

# The Great Silent Apartheid

Dr Mark J Rose PhD M.Ed.Admin. B.A. Dip.T.



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The Afrikaans word 'Apartheid' is one that still today elicits emotive and passionate responses even after almost a decade since its official dismantlement in mid nineties. The policy in South Africa endured formally from 1948 until 1994 as a legal framework for economic and political dominance by those of European extraction over those of Indigenous heritage. Many of us remember long before Mandela's triumphant emergence from gaol to the heady days of Whitlam and the Springbok tour of 1971 where non-Indigenous Australia across the nation stood up against the abhorrent separationist policy called apartheid. The protest had a ripple effect across the nation with smaller groups of campaigners at the Adelaide and Perth games attracting media attention that drew a crowd of five thousand in Melbourne. This was followed in Sydney by a giant anti-apartheid effigy being hung from the Harbour Bridge that so influenced the premier of the day in Queensland the inimitable Joh Bjelke-Peterson to declare a month long 'state of emergency'.

The protests failed to have the Springbok tour of 1971 abandoned but what it did was to raise consciousness throughout an emerging cosmopolitan Australia of the existence, albeit in a far away country of the socially reprehensible policy and practice of segregation called 'apartheid'. National sporting and political icons such as Bradman and Whitlam were subsequently instrumental in 'maintaining the rage' by promoting a sporting boycott of South Africa, making Australia one of the first western countries to do so. This was a defining and symbolic step for Australian

national maturity, one that should have carried greater profile in our national consciousness and one that marked something of a departure for Australia as an English colonial outpost. While Australia seized the agenda on this issue in the 1970's, introspection surfaces an irony that we as all Australians must face in the development of the future social architecture of this country. The paradox exists in the form of juxtaposition that while the Australian attention was drawn far off to the South African model of apartheid similar (and in many instances worse) circumstances were being experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders within the shadow of the sites of the protests.

This paper promotes the contention that cultural genocide as the progeny of colonialism is so insidious that as a wily beast it has turned on the 'dispossessors' who are now themselves being dispossessed through what is in reality a 'Silent Apartheid'. The 'Silent Apartheid' is a knowledge or intellectual segregation that targets one of the last bastions of colonial endeavour, the 'colonisation of the mind'. The silence of this apartheid is aided by its invisibility. In it there are no segregated buses, schools, diners or washrooms on which to target rage, but rather an ever consuming intangible ignorance which is harder to recognise. The phenomenon simply put is that non-Indigenous Australians as a result of their world standard education know very little about Indigenous Australia and as such cut themselves off from the cultural and spiritual heritage of the land that they now reside upon. This is not a thinly disguised attempt to harness political support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues but rather on the first hand it is about non-Indigenous rights that are being furtively misappropriated. The silent apartheid gains sustenance from the relegation of Indigenous knowledge, culture and tradition to the fringe of the curriculum in most streams of the educational supply chain. It is as a concept further nourished by seeing culture and tradition merely as a training outcome or at worse 'tree hugging' or 'feel-good activity' rather than a competency. Cultural competency like all Indigenous education should 'stretch the mind and stir the spirit'. It can be quantified as a competency and immersed industrially as a requirement and an ongoing KPI (Key Performance Indicator) for systems, schools and teachers. Worst of all the 'silent apartheid' effectively dispossesses non-Indigenous people of a 'truth' which negates their ability to make informed personal, political and professional decisions.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in its reference to 'underlying issues' gives us a hint that the phenomenon does exist and this can be seen in the gravity of the social indicators that are measured by government regarding service delivery. These relate to all human intensive fields including education and they defy reason in a country of first world status. Likewise a simple comparison to how the average non-Indigenous New Zealander embraces their country's Indigeniety through education, language and culture presents as a stark contrast to Australia where most instances of recognition are generally scant, tokenistic or non-existent. Just five central lessons that cover Indigenous identity, demography, philosophy, culture and value systems should be the baseline understanding for any professional whether they engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or not. The lack of

this or the 'Silent Apartheid' has created a downstream ramification in the quality of social delivery modes for the human intensive fields of health, housing employment and criminal justice and the focus of this paper, education.

The problem in many ways presents in the form of the classic 'chicken and egg' scenario. Universities produce educators that fill positions in the various supply chains of the nation's education systems. These educators over the last four decades have emerged from their universities with very little exposure to Indigenous insights and then they inadvertently replicate either none or at worse illegitimate or ill-informed Indigenous content in their disciplinary field. The cycle of ignorance then contributes, sustains and then replicates itself to the detriment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in nearly every field of professional service delivery, as recognised in the contemporary social indicators of the nation. This ignorance is the 'silent apartheid' and in view of the forty year celebration of the landmark 1967 Referendum needs to be firstly recognised and then addressed particularly in the specific field of education as a matter of urgency.

The silent apartheid as a detrimental phenomenon is bolstered not by the vacuum that it creates through the sustenance of ignorance, but by the raft of inappropriate by-products it produces in order to fill void. These by-products are themselves often covert and present not as racism but as an 'ignorance' that elicits professional practise that is derisive and harmful to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the general population. While the following conceptual frameworks relate largely to the education sector they are translatable across most human intensive fields and are the hallmarks of the 'silent apartheid'.

***Racism by Cotton Wool*** as a product of the silent apartheid is married to the phenomenon of 'political correctness' and while it is often camouflaged by the misnomer of 'respect' it is highly detrimental in practice. In essence it excludes or even excuses professionals afflicted by it from professional engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through the subliminal notion that engagement might cause offence. It is prevalent at times in those professionals who exude an active social conscience but are hesitant to traverse professional engagement for fear being 'politically incorrect or racist'. This might be in the teacher student relationship or at a collegial level between Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals or even in a 'line-management' relationship or arrangement. In the classroom this can be exhibited by execution of codes of discipline, standards of work, grading and acceptable boundaries of school culture by 'going soft' on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Professionally the very same phenomenon is evident in the range and allocation of tasks all the way through to issues of performance management and professional feedback. The ramification of both dimensions of this is that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders we receive less than the highest quality service delivery or feedback and may be lured into accepting exiguous and mediocre standards.

**Exoticism** is another intellectual sedentary position inherent and residing in the silent apartheid frame. In its raw form it is driven by a notion of an Aboriginal identity that has been crafted by a derivative of the classical noble savage syndrome. This position recognises a warped cascading paradigm of the ‘real Aborigine’ fed by a lack of historical perspective and the falsehood of Indigenous homogeneity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders form nearly five hundred separate and sovereign nations were colonised in two separate thrusts which were driven by changes in economic imperatives. These two separate thrusts happened to the southern and then to the northern regions of Australia by a separation of nearly one hundred years. This reality is not easily recognised by those wrack by the distortions of the Silent Apartheid and Indigenous people in Melbourne often watch in bewilderment as corporates and others drive through Fitzroy to catch planes to go to Fitzroy Crossing for that ‘real Aboriginal experience’ The mythology of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being one people married to the romanticism of the ‘central desert nomad’ and the ilk is an attempt to extinguish personal identity for many Indigenous people. This notion that relies heavily on narrow and incorrect stereotypes can be devastating particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders children and adolescents who themselves while grappling with all life offers at that age constantly have their own identity and being questioned by well meaning professionals operating out of a pronounced ignorance. This often leads Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students to no alternative but exclusion either physically or intellectually. While subscription of this position does respect and in fact revere Aboriginal culture it recognises only one type and discounts and dismisses others. Exoticism when converted to classroom curriculum and practise belies the reality of both past and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders life for the majority of Indigenous people particularly in the south eastern domain of Australia. It is centrally exclusionary in its construction and classroom application and is demonstrative of the silent apartheid.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has always attracted missionaries determined through assimilative practises to terminate Aboriginality in favour of higher orders – to civilise the savage. As a product of the Silent Apartheid the **Missionary** of today operates somewhat differently than that of the past. He or she may have relinquished the Christian dogma but not the zeal of superiority. The agent of this form of silent apartheid starts from the paradigm that they know what is better and that success for the missionary is for the student, colleague or worker to move away from their indigeniety in favour of the mainstream. In the classroom this would mean a conscious departure from accommodation of any special need or consideration in favour of the values and needs of the whole. Unlike the previous two types “racism by cotton wool” and “exoticism” whereby excessive consideration is apparent, the missionary works to a template where consideration must lead to a clear and distinct departure that leads to the only right way. The missionary is often driven by a sense of sorrow or a sense of righteousness which often sanitises their endeavour as they save the savage from themselves. Their tools

could be as verbal as much as non verbal, overt as much as covert and for many who subscribe to this paradigm there may be an engagement in politically correct discourse which should not disguise the tenet of the whole endeavour which is predicated win or lose.

Over the length and breadth of Indigenous education many high order gains have been made through the agency of parallel programs and many of the current educational challenges will still be best served by such like programs. These high order niche programs that strategically and tactically target a specific educational outcome are sufficiently resourced and inclusive of community input are essentially parallel programs. They look similar to but stand in stark contrast to the parallelist and the concept of **Parallelism**. The term Parallelism relates specifically to systemic responses that are analogously structured duplications of general (mainstream) programs and which purposely or by stealth negate both responsibility and standards. They present often as programs for the sake of programs or programs because they have to be seen to be making a response to Aboriginal issues or they are designed to attract external funding and are therefore mercenary in nature. Their hallmark often includes superficiality, poor resources, ill conceived and executed educational theory, no consultation with the community and are generally pedagogically second rate. The danger for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students morphs out of their standard and the pedagogical architecture that too often scaffolds them by mediocrity. This translates into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students being excluded from the general (mainstream) program because they are Indigenous and feed into an inferior program based on race. Evidence of this exists across educational jurisdictions and can be seen in examples such as leadership programs, literacy programs and other curriculum offerings whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are rejected because there exists dedicated 'programs for them' thereby effectively diminishing their rights to partake of the full range of offerings. All educational programs should as part of their quality and accountability framework, include their commitment to core business that is inclusive enough to add value for all students. Where stand alone programs need to exist they should complement general programs rather than an alternative of a lesser status and all students should be allowed to partake of all educational offerings and that choice should not be limited because of their Indigenous heritage. This does not translate into an automatic defence for the so-called 'mainstreaming' for the educational landscape in all sectors, but particularly in Indigenous education, which is littered with examples of programs that carry the sarcoma of 'one size fits all'. In short, parallelism is when systems, schools and individuals do it 'to us' rather than 'with us' and then provide it back to us 'instead of' other viable offerings.

All disciplines are from time to time buffeted around populist element in their domain. In the Silent Apartheid frame **Populist Professional Practise** is when the professional educators rather than developing a portfolio of pedagogical and andragogical approaches then crafts the best one for that particular student

opts for the reverse, make the student to fit the methodology. While this practice is not exclusive for teachers of Indigenous students the range of additional methods often crafted by professional ill-informed about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders create a vulnerability of vast dimensions. While such methods carry varying degrees of validity and credibility the professional educator, school or system needs to draw upon a vaster range of inputs. Danger arises when elements of the 'pop-industry' are so affected by climatic moods and trends in the academic arena that when coupled to distinctly Indigenous concepts of complexity such as 'learning styles', our students are put at extreme risk. It was Charles Darwin that introduced the academy to skull measuring in his seminal work. The analogy can be drawn that populist methods not interrogated educationally for Indigenous students and based upon stereotypes are nothing more than experimentation and can be an unfortunate contemporary extension of skull measuring. The antithesis is about engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in curriculum that is based upon inclusion and not exclusion through professional practice. It is seeing every student as unique and not falling for the latest 'off the shelf' panacea or silver bullet for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. 'Productive Pedagogies, Literacy Scaffolding, Accelerated Literacy' may be the right fit for many students as might be tried and tested tools such as 'Phonics and the Dolch Sight Words'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students more than general (mainstream) students are highly susceptible to an element that is fed by the 'Silent Apartheid' under the guise of 'Populist Professional Practise'

*Abrogation of Responsibility via Workforce* as a product of the silent apartheid relates directly to some of the gains made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activism over the last four decades. Simply put in many human intensive fields there are Indigenous sections that are embedded structurally in the workforce to provide informed and distilled insights into community needs that can then be translated organisationally into policy leading to transformational change. These operations were originally conceived as one person operations but many have spawned and now in many cases present as departments or branches. The issue certainly not about their existence for their worth and contribution is immense and very valued. The issue is more about their positioning and organisational purview within the organisational dimension. In many cases these operations constantly face a tide of relegation of handling only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues which places them clearly on the organisational fringe and viewed as a relegated commodity. This usually means that often professionals use these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to relieve them of professional engagement with Indigenous people or issues. If this is the case can then be argued that it is literally the abrogation of professional responsibility via the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. This then has a number of flow-on effects; firstly the organisation never develops its own capacity to engage Indigenous issues and relies principally on particular individuals. The community members that hold these positions take on responsibility far in excess of their job profile and have a massive burn-out rate while often

languishing at the lower ebb of the salary scale. Accepting the notion that transformational change of the social indicators requires a 'whole of system response' the worse effect is that the Indigenous workers are seen and deployed and treated as an organisational commodity rather than an organisational currency and the systems experts that they really are. This exploitative and replicative phenomenon sustains and nurtures the 'silent apartheid' while allowing significant abrogation of responsibility through the existence of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.

***Educational Ethnic Profiling*** is possibly the most controversial of the entire silent apartheid framework and the one that is the most likely to draw the greatest derision, scorn and affront to professionals. It is however the 'elephant in the room' and requires to be addressed head on. With substantive misconceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from within the general public not to mention the education profession, these do often translate into professional advice and practice that places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within inappropriate frameworks. This is done by both underplaying and overplaying the students in certain circumstances at times but more clearly by channelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into certain paths because of their Indigeniety e.g. you're Indigenous so you should go to a TAFE. Other responses that fit this category and are recognised by Indigenous educators across the nation include the concept of 'dumbing-down' the work because of Aboriginality, social promotion from one grade to another and even more concerning deliberate exclusionary tactics. The clear and distinct position of this paper is that these are rarely intentional acts of racism but are rather misguided benevolence from a workforce that they themselves through their pre-service arrangements were never equipped for the task of educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They therefore have been denied access to professional and contemporary perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander through a frame cultural competency. It rests essentially as an unconscious incompetence in their professional practise that if left unrecognised carries the same level of devastation for Indigenous students as would a premeditated act of racism.

In order to question the place of culture and tradition in the curriculum and having established their damaging by-products expressed as the silent apartheid focus upon how the particular supply chains of Australian education systems compensate for should be interrogated. Over the last forty years much time and effort expressed in both dollars and training hours have been expended in pursuit of the ubiquitous 'cross cultural' awareness training. With different proponents of cross cultural awareness training varying both in rigour and credential the reality is that has been a 'bolt on or an after-thought' usually attracting and preaching to the converted. This positioning is in tandem with the colonial and post-colonial relational notion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the 'riverbank' - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have for all time since first contact been relegated to the fringe, be it of a town, a colonial painting or even the constitution. The tradition of fringe dwelling continues

today be it in the University curriculum or in the national education outcomes for Indigenous students place them squarely on the periphery.

As we gear up to celebrate the forty year anniversary of the 1967 referendum we can trace with some degree of accuracy over that period how the concern about the ability of general (mainstream) education to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students have been expressed. Way back in 1975 during the heat of the Springbok Tour the NACG (National Aboriginal Consultative Group) flagged trepidation about the need for pre service teacher input. This was echoed again in 1988 by the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force and yet again in 1995 with the National Review of Education. Even the most recent MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) direction paper 2005-2008 explores in many of the domains of professional competency. By drawing upon this forty year heritage we must be unequivocal about the place of culture and tradition in the curriculum.

First of all it must imprint upon the collective consciousness of all Australians in a way that recognises the sovereignty and integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the continuity of the worlds oldest living culture. With this in place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have the prima facie right through their established education structures that have grown and sustained over the forty years hold custodial governance over any knowledge.

Universities as both the engine houses and the architects of the nation's social fabric must craft their curriculum so that their students are not allowed to emerge with degrees that promulgate the 'silent apartheid'. This is about not only the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders but also the teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The paradigm of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders culture and tradition should migrate from a training or awareness domain into a fully recognised competency. This then needs to be reverberated industrially in position profiles and job descriptions for all education sectors. A raft of pre-service and post service education programs in 'partnership' with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will then move culture and tradition effectively from a commodity into a currency or in other words from the 'riverbank' to the 'knowledge-bank'.

The Springbok tour protest of the 1970s remains a paradox for the reasons stated earlier but what is more of a paradox is that in so many educational venues the position of culture and tradition remains invisible in the curriculum. This under-utilisation of the nation's most valued asset carries with it culpable damage for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The result of this while highly evident in all of the nation's social indicators particularly education, as a phenomena it does translate across and infects all of the social indicators. Australian education systems and sectors placement of culture and tradition on the fringe has dispossessed and stunted the intellectual capacity and the national psyche of this country. For the field of education the Silent Apartheid and the range of by-products that it has developed

has drastically impeded engagement and the ability of educators, schools and systems to deliver on their mandate to teach all. With this they as educators, schools and systems must seek to break the corrupted and jaundiced cycle of knowledge transfer. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders should have more confidence if it were to become industrially prescribed as a competency as opposed to relying on the mere chance of cultural conversion through awareness training.

In conclusion the question beckons, what has happened to those long haired 'Levi' clad and placard carrying Springbok protesters whose action stirred a sleeping giant back in the seventies? That sleeping giant was a social consciousness at a time when 'meat and three vegetables' were recognised as cuisine and coffee was only 'instant'. The forty years hopefully has not tired them of their resolve and commitment to social justice. How much have they learnt over the forty years about the country they live on and with those who can claim an unbroken link to its origin? How many cross cultural and awareness programs have they attended only to be mesmerised by 'dot paintings' and ill constructed gems of cultural heterogeneity all the while being myopically distanced from the third world under their nose? They would more than likely hold positions of influence in organisations that they deemed in the seventies as enemies, they would be in their fifties and sixties now, grey hair, Italian suits and fighting a daily battle with cholesterol and bad lattes. It is time the knowledge apartheid gap was recognised and then destined to history and the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders culture and tradition in this country through curriculum was brought back from the fringe into this new millennium and out the seventies.

