

White Noise, White Wash, White Out

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The Australian media, collectively, does a dismal job of telling the story of our silent apartheid, the space between black and white Australians.

The new assimilation, well underway in the Northern Territory, has the same intent as Government policies of past eras, still aiming to change Indigenous people, restrict the importance of their law, language and Cultural practice, and move many from their ancestral lands into new housing estates that, we are promised, will materialize magically in great little Aussie growth towns.

There is a disturbing echo of the misguided policy that emptied the NSW missions and crowded Aboriginal people into cheap housing on the outskirts of western towns where they were trapped in disadvantage for decades.

Indigenous people know what is happening but there is a pathetic failure by the media to investigate and understand the seriousness of this assault on the world's oldest continuing Cultures.

There is a tyranny of numbers. The white noise becomes a white wash and then a white out.

Living in our media *Matrix* you will be treated very differently depending on whether you are black or white, rich or poor.

It's not an imaginary *Matrix*, a cyber world like the one in the Keanu Reeves movies. Our *Matrix* is real and it is governed by not-so-pure self-interest. The white majority rules and dictates what is heard, read or seen.

For all of us, of course, our perception of what is happening is influenced by many factors, including the way we were brought up, our Culture and our education, but the quality of the information we get and how well we understand it is crucial. Media shapes the way we see and treat one another.

The power brokers controlling the vital messages about Indigenous life are the major economic interests and Government. Genuine independence in journalism is rare. Even today's ABC management boasts that the national broadcaster's success in attracting federal funding and expanding digital channels is built on showing Government just which network does the best job of conveying Canberra's message.

Most media players collude, not for the common good, but for maximum attention. It has always been this way.

Some Indigenous leaders complain that the views of half a million Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people inevitably will be drowned out by the huge white majority.

But this power imbalance, now institutionalized by our society, is only part of the story of why the media fails to present an authentic picture of Indigenous life.

Journalists have a fundamental responsibility to truthfully report and bring to national attention the murders, the unconscionable imprisonment of so many Indigenous people, the deaths in custody, the shameful suicides, the neglect, abandonment and abuse of so many human rights. Our ethical code compels us to pay attention to the plight of the powerless.

Truthful reporting of the tragic and unnecessary death in the back of an overheated prison van in Western Australia and another in a police cell on Palm Island, conveyed to a national audience some sense of how two standards of justice prevail in this country. But it is telling that the media have not been able to reveal evidence that would bring convictions after hundreds of cases of injustice.

Why?

The *Matrix* so easily convinces everyone that this is just how it is in Australia. It traps Indigenous people in a permanent state of victimhood where they alone are blamed for the disadvantage they suffer. Australian journalists have become numb to the suffering of Indigenous people and lost the courage to question the Government's policy of assimilation and seek to change what is wrong. There is no moral force or clear, underlying set of values guiding the reporting on Indigenous life.

Often Australian media are complicit and compliant in the Government's *Big Lies* about Aboriginal people. From the outset of the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007 few journalists strongly challenged, let alone exposed, the outrageous Government lie about paedophiles in every one of the 73 remote communities

As a storyteller Aboriginal people frequently ask me serious questions. Why do politicians lie and fail to keep their word? Why do reporters know so little about so many things? Why can't we sit down together and listen to one another? Why is it so hard for others to understand what Indigenous people think and how they feel?

When you look honestly at our relationship it is clear that Indigenous people have tried hard for over two centuries to develop some understanding of the *Balanda* (white) way of life. Culturally speaking, it is whites who lack the knowledge, experience or even the empathy to walk together into the future.

"We are here together, taste the spirituality of this country," Dr Djiniyini Gondarra, a Yolgnu elder, tells a packed audience one night as we travel from city to city, screening an independently made film, *Our Generation*, explaining to people around the world just how much damage has been done by the Northern Territory Intervention.

Over and over, people who see this honest film, ask why the Australian public have not been told the truth by our media?

Aboriginal people can't count on white media. Listen to Djiniyini Gondarra who reminds us that throughout the Struggle, your ancestors have proven to be the strongest and most convincing voices.

Speak up. Tell your story through the new media. That's how you shatter the *Matrix*.