

The history of colonisation

"In the Absence of Treaty" Book Launch, Australian National University, 6th February 2014

Dr John Falzon

I'm speaking on Aboriginal land.

I'm not from here. I came here, uninvited by the First Peoples, in 1968.

I'm only beginning to learn about the Old People. Uncle Max taught me how to be respectful when I was going near a very ancient meeting place, like the one in the Blue Mountains where my children always gravitated to.

I don't know how to read the country, but I'm learning how to listen to it.

There are places all over Australia where the country is calling out to us, where the Old People of the country are calling out to us, where the hidden histories are calling out to us... reminding us that another kind of world is possible.

And that the blood of our sisters and brothers cries out to us from the ground.

This blood calls us to struggle and to reflect.

A struggle for justice that makes no room for reflection will be defeated by its own lack of clarity.

And, reflection that does not come from, or lead to, struggle is nothing more than the dancing of clouds.

It brings no rain to the earth, no sustenance, no growth.

Like the red land, we long for the life-giving rain of deep reflection grounded in the struggle for justice.

But we also long for the lightning flash of social change, the real cause for hope.

Why? Because our history, since colonisation, has not only accepted oppression, it has enshrined it, as structure, as attitude, even as law.

My daughter, Gabriela, came home from school one day a couple of years ago and told us that she had been roundly condemned in class for claiming that Australia had been invaded and colonised rather than 'discovered' and 'settled'. Gabriela stood her ground, even when some of her classmates started calling her a communist. On her report card, it was noted that she had a poor understanding of this period of history.

It is with the greatest pleasure that I join with all of you who share this poor understanding of history, or rather, who know that history did not begin with colonisation and, I say this with utter confidence, will not end at colonisation. It is with joy that I join in launching ***In the Absence of Treaty***. In doing so I pay tribute to the incredible determination and beautiful passion of people like Michele Harris and the members of Concerned Australians.

As Rosalie Kunothe-Monks, Elder from Utopia, says in this book:

"... take away from me my language, take away from me my responsibilities for the land, take away from me my land, and I am nothing."

This book proclaims very loudly that the people who are made to feel as if they are nothing are actually everything.

I will conclude with a little poem called ***History of the Intervention***:

When they landed they did not say, we are beginning the history of colonisation.

They did not say, we're invading.

Settling, they said, we're settling.

They did not say soon we'll be taking your children from you, not just your mother, or soon we'll be trying to work out ways, scratching our heads, to bring down the number of your deaths in our custody without even trying to stop putting you in custody.

They did not say one day we'll probably have to say sorry for all of this or one day we'll set our finest minds the task of working out why you don't live as long as we do or why your problems are bigger than ours while our houses are bigger than yours.

They did not say oh so you're the custodians of the Countries and the songs we're treading on and building fences around.

They did say oh really well now we are the custodians of you. See we're taking you into custody and you're not going anywhere.

And when they said this you said no we're not going anywhere.

Was.

Always.

Will be.