

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission

From: Anonymous 1470

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Submission:

As a white person I have not suffered systematic injustice, particularly in relation to Indigenous people. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to the commission for me to note a few things. My parents left South Africa because they did not want to benefit from Apartheid any more. They moved to the first place that offered my father a job.

Growing up, I learned a lot about racism in South Africa from them, and the books they had. I also learned that Indigenous Australians have been the victims of a great deal of injustice with some commonalities, but very little detail. The information was not easily available. The schools I attended both stood on the lands of the Wurundjeri people but even that is not something I learned until quite late in my schooling. Very little was taught about Aboriginal culture, and what was related almost entirely to the people's of northern Australia. I cannot remember learning anything about the culture in the area I was born and grew up until University, and little then.

The history of massacres or the stolen generation was almost entirely hidden from us. I can remember at the age of about 11 having a conversation while overseas with a non-Australian who asked some questions about Indigenous Australians. I was probably more aware than most people my age, and talked about the importance of land rights, although I think it was probably something I thought of in the context of the Northern Territory or Western Australia. I confidently told the man that there had only been a few massacres of Indigenous People, naming one but saying this was a rare example. Given that I was aware land had been stolen, and systematic discrimination widespread, I would have been much more receptive to the truth than most people my age, but all channels by which I might have heard it were blocked. It is therefore not surprising that many people my age and older have resisted the true story of Victoria's colonization, having been taught something much more comfortable.

Over the last 20 years my work has sometimes brought me into contact with Indigenous University students, and occasionally given opportunities to hear their stories. In some ways this has been encouraging. When I started, the numbers of Indigenous students at the universities I dealt with were tiny, over time they have grown, and more support structures have been put in place. Yet recently I was part of a meeting where one student described some experiences, including the suicide of a peer she attributed to a lack of support, which she had tried in vain to provide. Meanwhile another Indigenous student, who was meant to attend the meeting, had to urgently rush interstate because of family health issues that are very rare for nonIndigenous Australians of that age, but all too common among Indigenous people. The fact that two individuals, whose presence was independent on personal trauma, had these cases was not a substitute for statistics, but was a reminder, in the way more direct experiences can be.

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