

# Book Review



Bird G, Martin G & Nielson J: *Majah, Indigenous Peoples and the Law*  
Federation Press  
Reviewer: Robyn Davis

The contributors to this book are academics from Australian and overseas universities. The book comprises 13 chapters which examine in details particular aspects of the experience of indigenous peoples in the justice system.

The book was given the name 'Majah' by an elder of the Bundjalung people who reside in north-east New South Wales. 'Majah' means 'white boss' to the Bundjalung people. All articles in the book examine the effect of white colonialism upon indigenous people.

The book's central theme is colonialism. The authors of the first three chapters focus upon attempts made to disempower the 'Nunga's' – indigenous people of the southern regions of South Australia. In this part of the text, issues such as the impact of the criminal justice system, maintenance of white political power and the economics of colonialism

are also considered.

The authors of chapters 4 and 5 examine international law legislation and remedies concerning indigenous persons. In Chapter 4 Lisa Strelein considers the International Labour Organisation Convention no. 169. She concludes that Australia should not become a signatory to its proposed amendment because of its failure to advance the interests of indigenous people. The author of Chapter 5, *Keeping the Colonisers Honest*, Neil Lofgren considers the possibility of indigenous people utilising the United Nations Human Rights Committee as a forum to advance their rights.

The authors of Chapters 6-9 explore the ways in which indigenous people are portrayed and constructed. The remaining chapters in the text look into the effect of white law and Mabo no. 2. Particular attention is given to the impact of the criminal justice system on indigenous people.

The authors conclude the indigenous people, particularly in Australia, remained colonised. They support self-

determination for all indigenous people.

Jenny Blokland and Martin Flynn of the Northern Territory University contribute a chapter entitled *Five Issues for Criminal Law after Mabo*. This chapter is of particular interest in its explanation of the effect of Mabo no. 2 and it clearly identifies questions which remain unanswered since the Mabo decision, the major issue being does the criminal law of the Crown apply to Aboriginal persons?

Chapter 12, entitled *The Incarceration of Aboriginal Women* was written by Marie Brooks, lecturer at the Southern Cross University in NSW. She examines in detail the over-representation of Aboriginal women in the criminal justice system, the types of offences committed and the disproportionate sentences received by Aboriginal women. She also identifies possible solutions to the problem/

The authors' contributions are all grouped in themes and are interesting, diverse and informative. This is an excellent book.

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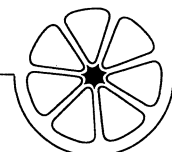
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