



ShantiWorks

Equality Peace Justice

Image: Yarra River c1860 - 1870, Melbourne • Shantiworks Newsletter • June 2020 • 210 Bridge Rd, Richmond VIC 3121 • www.shantiworks.com.au

MULTIPLE EXPOSURES – EXAMINING WHITENESS

Acknowledgement to country and to our Aboriginal colleagues and communities who teach us to listen and be with the land:

When do you know it has become obsolete?
When can we be certain it has become obsolete?
Take the White Australian Policy abolished on paper yet
The mindset was to keep Australia for the descendants
Of the British and to keep 'Asians' and 'coloureds' out
Prime Ministers applauded making farmers feel safe
With the stolen lands taken from the First People's
Australia's foundation proudly cemented
As the land of the long white nation
A mindset transferred from father to son
Ensuring it survives down the line thru time.
A White Australia mindset is not out of date
Policies, Legislations, attitudes, stereotypes
A voice screaming "go back where you belong"
A voice asserting "Hey mate whites built this country"
A voice declaring "this was nothing before we came"
The White Australian mindset not replaced
Not obsolete, not out of date, not disappeared



by **Charmaine Papertalk Green | 1 February 2015**
Wajarri- Badimaya nyarlu from the Yamaji Nation - Midwest Western Australia

<http://cordite.org.au/poetry/obsolete/a-white-australia-mindset/>

OUR ASSUMPTIONS

We wanted to offer this newsletter because this work matters to us as a team. We wanted to make whiteness and its tactics visible; to show and challenge its destructive power; and to develop our anti-racist work within a framework where Aboriginal people and people of colour are centred. We wanted to develop meaningful, honest and robust accountability practices between people of colour and white people.

This newsletter offers:

- 1. Ways of problematising whiteness, our systems' of whiteness, its tactics and impacts***
- 2. Our team members' and colleagues' stories of whiteness and how their lives have been shaped by Australian white supremacy culture***
- 3. Some considerations for developing meaningful accountability and relational practices***

Do you feel uncomfortable engaging with white supremacy as a system, a culture, a practice?

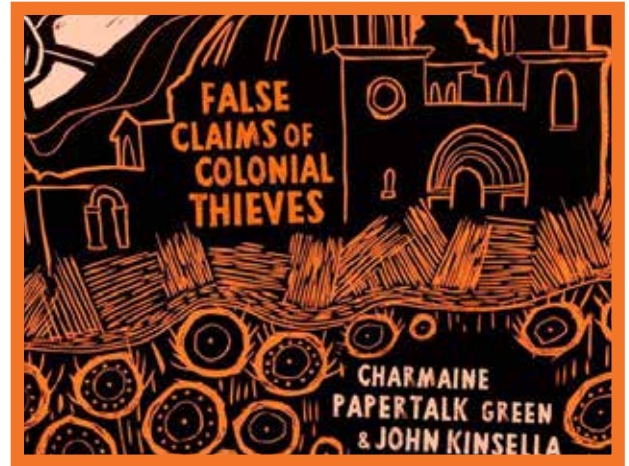
Do you feel uncomfortable engaging with white supremacy in your relationships and your communications?

“ I can't own your discomfortability ”

Aunty Charmaine Papertalk Green

from the Yamaji Nation

It is concerning that white feelings are priviledged over First Nations peoples and People of Colour's oppression



Whiteness is part of our cultural stories for white people - we need to racialise our selves as white people - whiteness is a thinking that runs through our body and our minds, it is in our bodies - we cannot scrub it off just because we want to or because we are one of the good white people.

A MIND'S ROLLING OF A COLOURED KID

I'm small:

I don't know how small but I'm small, I'm in the bath, there's products all round. I start adding all the white creams and white liquids to the bath, maybe if I sit in the bath long enough with all the white cream my skin will absorb the whiteness and make me look normal - white.

I'm in primary school in Footscray:

Someone wrote FUCK on a piece of paper and stuck it on another girl's chair. I'm in grade 1 or maybe grade 2. The teacher opens my books and another girl's books to see who wrote it, apparently, the K looks like mine. I didn't do it. The other girl is white, I'm convicted. I'm taken into a grade 5-6 class and yelled at and humiliated in front of all the older kid's class, I'm condemned and made to sit facing a wall. I didn't do it.

I'm in high school:

My close white friend is convinced I'm adopted because my mum is white, she thinks my mum must be lying, she tells me to look for adoption papers in my house, I'm in grade 7. I'm not adopted.

I'm in year 12:

Apparently I have anger issues, I don't like school, everyone assumes I'm dumb and a fuck up because of the colour of my skin, I hang out in the class with all the African kids from the commission flats. A teacher is annoyed with one of my friends and says 'at least I know I won't be just a 'diversity hire'.

Will any job I ever get be on my merit? How will I ever know if I'm just a diversity hire or if I'm smart and valued and worthy?

Great, now I can't sleep. It's 4am, I hate having sleeping problems, years of going to do studies at the hospital and seeing specialists. Why can't I sleep.

I've graduated university:

I have a degree, I'm a social worker, everyone is proud of me for finishing university - genuinely no one expected me to or thought I would, they thought I'd be a bartender forever. I'm in a meeting with all my bosses, all white educated women. One of my bosses announces she wants this project to be a bit of a 'bitser', She stops and turns to me, everyone stops and turns to me, She looks at me and says, 'whoops sorry' and then keeps talking.

A bitser, I think? Am I the bitser? Isn't that usually the language that you use when referring to dogs having two different breeds?! Of course I'm the bitser, the only person of colour in the entire room.

It's a few days ago:

A high up manager sends around a quote of my favourite poet/activist/song writer. He sends an email to the entire organisation of roughly 200+ people with his opinion on the 'riots and looting' in America and the recent 'death'.

Death? Don't you mean murder? Only a white man would send a mass email informing he 'doesn't condone the violence'. Who asked him? Who is he to condone what resistance looks like? Who is he to use a black man's words to push his own agenda and elevate his views and his stance on other people's pain?

For the first time, I stand up for my views, he's weighing in on my pain.

I'm disgustingly polite - can't lose my job in a pandemic.

I respectfully challenge and provide a quote by the same person he had chosen to quote, to provide a different perspective.

The quote that that was originally sent:

"I think we can make it, in fact I'm sure. And if you fall, stand tall and come back for more"

The quote I provided to reflect a different context:

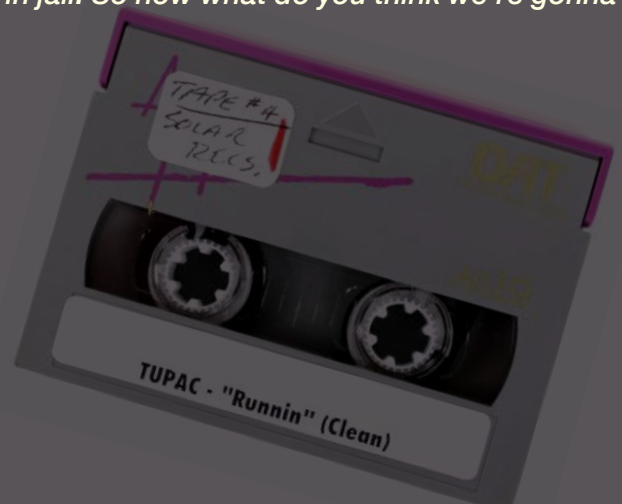
"If I know that in this hotel room they have food every day, and I'm knocking on the door every day to eat and they open the door, let me see the party, let me see them throwing salami all over; I mean, just throwing food around [and] they're telling me there's no food. Every day, I'm standing outside trying to sing my way in: "We are hungry, please let us in. We are hungry, please let us in." After about a week that song is gonna change to, "We hungry, we need some food." After two, three weeks, it's like, "Give me the food or I'm breaking down the door." After a year you're just like, "I'm picking the lock, coming through the door blasting!" It's like, you hungry, you reached your level. We asked ten years ago. We was asking with the [Black] Panthers. We was asking with the Civil Rights Movement. We was asking. Those people that asked are dead and in jail. So now what do you think we're gonna do? Ask?" - Tupac Shakur

I'm explaining the interaction to family, they are not of my blood but very close to family, they are three older white people. One man explained the boss sounds like an idiot, the woman says it's good I responded to the email, the other man says - 'careful playing the victim'.

I hold back tears, eat my food and go to bed.

If only I could sleep.

By Casey



FROM A WOMAN OF COLOUR

Speakings

How can I speak whiteness, make whiteness visible without being constructed as:

- A brown woman that is too political?
- A woman of colour with strong convictions?
- An angry black woman?
- Too emotional and over sensitive?
- The problem?

“ How can I speak whiteness, make the impact of whiteness on me without being worried about how they see me? So I have learnt to speak white words, I learnt the communication norms - very well. I have a PhD in it! ”

- Dear sir/madam
- Hope you are doing well
- Could I suggest to you...?
- Use 'I' sentence structures as this centres the self, the unit, the person
- without context, without politics, without location, without history
- Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you
- With sincere regards

Emoting empathies

White emotions are the sun

We circle around...and around

And around

Because it hurts to be burnt

Our colleagues think and speak their outrage at the Australian policy position on asylum seekers

They know we are a racist nation

They know that Indigenous kids are ten times more likely to be removed from their homes than other children

and 80% of incarcerated Aboriginal women are mothers, all while the government try to push for easier laws to separate and traumatise our families (Grandmothers Against Removals)

They have relationships with brown people – like us!

They feel shame and sadness at the racism...

They feel pain at their whiteness.....

They care about us....so it deeply hurts them that we, their brown colleagues, their friends are pained daily by racism and the insidious yet invisible white cultural forms and norms

So we see their pain and we care for them....so we hold our tongue....not with anger....with care

Doings...

So we have to get on with it

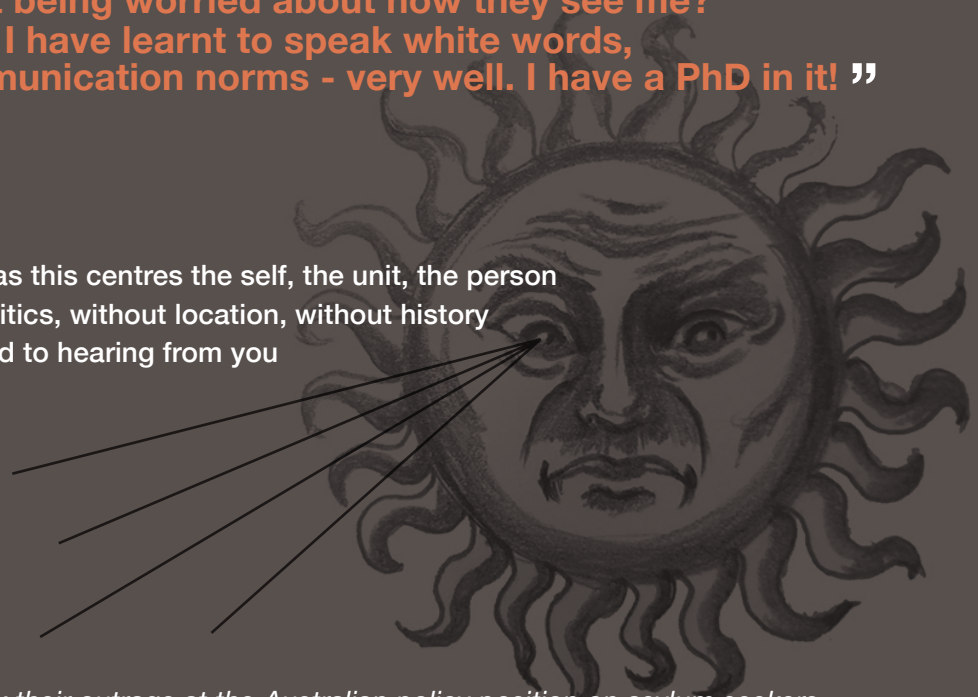
Just get on with it

Just keep doing what we do....

So we can be known as the brave ones

People say we are resilient, and we should feel proud

Proud of surviving, proud of standing up, proud of being brown



I don't get resilience and pride at surviving.....

Why do we have to survive racism?

Why is it good to know and manage and navigate the rules of whiteness?

Why should I teach my kids whiteness practices and cultures and norms?

And why should I be proud of them censoring their emotions as they circle round the sun, abiding by the rules?

What are you proud of about your whiteness? How do you maintain your resilience with your whiteness as you move in this world, with people you care about in pain?

By *Tracy*

A WHITE WOMAN'S RESPONSE

Trip, stumble, fall, fuck up - don't retreat... remain open...we can't let our hearts close...

(does our white entitlement permission our hearts to close?)

If whiteness is the sun, it doesn't seem good enough just to try to burn the least amount we can... the least amount as possible... the reality under white supremacy...

“ whiteness says **all lives matter...** (*white lives matter the most though, really*)

whiteness says **don't worry about it - it's too big to solve anyway,**

whiteness says **you can only give so much,**

whiteness says **there are bigger things to worry about,**

whiteness says **of course white supremacy is bad but the violent protests**

and looting won't solve that (*what will then?!!*)

whiteness says **we stand in solidarity but we can't condone what you are asking of us**

(*why do we get to condone what resistance looks like?*)

whiteness says that **we hear you and we are doing diversity training to address**

the minority problem

(*but isn't whiteness the problem?*)... ”

**listen-consult-speak-trip-move-consult-listen-fuck up speak
listen-move-fuck up-consult-listen-move... racialise our selves
racialise our white everydays...**

By *LF*

SOUND BITE IMAGES... SOUND BITE MANTRAS...

These are only a few images that have been posted recently on social media here locally in Melbourne.



CONSIDERATIONS:

As we look to social media for inspiration, imagination, creativity and a platform to express ourselves, lets not forget social media is still a form of media; media isn't accurate and unbiased news.

Who owns the media? Who decides on terms used? Who are the editors?

And who are the people making the final decisions?

Over the past two weeks, the amount of white people, white corporations on social media showing their support, their solidarity to amplify black voices, to promise to do better, to dismantle white supremacy has left an uneasy sense of what this all really means and what it will mean after this 'single moment' of protest is over.

- For white people, what is meaningful about posting these? What do these actions tell you about white supremacy?
- What do these images show about white supremacy?
- What do you hope these actions show of you? What might it mean if your actions are received with anger, with frustration, with silence, with apprehension...?
- How do we act on our ethical intentions when we are not in the space of people of colour?
- How do we act on our ethical intentions when we are with other white people - our friends, our family, our colleagues? Are there occasions when we are relieved or make a decision not to respond to racism and discrimination because no people of colour are present?
- How can we act with ethical intentions of connection and relationship building, and compassion and accountability?

WATCH AND REFLECT:

The video is a snippet of a TED talk by Baratunde Thurston deconstructing the racialisation of news headlines and how we need to challenge and change the story to change the white supremacist system.

<https://youtu.be/RZgkjEdMbSw>

ETYMOLOGY:

Etymology is the study of words' true meanings. There are many, many words that are used and circulated with little known about their racial and gendered histories. This is a passage found on a website as an example.

Thug

1810, "member of a gang of murderers and robbers in India who strangled their victims," from Marathi *thag*, *thak* "cheat, swindler," Hindi *thag*, perhaps from Sanskrit *sthaga-s* "cunning, fraudulent," from *sthagayati* "(he) covers, conceals," from PIE root **(s)teg-* "to cover."

The thugs roamed about the country in bands of from 10 to 100, usually in the disguise of peddlers or pilgrims, gaining the confidence of other travelers, whom they strangled, when a favorable opportunity presented itself, with a handkerchief, an unwound turban, or a noosed cord. The shedding of blood was seldom resorted to. The motive of the thugs was not so much lust of plunder as a certain religious fanaticism. The bodies of their victims were hidden in graves dug with a consecrated pickax, and of their spoil one third was devoted to the goddess Kali, whom they worshiped. [Century Dictionary]

The more correct Indian name is *phanseegur* (from *phansi* "noose"), and the activity was described in English as far back as c. 1665. Rigorously prosecuted by the British from 1831, they were driven from existence by century's end. Transferred sense of "ruffian, cutthroat, violent lowbrow" is from 1839. (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/thug>)

"Pac said Thug Life stood for 'The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody'."

"People like us in situations like this become hashtags, but they rarely get justice. I think we all wait for that one time though, that one time when it ends right."

"To every kid in Georgetown and in all "the Gardens" of the world; your voices matter, your dreams matter, your lives matter. Be roses that grow in the concrete."

"That's the hate they're giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That's Thug Life.

- Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give*

This is an example of how a word becomes popularised and used without understanding its history, development and origins. This word "thug" is clearly racialised and gendered. Angie Thomas, in her novel "The Hate U Give", provides a potent political explanation of the word "thug".

In the 90's the media labelled many African American poets as rappers and thugs. In particular they labeled Tupac Shakur as a thug, and doubled down on that message when he got 'thug life' tattooed on his body. Some things the media didn't highlight:

- Tupac explained the meaning of his thug life tattoo "The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody".
- Tupac's mother and father were active members of the black panthers, his mother was even jailed during her pregnancy.
- Tupac predominantly wrote political songs about racism, police brutality, poverty and politics, although they weren't always the songs record labels would promote or encourage at the time.
- Tupac studied at an arts school in Baltimore where he took ballet classes, studied playwriting, joined a young communist league and fell in love with poetry, defining himself as a poet who is heavily influenced by his favourite poet - Shakespeare.
- He openly cried in conversations with Maya Angelou on set when they were filming 'poetic justice'.

Tupac Shakur was a poet and an activist before he was ever a 'thug'.



WRITINGS FROM A WHITE DAUGHTER

If you put a photo of my mother as a child next to one of me at the same age,
you say we could almost be the same person.

My mother & I look so much alike,
Same face shape
Hair colour is very similar
Eye shape
Nose
Height

Except.

She's a woman of colour.

I am a white woman.

My skin colour doesn't give me a disadvantage

My skin colour doesn't mean I suffer from abuse

My skin colour means I am part of;

the systems, problems, reason, pain, power,

that has caused, & continues, to cause my mother pain & hurt,

that discriminates against her

Is the reason why she has to try harder than white women,

than I do & will have to do, in order to be seen & heard.

I never use to think much about what the difference in our skin colour truly meant.

She's my mum.

I knew she experienced racism & discrimination. It wasn't something unknown,
& not something that wasn't mentioned.

But, now I see how my whiteness has an impact on her. Our relationship is different.

Not in the sense I see her differently.

She isn't any less my mum

My love & care for her hasn't changed.

But my understanding of our experiences has, the way we live our lives

As a child, a daughter, you don't like seeing your parents in pain, seeing them cry.

It's not until recently my mother has shown her pain that racism

& whiteness has caused. It angers me so much that she has to experience this,

it pains me when she speaks about whiteness, about racism, about her experiences.

We can't change our skin colour

But I can change the way I stay silent when I hear comments from anyone about race,
I can change the way I let her be the only one who has the discussion about race when we are out
with friends or family,
I can actively start conversations about whiteness, and race.
I can stand by her, with her always, every time, not when I feel like it, not when I think she's
defending herself too much on her own, but every time.

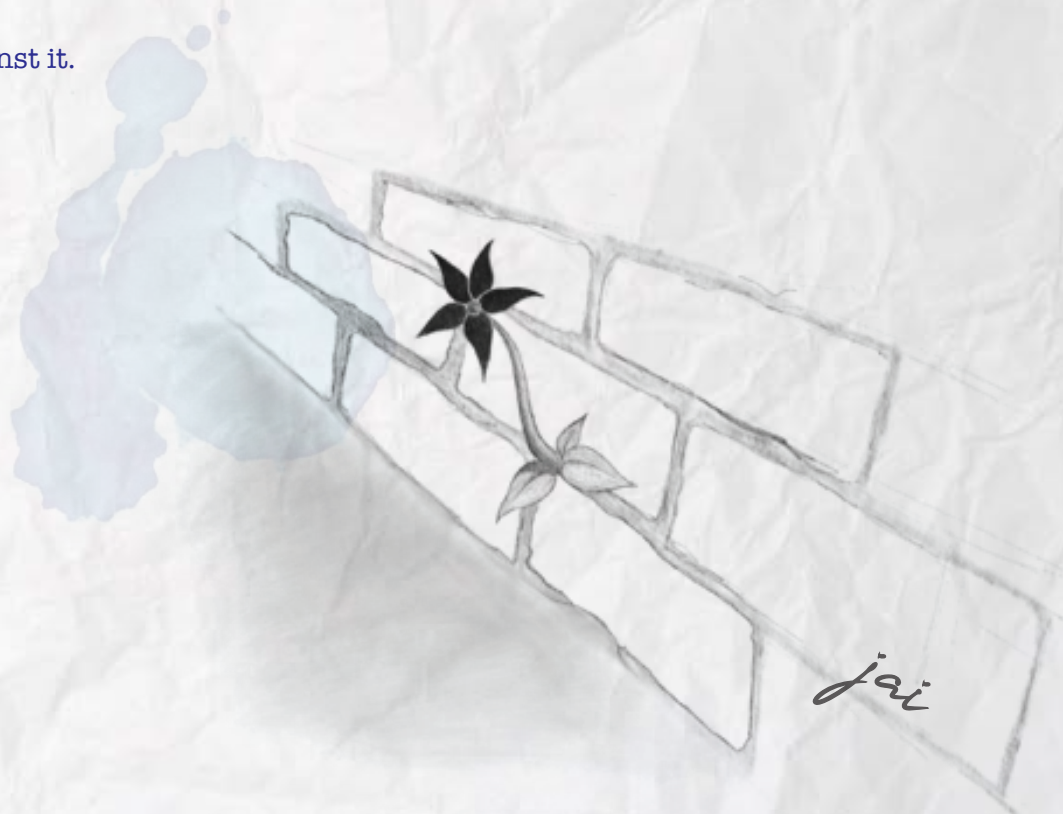
It's hard writing this

I want to find the right words,
I'm not sure what they are though,
Or if there are even 'right words'
But I think maybe, writing this is a start, writing about the complexity of our relationship but how
the love, care and respect are there through it all.
I want to take away the pain, the hurt my mum feels.
I know it's not that simple
I don't know how to talk about my whiteness with her just yet, it's all new to me,
But I can't not try, I can't hide from this, because my whiteness will never go,
Because although I don't understand it all,
I know the not talking hurts her,
I don't want to hurt her,
I want to support her,
I want to stand and fight with her,
I want to change the way my whiteness is privileging me & disadvantaging her.

So I need to talk about my whiteness, the whiteness in the world, the power & privileged it holds,
The pain it causes,
I need to fight against it.

Because I care,
About my mum
& about everyone.

By *MW*



PANDEMIC BLUES

I rush to fill my weekly needs,
Amidst a sea of panic-stricken buyers,
Pale faces drive past in SUVs,
Laden to the brim with groceries...

I try to fill my little green bag with caution,
Aware that my pocket may soon flatten,
Alas all that is left on the empty shelf,
A few bottles of fabric softeners and a detergent...

“For dark clothing only, separate whites from blacks”
Said the caption...

The isolation, the separation, no eye contact,
Amongst a sea of grim white nation...

SAMSARA

From the days of the devils in red,
We have been cursed to roam the earth,
In perpetual daze... birth after birth,
Set by the tune of the bagpipes dread...

Grandmother always said,
Never trust the white clan,
For they came and pillaged our women,
Our dignity, our gods and our land...

The Queen of India, her name was not Tara...
The Queen of Australia, her name is still not Yarra...
The lucky land is calling, the voices say,
Mother is crying, ‘boy don’t go, please stay’....

I left my kin in search of better tiding,
I ran towards the same very hand,
That smeared my ancestors’ sacred marking,
Hoping my struggles will end...

But...

Only white suits are finished with luck and gold,
Mother’s old red sari, is trimmed only with story,
Lessons I ignored when it was told,
Forgiveness I now seek... Amma, I’m so sorry.

By *Eshwar*

REFLECTIONS FROM THE RACIAL WORKSHOP 'CHALLENGING OUR RACIALISED SELVES' ON BEING WHITE, INSIDE AND OUT!

The colour of my skin is white. This is obvious. I thought that I knew what this meant. But after listening to POC at the Shantiworks anti-racism workshop, a workshop that asked me to speak about being white and how I use my whiteness, I discovered that my whiteness was more than skin colour and racism, it is about my worldview, my perspective, my experience, how I hear and see through my internal white system which runs deep inside me, and how I find ways to preserve it.

I used to think that white supremacy was about lynching, hate crimes, making racist jokes, laughing at them or not challenging them.



Words such as white supremacy, make me cringe and I think about people like Donald Trump and Pauline Hanson.

But Donald Trump, Pauline Hanson and I have more in common than I care to imagine when it comes to a white internal system or worldview, a white perspective and experience.

Whether I like it or not.

What have our white histories and white ancestors taught us about our worldview? A combination of historical and cultural messages about who to fear, who to accuse, who to pity, who to objectify and fetishize, who to be repulsed by, who is poor, who is a criminal, who gets murdered by police, who I do not relate to. We are socialised and wired to move towards what is familiar, not what is foreign. When I look at POC, I see an image which has something to do with just how different from me they are, not simply because of the colour of their skin, but because of the different worlds we live in.

When I ask myself would I trade places with people of colour, my answer would be an emphatic "No!"

We cannot do social justice work, anti-racist work without building meaningful and accountable, political and caring relationships between white people and people of colour. In saying this, white people need to develop practices to develop relationships with people of colour in non-oppressive ways and recognise that in the context of a colonial white-australian state and as settlers under white supremacy, Aboriginal people and people of colour are legitimate in their naming what is white-racist practices, white-racist speakings and white-racist actions: people of colour are thoughtful and considered in their rage, in their emotions when responding to whiteness – listen to the message, not only the emotion.

By *Anthony*

DO SOME FURTHER LEARNING:



'I don't want to sit down' - Meyne Wyatt

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-09/meyne-wyatt-delivers-powerful-monologue-on-racism/12333854>

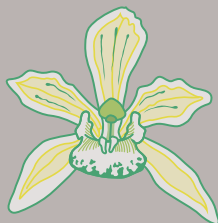


'A Gaslit Australia': Joshua Waters

<https://indigenoux.com.au/a-gaslit-australia/>

In solidarity,

Maya, Lisa, Casey, Sue, Shivani, Anthony, Eshwar, Jai and Tracy



ShantiWorks

Equality Peace Justice