

The Colonial Fantasy

Why white Australia can't solve black problems

Professor Sarah Maddison

School of Social and Political Sciences

Co-director, Indigenous Settler Relations Collaboration

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SARAH
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The system is not working

“We have organised this rally to abolish the day. Again, we have not organised this for change the date. We have organised this to abolish Australia Day because fuck Australia. Fuck Australia, I hope it fucking burns to the ground” (Tarneen Onus-Williams, 26 January 2018)

Huge backlash against her, but not a new sentiment

Clarifying her views:

“I don’t have all the answers of what is going to liberate us. I just know the current system isn’t working. Since colonisation nothing has worked for blackfellas on this land”

(quoted in Cunningham and Carey 2018)

The Colonial Fantasy

“The current system—the settler colonial system—is not working. It has never worked for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Yet despite incontrovertible evidence of this failure, the nation persists in governing the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in ways that are damaging and harmful, firm in its belief that with the right policy approach, the right funding arrangements, the right set of sanctions and incentives, Indigenous lives will somehow improve. This is the colonial fantasy” (p. xviii)

A particular type of colonialism

- Settler colonial societies seek to *permanently* displace the Indigenous populations within their acquired territories, without any intention that the nation might one day undertake a process of structural decolonisation
- This is what Patrick Wolfe refers to as the ‘logic of elimination’
- Different modes of elimination
 - Violence - frontier warfare, policing and incarceration
 - Assimilation - drawing Indigenous peoples into the settler state, eliminating political difference
- The ‘organising principle’ of settler colonialism

An Aboriginal problem? Or a settler problem?

- It serves the logics of settler colonialism to view ‘the problem’ (of Indigenous disadvantage) as being Indigenous people themselves
- This justifies policy approaches aimed at ‘improving’ Indigenous lives
 - If Indigenous peoples and cultures are to blame for their own suffering, the settler state can avoid addressing the structural roots of these problems and deny the fact that structural change is needed if the situation is ever to change.

“So long as we are seen as the problem, there is literally nothing that the government cannot justify, there is no level of incompetence or racism from the government that cannot be justified, and there is no amount of arguing from anyone else that will be seen as anything other than ‘reverse racism’, wanting ‘free handouts’ and refusing to accept responsibility”

(Luke Pearson 2016)

A radical change is needed: Refusal and resurgence

- Refusal:
 - Turning away from the state
 - Indigenous peoples refusing to consent to their own elimination
- Resurgence:
 - Like refusal, it signals a turn *away* from settler institutions, values, and ethics and a turn *towards* Indigenous institutions, values and ethics
 - Seeks to actively restore Indigenous *nationhood*
 - Focuses on transformative alternatives to the dispossession inherent to settler colonialism
- Radical resurgence: ‘an extensive, rigorous, and profound reorganisation of things’ (Leanne Betasamosake Simpson 2017: 48-9)
- Radical resurgence has specific political goals concerned with the decolonisation of political relationships between Indigenous peoples and settler states
 - Increasing Indigenous self-government
 - Decolonisation
 - Re-centering Indigenous nationhood