Aboriginalities and it was a game changer. Before my encounter with the subject, I had found there were conversations happening amongst Indigenous people and for Indigenous people within media and politics, but not with Indigenous people. So to enter a lecture theatre filled with 300 or more students my own age and discover there was a conversation happening at my own university amongst people interested in learning about contemporary Indigenous Australia was a surprise, and I knew it was something I needed to be a part of.

However, I quickly discovered that Aboriginalities was one of the only subjects within the Indigenous Studies faculty of Melbourne Uni that was a study of what Aboriginal people thought, rather than of what settler Australia thought about Aboriginal people. Importantly, it had a variety of mostly Indigenous and sometimes non-Indigenous guest lecturers and I found that for me, this made all the difference.

In Australia, nearly all history is white history and sadly, in my

experience, UniMelb's Indigenous studies has similarly become a faculty dominated by settler academics.

For me, and I think for a lot of other Indigenous students, we already know what white people think of Aboriginal people – we've been told our entire lives. In the society we live in today, if the only voices in an Aboriginal Studies class are white ones, you need to rethink what you're teaching. Indigenous voices matter and it's time the university acknowledges that settler voices aren't the only voices available anymore.

I took a subject in my first year called Law in Society – if you've taken the subject, you probably know where I'm going with this. There were two or three weeks dedicated to Indigenous people and the law. I looked forward to these weeks and was excited to engage with the lecturer and material provided. However when it got to those weeks, I was disappointed to find that both times, rather than engage students with discussion, the lecturer screened a Four Corners documentary from 1994. It showed a young Liz Jackson standing with a microphone or sat on a chair whilst members of the



Indigenous community sat in the sand at her feet. There was no follow-up discussion. This documentary wasn't shown in jest or satire; it took the place of an entire lecture. I walked away from that lecture disappointed and fuming. The lecturer had copped out and the near 1000 students who took that subject had missed out on a real opportunity to learn. This happened not once but twice. If lecturers aren't up for talking about Indigenous affairs, then that's fine, but there are Indigenous lecturers at this university or even from outside the university who could have stepped in as other guest lecturers had done in previous weeks. I was discussing this with a friend who had also taken the subject and she described it perfectly: "These subjects and the discussions that follow place us as outsiders. The discussions are for white people made by white people. I felt like an object... my race was an Australian curiosity."

Many of my Indigenous friends who have taken Indigenous studies at one point or another can identify with this strange feeling that comes over us whenever Indigenous issues or people are discussed in lecture theatres. It makes us sit up a little straighter, and we pre-

pare ourselves to cringe, raise our hands or roll our eyes.

I would compare the sensation to when you're at parent-teacher interviews in high school and your teachers are telling your parents how you're going at school. Regardless of whether the feedback is good or bad, you still feel like you shouldn't be there. Parent-teacher interviews are the perfect example of being spoken about but not spoken to, even though you're in the room.

For me and my friends, this is how it feels like to be an Indigenous student. It feels like we are being spoken about but not to; and it still feels the same way it did in high school – shitty. When did Indigenous students become outsiders in Indigenous studies? That doesn't sit right with me. In class, my tutors often say things like: "we might say that Aboriginal people do this" or "we think this way" and forget that not everyone in their class is part of that 'we'. I don't belong to the 'we'. But it doesn't matter, because everyone taking Indigenous studies is assumed to be a settler because it's still a subject that hasn't been prepared for Indigenous students. And it is this assumption that needs to change.

CLOSING THE GAP - WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?

NGAREE BLOW.

Most of us know by now what 'Closing the Gap' is or at least have heard of it and have a vague idea what it's supposed to mean. Why is it though that so many of us still don't know what we're talking about?

It's obvious that there are huge and downright shameful disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. CTG is a policy which "aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, employment outcomes." It has been in place since 2008, following Tom Calma's (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice commissioner at the time) social justice report in 2005 and Oxfam's campaign 'Close the Gap' in 2007 - 2008 which pushed for the government to take the report on as a policy.

I, like many Australians, think what the CTG policy is addressing is vitally important and the targets and goals are there for a good reason. I want to see the life expectancy gap close. I want to see Indigenous children achieving the best they can in education. I don't want to see more of my Aunties and Uncles get sick with heart disease and diabetes. I don't want to go to any more funerals of young men and women in my community dying well before their time. I don't want to see cousins lose their babies to an infection that could be easily treated if there were more equitable health systems. I want to know that my future children are going to have the same opportunities as their non-Indigenous friends, a good education, good health and have the chance to live until they're 80 or 90, maybe even 100. I believe the theory behind 'Closing the Gap', the aims and targets of CTG are really important, but in my view the way 'Closing the Gap' (and many other Indigenous targeted policies) is talked about, utilised and thrown around is awful.

Whenever CTG is talked about, whether it be on the news or at schools or in my lectures at university, where ever it may be, it is always portrayed negatively. All I ever hear about are the poor statistics for Indigenous Australians in every domain. Of course I

understand why these things are important to talk about, but there is usually very little about how this is changing or how to change it. It's also incredibly uncomfortable as an Aboriginal person to sit there and listen to people talk about Indigenous Australians as if you're not even there or have people look at you with sympathy as if you're going to die tomorrow. When in fact these statistics aren't about young Indigenous people like me, certainly not yet anyway. These numbers are referring to our older generations, but if we keep talking about CTG the way we are currently, we won't inspire change and the cycle will continue and then we will be talking about young people like me.

The discourse around the CTG policy often refers to the 'gap' and for most the meaning gets lost. It is also apparent that there is this recurring theme of 'us and them'. The 'us' is always non-indigenous and the 'them' is the people who this policy, campaign and interventions are meant to be 'helping'. Indigenous people continued to be 'othered'. Where are the conversations about community interventions, the positive work that has been done by Indigenous people, often in collaboration with non-indigenous colleagues? If the main aim is "to work together" then why isn't anyone ever talking about it? Yes, there are those out there who write about the strength-based models and programs that have had good outcomes by working alongside the community, but there is still nowhere near enough discussion about the positive changes.

Still the conversation focuses on statistics, which may be a practical way to see if things are working, but it's not if those statistics aren't accurate, nor is it productive if the only thing being mentioned is statistics. From looking at the statistics now in 2015, we can see that there have been some wins since 2008, for example infant mortality rates have decreased overall, which was one of the main goals of the CTG policy. However, we can also see that many things have stayed the same, not increasing the gap but certainly not decreasing either. The accuracy of the 'wins' also appears uncertain. While infant mortality is going down overall, according to the Australian



Close the Gap

and Indigenous health equality

Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2013, there is now evidence to show that infant mortality data for Victoria was unavailable before 2013, when the Victorian Aboriginal Child Mortality (VACM) birth report came out. The following report on infant mortality in 2014 showed that there had been an increase in infant mortality in Victoria for the Indigenous population between 1988 and 2008. Currently there is no data for infant mortality in Victoria after 2008. I wonder how the ABS data could show that there was an overall decrease in infant mortality across Indigenous Australia, if there was no Victorian data included – effectively a whole state of infant data missing from the study? This brings up questions about the validity of the data collected to show achievements in the CTG goals.

Even if there weren't these doubts about the validity of the data, Indigenous people aren't numbers and the more we are talked about as such, the more we are treated like it. What is also missed time and time again is why these statistics are what they are. There are so many underlying reasons and drivers for these lower rates, for example poor health status within our communities is not simply due to poor access to health as is most often quoted. The 'upstream factors' or the social determinants of health are hardly ever talked about in the mass media. It is very rare to hear about how having a lower level of education or not completing Year 12 can affect health status and how in turn health status can affect educational ability. Or how a serious lack of cultural awareness education is affecting Indigenous Australians in all aspects of their lives: socially, emotionally, culturally and wellbeing. I applaud the work by Yin Paradies and 'Beyond Blue' for starting up the campaign 'Stop. Think. Respect.' as this has really brought to light a conversation that was previously avoided. There is still a long way to go though. What about racism in our education system? What about racism in housing and employment agencies? What about racism in politics and government?

Look at the recent argument about the forced closures of Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. Tony Abbott supported Collin Barnett's decision and was quoted saying (now infamously),

"...what we can't do it endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have... If people choose to live miles away from where there's a school... If people choose to live where there's no jobs, obviously it's very, very difficult to close the gap". Lowitja Institute, an Indigenous organisation, rebuked this, "if Australia is to Close the Gap in life expectancy and health outcomes, our leaders must fully appreciate the Aboriginal understanding of health... Being on country is more than a lifestyle choice, it is the essence of life itself... There is a strong link between land, culture and wellbeing (health)".

Considering that removing Indigenous Australians from their land is actually detrimental to their health and wellbeing, this is a clear example of a politician pulling out the 'Close the Gap' slogan for his own purposes. This isn't the first time that the CTG slogan has been used for political purposes rather than for improving health, education, housing, and employment for Indigenous Australians. It's also probably the reason that the underlying factors causing these disparities aren't talked about either. These complexities of over 670,000 people from over 250 different first nations are often left out or forgotten, but I guess you can't really squeeze that into an easy slogan. Some people believe the government changed the original title 'Close the Gap' to 'Closing the Gap' in acknowledgment that it will take time to achieve these goals in the right way. Others see the change as a loophole for the government to be let off when it's been five or eight or even twenty years down the track and still nothing has changed.

This is why 'Closing the Gap', the phrase, the policy, the discourse, the politics and the proposed solutions are problematic for me. I believe it can't be successful nationwide until we are all having this discussion, a discussion which is not limited to mere numbers or by an "us" and "them" mentality. We can't "work together to achieve equality" until we all know what 'Closing the Gap' really means.



LEADERSHIP PROFILES: PRISCILLA COLLINS.

Leadership Profiles is a look into the lives of leaders that are connected to the students at the University of Melbourne. Their stories inspire us to achieve at the highest level.

I am Eastern Arrernte from Alice Springs and I am currently the CEO of the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and Deputy Chairperson of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services which is the peak body of the Aboriginal Legal Services in Australia.

Aboriginal Legal Services over the last 8 years have changed significantly. We are focussed on providing high quality culturally appropriate legal services to Aboriginal people and on reducing Aboriginal peoples contact with the criminal justice system.

Before involving myself in Aboriginal justice, I spent over 20 years in the media industry, a career highlighted by my role as the CEO of Australia's largest media company which included overseeing a radio station, film and television production company and music label.

In 2006 I produced a 13 part series for the Disney Network called "Double Trouble" which was based on my twin daughters Jamie and Codie growing up in Alice Springs. Following this I worked with Owen Cole and Rachel Perkins to establish the National Indigenous Television Station (NITV).

In 2007 I was appointed the CEO of NAAJA and I came into the position with no legal experience.

When I first commenced at NAAJA we focussed about 90% of our efforts on providing legal advice and representation in criminal law.

Growing up in Alice Springs gave me first hand experience of how my fellow black families were involved with the law. When I started at NAAJA, I was inspired to change the way legal services worked and focus on reducing Aboriginal peoples contact with the criminal justice system.

Now 8 years later, 50% of our services is handling criminal law and we have expanded our services to meet the legal needs of Aboriginal peoples in civil law, family law, tenancy services, welfare rights services, law and justice, Indigenous Prisoner Throughcare, Community Legal Education and education of the Royal Commission Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

We have increased our staff from 45 to 107, 50% of whom are of Aboriginal descent. Furthermore, with over 60 lawyers, we are the largest legal practice in the Northern Territory.

We aim to deliver high quality culturally appropriate legal services for Aboriginal people and we achieve this by employing Aboriginal people and interpreters as most of our clients have English as a 3rd or 4th language.

To make our communities safer, I focus on improving and maintaining relations with government officials. I meet with the Police Commissioner for Corrections every 3 months and I work with the Chief Minister, Attorney General and Minister for Corrections, Police, Housing, Children and Families in the Northern Territory. I also meet regularly with the Commonwealth Attorney General and Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

I have an MOU with the prison and I have 2 staff members within the prison who serve as Aboriginal legal services staff, the only service of its kind in Australia.

The over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system is directly linked to the broader issues of social and economic disadvantage.

Issues such as poverty, poor education, high rates of unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, homelessness, poor living conditions, over representation in the child protection system as a result of family dysfunction and a overall loss of connection to community and culture have all contributed to Aboriginal peoples disproportionate contact with the legal system.¹²

The incarceration rate of Aboriginal peoples is one of the most significant social justice issues in Australia. Aboriginal and peoples represent 2.5% of the Australian population, yet account for more than 25% of the prison population.

In the NT alone, we make up 30% of the population but take up 85% of the prison population.

This rate increased between 2000 – 2010 by almost 59 per cent for Aboriginal women and 35 per cent for Aboriginal men.³ Aboriginal children are 22 times more likely to be in detention than non-Aboriginal children.⁴

The operation of laws, policies and practices combined with significant social and economic disadvantage, excessively impacts on Aboriginal people and especially impacts women and children.

This additionally results in substantial economic expenditure. In the NT, it costs \$110,000 to lock an adult up for 12 months and over \$200,000 to lock up a juvenile for 12 months.

Pure and simple, this situation is unsustainable and governments can't keep up. For example, the new Darwin Prison that is expected to open next year has the capacity to house 1,000 prisoners and is costing the Territory \$495 million.⁵ However, by the time it is operational, it is expected that the budget would have broken significantly. The Commissioner of the Department of Correctional Services, Ken Middlebrook, has stated that current projections on the new prison reveal that it will be 83 beds short and based on current predictions, the NT will need another 1,000-bed prison by December 2016.⁶

Over the last thirty years, Australia's prison population has grown at alarming rates with no corresponding decrease in crime rates. It is clear that the 'tough on crime' approach has led to legislative and policy changes that have contributed to a steady increase in imprisonment rates while failing to address their primary purpose, ensuring community safety.

The underlying causes of crime are complex and varied. Yet evidence demonstrates that individuals who come into contact with the criminal justice system are highly likely to have experienced multiple characteristics of severe social and economic disadvantage.

We work in a contentious area, dealing with difficult and unpopular issues. However these issues are extremely important and the challenges that Aboriginal people face are complicated and multi-faceted. We work exceptionally hard to meet the legal needs of all Aboriginal people and to ensure that every Aboriginal man, woman and child has real access to justice and true legal representation.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Stewart, A, Transitions and Turning Points: Examining the Links between Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Offending (2005) at <www.ocsar.sa.gov.au/docs/other_publications/papers/AS.pdf>. Stewart found that in Queensland 54 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males, and 29 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females, involved in the child protection system go on to criminally offend.

² Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, above n 26, 12-13.

³ Steering Committee for the Review of the Government Service Provision, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators, 2011, 4.12.1.

⁴ Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Crime: Facts and figures (2009), 113.

⁵ Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, Value of a justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice in Australia, Wednesday, 1 May 2013, pg. 8

⁶ Ibid.

RE-THINKING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY.

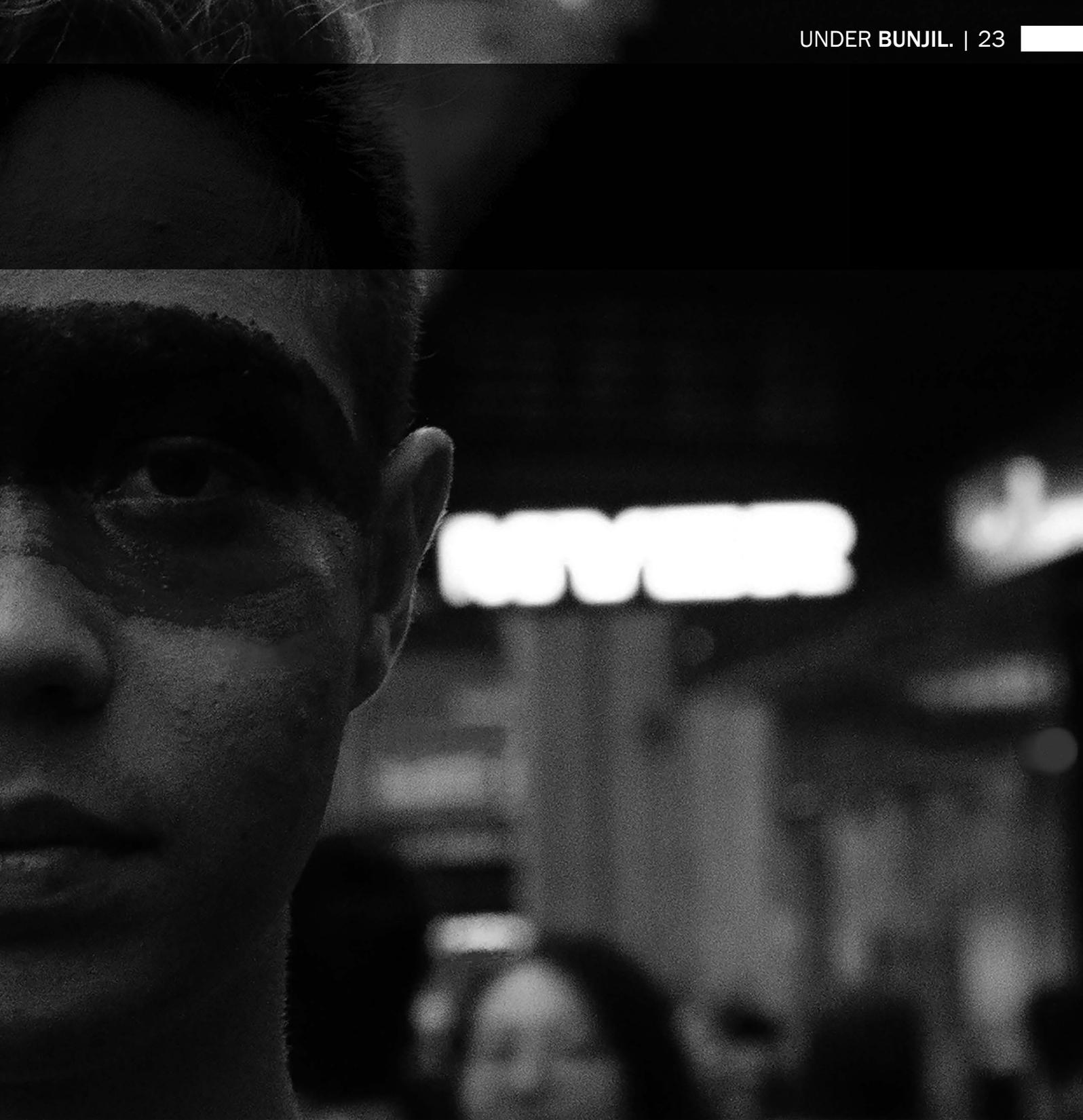
TYSON HOLLOWAY-CLARKE.

Let's make one thing perfectly clear: I am not here to tell anyone how they should identify, or that how they previously saw themselves is wrong. I am not looking to provide a solution to the puzzle that is personal identity. That's an endeavour that spreads itself across the fields of psychology, history, philosophy and anthropology. Instead, I want to discuss the habitual frame of mind that people of all shapes and sizes take when addressing identity and race. I have seen this frame of mind adopted by a member of just about every demographic you could imagine, my own Aboriginal family included. Simply put, I'm referring to our obsession over fractions and percentages.

When we use phrases such as 'half-caste' or discuss whatever fraction we are of whatever race and ethnicity we might be, what we are really talking about is racial purity. That's right, the same thing villains have been obsessing over for millennia (here's looking at you Voldemort). Voldemort felt that Mudbloods, magical folk born to

non-magical parents, were compromising the purity of the wizarding world. In a similar vein, depending on who you ask, Indigenous Australians were once seen as either a threat to Australian culture, as needing to be civilised, or simply as inferior; and steps were taken over two centuries to oppress them, one way or another. This included forced labour camps, the introduction of diseases and germ warfare, massacres, mass rape, kidnapping and the destruction of an entire culture. And in many cases the extent to which Indigenous Australian were (and are) treated poorly would depend upon the shade of their skin, seen as an indicator as to how much 'Indigenous blood' they have.

These acts were at least in some part based on the 'science' of eugenics, a field of social philosophy which achieved considerable notoriety and traction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Eugenics blends components of biology and sociology with the intent to 'improve society' through population control. In Germany,



Australia, and across North America, among other places, these efforts were largely concerned with the attempted achievement of complete racial purity.

Given the deep connections between these historical practices of genocide and the conception of racial purity held by their perpetrators, shouldn't it horrify us that we still use this language and mindset to frame our identities? I would think so, and encourage others to abandon the idea that anyone is more or less Indigenous because of the 'purity' of their blood.

If you really want to talk about what Indigenous identity might mean, then take a number. It's a complicated subject that everyone from Andrew Bolt (in his own special way) to Yothu Yindu has made an attempt at, with wildly different responses. I can tell you with absolute certainty though that it's not just about the fraction of your 'blood' or the darkness of the colour of your skin. It's not the way you talk or walk, and it's definitely not the fact that you are the

deadliest dancer this side of Dubbo. The reality is that being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or Noongar or Koori or Murray could mean any great number of things.

For some it means getting to live on your people's land and hunt goanna, or it means that Coranderrk is both a place of pride and pain. Some will herald from an unbroken line of elders going back for millennia, but for others to whom their people are a mystery, the journey is only just beginning. For me, it means that I live by the words "protect and provide".

We might call ourselves blackfellas but our family often have red hair and freckles. What you look like and whether you fit prescriptive stereotypes is not what makes you Indigenous. The important takeaway is this: ethnicity and racial identity aren't about being one way or another, or having more or less. Being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander isn't about the fractions of your blood, but rather your connection to the stories and the lives of others.



POETRY



OUR OLD TONGUE¹

¹a turnaround on John Batman's Diary

LUKE PATTERSON.

to live in a wingless age
flying with sanguine expectation
in the wavemovements
in the nounharmonic duties
in search of islands
in a ponder

as soon as day broke
we land for the purpose
of carrying out the objective
rejuvinations of these
summitsongs
in the distance the fires



into single file forthwith beat
the trail leading
to the emotional interior
flow of walking
with pauses
straggling & forward

as a relief to the landscape
for the fun of fellowart
& puzzletask direction
we point straight off
to obtain a view
having made a sign



in gently rising lingo
by a sought of freemasonry
or similarity of language
a luminary footing appears
a wordless choralism itching its way
into the ear like a vista sans

mythology
we immediately strip
ourselves purae naturablis
that oneness of sway
that morning anthology
of rivers

THE WORD FOR STUMP

omen hoop self-aparted seed law to limb by limb branch to

bark lust draping

pea green

tiers tear a

lift

thus and thus

dusk

red squaller

springs

flood this scout

home

first

engulf

light

p/luck/ed

egg-thesis

amnesiasynth-

pierce air born

leap

leach miner drink

down/up-ward

ravenous loam

in sleep/s

buried

birth

burnt old nut

reach

a moment

mist high

circlet

sky

high rhythm

thicket

trinket leaf

(breath's

breathe

moment/um)

fire's patient

dance spirit

fingers

pick

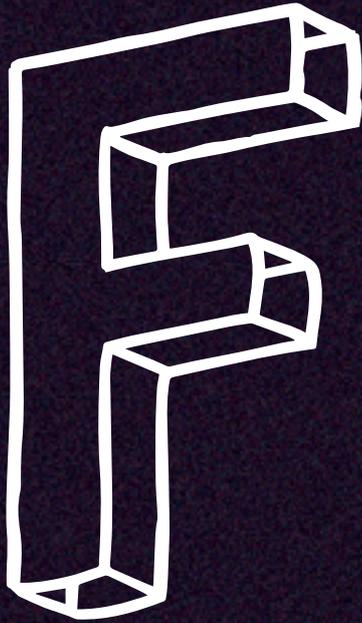
this small

flora shell

bark

heart to stony

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THE UMSU INDIGENOUS DEPARTMENT.

Our job is to give voice to the Indigenous students to ensure they have the best university experience possible. We also believe in promoting cross-cultural awareness and dialogue. This year we hope to run a number of events for Indigenous students which will also be open to the broader community. We are looking forward to collaborating more closely with our fellow student representatives this coming year so that we can help create a fun and inclusive university campus for all students!

UMSU and the University of Melbourne acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our campuses are situated. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Contact us at indigenous@union.unimelb.edu.au or visit us on Level 1, Union House.