

Chapter 1

Beyond Captives and Captors: Settler-Indigenous Governance for the 21st Century

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After more than 200 years, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians struggle to understand the governance relationships that bind us. We have recently come to acknowledge something of the history that brought us together – ships arrived with white settlers, land was taken, there was brutal frontier conflict and the spread of disease that decimated Aboriginal populations. This was followed by policy frameworks of segregation, assimilation, self-determination and, most recently, intervention. But, as we focus on this story, we neglect to consider the principles or ideas about how to organise society that came with the people on the ships. We overlook the concepts and values that underpin mainstream Australian governance and, consequently, the power relations that position Indigenous people within the Australian political community. These larger matters tend to be pushed aside by a deficit model of Aboriginal people, a hubbub of preaching about good governance from mainstream Australia, or because we wrongly interpret the simple *participation* of Indigenous people as evidence of the expression of Indigenous ideas and values. The lack of discussion about the relationship between mainstream and Indigenous values and ideas makes us all, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, captives and captors in a complicated governance relationship – an imbroglio – that we do not adequately comprehend. This state of affairs leaves us confused about how to chart a respectful path together in the 21st century.

We can partly understand this situation by noting that Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives have now been entwined for more than two centuries. This entwinement has often been tense and antagonistic, but the intimacy of the Settler-Colonial relationship has inevitably led to mutual borrowings and adaptations (Thomas 1999: 10-15). Such borrowings can make it hard to differentiate the

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