

convincing by simply assuming that China's political system should remain substantively authoritarian.

Frustratingly, *The China Model* also offers unfairly glib analyses of democracy's internal challenges. For example, Bell abruptly and without elaboration takes Australia's vacillation on climate change policy as obvious evidence of the unsubstantiated general principle that in democracies good policies 'get repealed by populist governments as soon as they are seen to impose substantial economic costs on voters' (p. 49). Similarly, Bell hastily concludes that democracy's empowerment of the fickle voters of today means that future generations are sidelined (p. 50). Of course, future generations are not formally enfranchised in democracies for obvious reasons, and yet voters regularly choose policy specifically to serve the interests of their descendants. For example, irrespective of one's opinion of the Paris Agreement, a major motivation behind last year's landmark climate change accord was certainly the welfare of future generations.

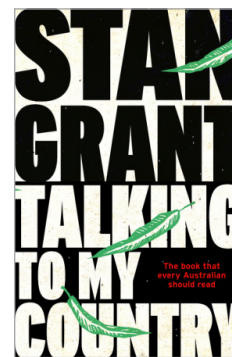
Bell is right to want to disabuse liberal democrats of the naïve notion that the sheer moral, political and/or economic superiority of liberal democracy will usher in the imminent end of authoritarianism and a final wave of global democratisation. *The China Model's* confronting analysis of the strengths of China's avowedly undemocratic governance system is therefore a bracing reminder for liberal democrats that their preferred system of government faces powerful competitors. Yet just as Bell's book is a beneficial corrective to the liberal democratic orthodoxy, it suffers serious empirical and theoretical limitations. The ideal of enlightened and altruistic political meritocracy is neither an accurate reflection of contemporary China, nor a good guide to China's future under the unrepentantly oppressive and self-serving CCP.

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Talking To My Country

Stan Grant
HarperCollins Australia,
2016
\$29.95, 240 pages
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**Reviewed by
Eloise Ambrose**

Stan Grant's book *Talking to My Country* is a confronting read. Grant discusses how the booing of Indigenous Australian Rules football player Adam Goodes at a Sydney Swans game last July compelled him to share his personal experience of being an Indigenous person in Australia. Grant explores Indigenous identity, placing much emphasis on the nature and causes of Indigenous disadvantage.

The book reveals that Grant, a successful television journalist, tried to escape some of the negative connotations that accompany being an Indigenous person in Australia. He achieved this by working overseas for many years for CNN, only to come back and feel as displaced as ever.

Grant's journalism career and the person he is today has been moulded by his work with CNN. He spent many years overseas in war-torn, poverty-stricken countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and South Africa, reporting on some horrific events. Suicide bombings, genocide, beheadings and kidnappings—these are all stories of crime, but even more so they are stories about families and loss. Someone needed to tell the stories of these people, to reveal their suffering to the world. Now, Grant describes similar stories of his people, including personal accounts of his own family's suffering and loss.

Much of the book is focused on the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: Indigenous people die ten years younger than other Australians, they are twelve times more likely to be locked up and three times more likely to be jobless. These statistics, and many more embedded in Grant's book, speak for themselves. Grant believes that this gap is a product of the racism that is woven deep into the fabric of Australian society. With friends and family who are white Australians,

Grant does not think that ‘white people’ are necessarily the problem; he argues instead that it is the ‘system’ that has constantly failed Indigenous people. *Talking to My Country* uses emotive imagery to convey Grant’s views:

There is [still] a space [between us] . . . we fill this space with hate and charity. We fill this space with ignorance and fear. It is the space on a bus: an empty seat, a black face and a hesitation: should I sit there? (p. 174).

Many people may not want to read this, but perhaps it is time people learnt how it feels to be an Indigenous person in Australia.

Grant argues that poverty, suicide, addiction, abuse and inequality are what Indigenous people have inherited from Australia. These are the things that continue to divide us: ‘If Australia is free, prosperous and wealthy then we are not Australians’ (p.176), he writes. He blames colonisation and generations of discriminatory government policies for attempting to eradicate the Indigenous race, such as the Stolen Generation that reportedly saw thousands of Indigenous children removed from their families. Grant also believes that Indigenous people’s entrenched dependency on welfare compounds their social and economic disenfranchisement. While the government continues to throw money at the problem, it has failed to make a noticeable difference to the lives of many Indigenous Australians, particularly in remote communities.

Personal anecdotes about Grant’s family make his story powerful and heartfelt. His aunty was part of the Stolen Generation, his grandmother was a white woman who was ostracised and shamed for loving a black man, whilst his grandfather was an alcoholic. These are the memories that many Indigenous people have to deal with every day, the weight of their history. Grant concedes that, yes, other people in Australia deal with similar issues, but for Indigenous people these issues are a direct result of failed government policies and intervention.

Grant describes the suffering of his people and how the spaces in their hearts from the shame and hardship of being Indigenous were filled with

drugs, alcohol and violence. He disagrees with the Australian anthem and the flag, arguing that these are symbols that Indigenous people cannot identify with. We see this every year with Australia Day, otherwise known as ‘Invasion Day’ by many Indigenous people.

Talking to My Country opens a window of insight into what Stan Grant believes it means to be Indigenous in Australia, as well as addressing the past and present struggles of the daily lives of Indigenous people. Despite this, Grant fails to provide suggestions on how Australia can move forward. He does not delve into the complicated issue of exactly how we can close the gap and bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians closer together, but merely states that we need to do so. As such, his book asks many open-ended questions but falls short in addressing what needs to be done.

At times, his discourse creates an ‘us’ and ‘them’ narrative, which can perpetuate the dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. We need to recognise that if we want to build a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, it needs to be done by both sides. Yes, we need to have a conversation, but blame and anger will not lead to progress any time soon. When Stan Grant wrote this book, he was mad. And I would be too. But no future reconciliation is likely to come from such anger, nor is it likely to lead to productive solutions that address the real problems.

Whilst Grant engages with complex issues and suggests that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians need to work together to solve them, his commentary is very much the established line—painting Indigenous people as victims of white oppression. Nevertheless, Grant believes that Australia ‘can do better’ than the racism we have displayed in the past. When he watches his children playing with other kids of different race, colour and culture, he feels hopeful about the future.

Putting his life story into words has perhaps helped free Grant from his past, and the thoughts and feelings that have burdened him. Many Indigenous Australians have felt deeply affected by the issues Grant raises such as racism, marginalisation, displacement, government policies, poverty, and so on. In a way, *Talking to My Country* speaks on

behalf of Indigenous people who have shared similar experiences. As a result, this book not only shares Grant's story, but also allows other Indigenous people to have their voices heard.

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Serious Whitefella Stuff: When Solutions Became the Problem in Indigenous Affairs

Mark Moran with Alyson Wright and Paul Memmott
Melbourne University Press, 2016
\$27.99, 224 pages
ISBN 9780 5228 6829 6



Reviewed by Sara Hudson

This book has an interesting premise: 'how does Indigenous policy signed off in Canberra actually work on the ground?' To answer this question, the book is divided into chapters that provide case studies of particular policy initiatives: for example, alcohol prohibitions, revitalising cultural practices, Shared Responsibility Agreements, and homeownership. However, while the idea of the book is good, potential solutions to improve the 'dysfunctional beast' that is Indigenous policy are buried at the back. Nor are these solutions particularly novel. Recommendations include looking back at past practices as well as forward to the future when designing policy, studying the local context, not coming in with pre-conceived notions, and working with Indigenous communities and leaders. The most original suggestions are for frontline workers to have more training in development strategies and for remote Indigenous

communities to become 'radical learning centres' where networks are developed and knowledge-sharing occurs amongst practitioners (p. 196).

The absence of specific solutions is perhaps a key point the authors are trying to make—for many of the 'wicked problems' bedevilling Indigenous communities, there are no simple solutions. In fact, as Moran points out 'attempts to solve one aspect of a problem typically reveal or create others' (p. 189). Yet while it may be true that 'solutions themselves become problems' (p. 181), it makes the book quite a depressing read.

What is particularly disheartening about some of the chapter case studies is the purging that goes on in Indigenous policy. Policy reforms, Moran explains, 'typically discredit anything that precedes them' (p. 178). Thus, a chapter by Alyson Wright relates the sad example of Ali Curang community leaders working hard to implement the actions in their Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) only to have all this work overturned by the Northern Territory intervention and the creation of Super Shires. Although there were many shortcomings in how the SRA was implemented and how the 'shared responsibility' component was articulated to community members, the funds that accompanied the SRA led to the creation of an art centre, Internet café, newly grassed ovals and a market garden. At the time of the SRA, Ali Curang was a relatively orderly community with neat and tidy yards and twice-weekly collections of rubbish. Today the only surviving legacy of the SRA is the arts centre. As Wright describes: 'The once reasonably tidy settlement is . . . crowded with litter and car bodies and the green grass in parks and ovals is dying and overgrown' (p. 129).

Another point the book makes is about the importance of being there for the long haul. Unfortunately, the political cycle is such that the only thing consistent in Indigenous affairs is the constant state of change, from policy and legislative reform to the overhauling of government departments. Funding cycles are also notoriously short, impacting on the ability of organisations to attract, train and retain staff as well as to show evidence of outcomes. According to Moran, internationally, the average time for NGOs to engage with communities is eight to ten years