

Chapter 11

An Australian Dialogue: Decolonising the Country

Patrick Dodson and Darryl Cronin

Introduction

There has been a long history of oppressive and domineering Indigenous policy in this country. Such policies are anchored in the ideology of superiority where the coloniser portrayed Indigenous people as having no civilised customs, societies and government. Derived from the myth of *terra nullius* (land belonging to no-one), it has created a distinctive form of Settler-Colonialism in Australia where the recognition of Indigenous rights – and, for that matter, respect for Indigenous people – was considered unnecessary. Indigenous policy-making today is largely a product of Settler-Colonial ideas, attitudes and institutions that have operated to deny Indigenous rights. The 2007 Commonwealth Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) to Indigenous communities is an example of colonial policy-making. The federal government's 2008 review of the NTER found there was a failure to engage constructively with Indigenous people. The current ideological and authoritarian approach of Indigenous affairs policy-making underscores the need for a process of dialogue to find a new frame of reference to build relationships and bridge differences between Indigenous peoples and the Australian nation state.

The formal reconciliation process provided a pathway to establishing a foundation for a new relationship with Indigenous people, but its demise has left Australia floundering with issues it is not prepared to confront. Without an innovative way forward, Australia will continue in a cycle of colonisation. A process is needed to help the nation move to a space where there is mutual respect, a common understanding, valuing of our cultures and histories and openness to the need to change. Dialogue between Indigenous

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