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Bla(c)k and Indigenous Solidarity

Confronting Colonialism & Anti-Racism

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| Zimbabwe | Australia |

Colonisation is an ongoing process. It did not end when Bla(c)k and Indigenous people had the right to vote, nor did it end with the immigration of non-indigenous peoples into Australia. When talking about race, racism, territory and institutions in Australia, it is impossible to do so without centring First Nations people on this stolen land.

Australia is a young country in comparison to America, which was colonised over 530 years ago. Australia is only 250 years old in comparison. There are many indigenous and non-indigenous people alive today with great-grandparents who lived through the horrors of colonial Australia and remembered the stolen generation. Colonial Australia may only be 250 years old. However, aboriginal people have inhabited the land for over 50 thousand years, making them one of the oldest civilisations on the planet.

As a Black woman in Australia, I understand and know what it is like to be othered. To be considered lesser, for the colour of my skin, texture of my hair or the food I eat. My experience with racism in Australia differs from the diaspora of Black people around the world, though without doubt we all share similarities. Inextricably linked by age old racist tropes that have worked effortlessly to pin us against one another and make us feel lesser than. Rarely when racism is discussed does colourism, texturism and Afrophobia enter the

chat. Rightfully, police brutality and Black women stereotypes are addressed.

Though, little do we talk about how in school as a Black immigrant you are expected to aim lower, go for career options that are within your range. We don't talk about how Black hairdressers would have you straighten your hair because it is easier for them. Neither do we talk about how white supremacy perpetuates rankings based on one's proximity to whiteness, the less foreign you appear the tolerable. BIPOC who have been in Australia many years disregard new immigrants and say they will never be as ignorant or foreign as them, all in an attempt to appease the white hegemony.

Racism is more profound than the microaggressions on the daily or the lack of resources for your community simply because the government does not care enough to do something. How we talk about race and racism in Australia narrows back down to how we address the problems that indigenous people have had to deal with since the arrival of the white man. Progression or liberation for Black and Brown people is not possible if indigenous rights are not centred at the conversation on racism in Australia. Simply put, there is no end to discrimination in a country that refuses to properly acknowledge the crimes of their past and how they continue to commit them.

The reality is that colonisation is a group effort. You can be both the oppressed and the oppressor. Non-white people coming into Australia need to understand their position as a settler on a colonial state, on land where the original owners do not have sovereignty. Understand how their actions contribute to the ongoing colonisation of indigenous people, it is by no fault of their own; it is only by design. Privilege, I believe, is best described as a bar chart. You are more fortunate in some areas than you are in others. In the case of Black and Brown people coming into Australia, we hold an immense amount of privilege in comparison to aboriginal people.

Firstly, we have the luxury of leaving our birth countries and relocating to Australia for a 'better life', aboriginal people do not. Secondly, there is an immense amount of privilege to

be able to set foot on someone else’s land and call that home, without their permission. As settlers in Australia or even Canada, America or New Zealand people do this all the time. We make a home on soil that has seen genocide and generations of abuse. Indigenous peoples today have little to no say on how their land or their people are treated, cared for and what future they have.

Embedded in Australia's core is racism, and the outbreak of covid-19 merely amplified it. In early July 2020, residents of a public housing tower in Melbourne, Victoria were subject to a 'hard lockdown' by Victoria's chief health officer Brett Sutton. The Victorian government ordered the residents of the towers to be locked in their small apartments, some with families of five or more sharing a two-bedroom flat. Unable to leave, have visitors or even go shopping for groceries. Residents were only permitted to leave the house for essential work and services. However, many of the residents were not essential workers and could not afford to miss work. These efforts were to contain the spread of covid-19.

People who are politically and socially marginalised were subject to extreme measures, under the guise of protecting the general public from a covid outbreak. This incident demonstrates how race and socioeconomic class were used as a tool to determine quarantine status. Extreme measures were taken in the name of public health. However, these same measures were not given to white Australians and foreigners staying in hotel quarantine. Many of the residents in the towers were of Aboriginal descent, disabled, Black and Brown. Heavy policing and multiple armed officers were situated outside the buildings to ensure residents and the public cooperated with the lockdown. The measures incited outrage from residents, families and friends who were unable to see their loved ones. The government provided the residents with expired ingredients and other foods that did not meet the dietary requirements of residents who either ate halal, vegetarian or kosher.

The procedures were put with the intention of risk mitigation. However, it merely exposed the Australian government and society’s tolerance for violence and obvious inconsideration towards marginalised and vulnerable communities. Residents were treated as disposable, second class citizens that were not a priority for the Victorian government.
Australia has failed to properly rectify its past and acknowledge that it needs to do better

not just by immigrants coming into the country but by the original owners of the land. Which is why atrocities against underprivileged communities are repeated time and time again. Without sovereignty and justice for First Nations people, we cannot expect empathy and humanity from colonisers who are unable to acknowledge their wrongdoings.

In October, Victorian premier Daniel Andrews ordered for the Djab Wurrung to be chopped down for a highway. The Djab Wurrung, also known as "Direction tree", was a sacred tree to the indigenous people of Djab Wurrung. For months, people had been protesting the government's plan to chop it down and build a highway. Estimated to be about 350 years old the tree was not on the state protection list and therefore did not qualify for protection. The chopping down of Djab Wurrung is a tale as old as time, illustrating the ongoing and violent efforts of colonisation and racism that plague Australia and all colonial states. Unfortunately, over-policing and the desecration of sacred lands are not isolated incidents. They are the flow-on effects due to the refusal and lack of awareness to take responsibility for the suffering of millions.

The cases of Djab Wurrung and the public housing towers show the world how white Australia views immigrants and indigenous people, differently but ultimately the same. The same, in that both are lesser to that of white society, undeserving of dignity. Different because white supremacy uses different tools to separate and dehumanise immigrants and aboriginal peoples. Immigrants are considered to be hard working, smarter and looking for a better life which is why they leave their old one. Indigenous people are considered the opposite, lazy, unambitious and savage to the white man.

These stereotypes are not only in Australia but the UK, SA and the US. Only creating a level of separatism that allows for white supremacy to prosper because it sets us apart when we are more alike than they want us to believe. There are many immigrants who believe that indigenous people are lazy and they consider themselves better. This mindset is all about gaining proximity to whiteness, to fit in and not be like the ones we consider ourselves better than. But the gag is that they/we will never be like them. Separatism is a tool by white supremacist to ensure that we do not use our differences and likeness as strengths. When we treat people who are similar to us as the enemy we only play into the hands of our oppressors, tearing each other down is all by design.

As a Black woman who is an immigrant having grown up in Australia, I have experienced racism first hand. I know what it is like to be overlooked, undermined and disregarded. I have witnessed brutality towards people who share my roots on the soil I spent my childhood. In my homeland Zimbabwe, my people took their independence from British colonists in 1980. My ancestors know what it is to reclaim their home after having it taken from them and moulded throughout generations. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cannot say the same; they are yet to smell the fruits of their labour.

A shining example of what a country looks like when it is unable to accept and be accountable for the atrocities of its past is America. America has a long history of slavery, capitalistic greed and genocide that has ultimately bred the school to prison pipeline, modern slavery and less than minimum wage labour. We cannot fool ourselves into believing we can conquer racist institutions without holding them accountable for their past atrocities. Racism is behaviour that is practised, and history has proven that colonial states have mastered the performance.

"*For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.*"

Nelson Mandela understood that freedom is not singular, not limited to the oppression of one's reality. He knew that true freedom and true work meant liberation and liberty for all. So when we talk about anti-racism, we must not forget to encompass the people of the land in which we occupy. In Australia, we do not have the right to talk about race without understanding our level of privilege, even when our experiences are wrong. There is no Black liberation or justice for Black people without the freedom and sovereignty of indigenous people, whether that is on Australian or American soil.

So when we talk about *race, racism, territory and institutions*, we must appropriately position ourselves and not live inside the vacuum of our own experiences. Black people

consistently bear the shorter end of the stick, across the globe Afrophobia breeds afro-pessimism. Although, we must not forget the privilege we hold as we settle and occupy land that is not ours, to begin with, simply because we are the most discriminated against. Winning the oppression Olympics will not grant us our liberation. We must be aware that our existence can be hurtful and contribute to the ongoing colonisation of First Nations people. When we are aware of our positionality and the spaces in which we occupy, it can become a source of strength. Governments built on racism and genocide will never seek to have our best interest at heart. So long as they refuse to take ownership and confront the crimes of their past, they will actively continue to harm the generations after us.

Liberation and human rights efforts cannot rely on empty government promises. Instead, we must aim to understand our own biases better and use our privilege to assist those who may not have the same resources. In Australia, Black people have the power and privilege to amplify the voices and concerns of First Nations people who are otherwise at a disadvantage. By helping those who cannot always help themselves is where real activism and power lies. Because once we can ensure the rights and freedoms to the people of the land in which we reside, we can lay a foundation for a future where there is real equity for all.

Talking about race as a Black person on stolen land is complicated; there are no one-size-fits-all to the conversations, it is convoluted with ongoing colonisation, white-supremacists governments and genocide. By better understanding the land on which we are on and the rights of the traditional owners, we can move forward in the name of true freedom and liberation.