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WE DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO 'NORMAL', WHEN 'NORMAL' WASN'T GOOD FOR EVERYONE

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Alongside the disruptions caused by the spread of COVID-19 we have heard discourses reflect the theme of normality. Preventative measures employed to 'flatten the curve' and stop the spread of disease are often spoken of as creating a temporary 'new norm', while a post-COVID-19 world is seen as marking a return to 'normality'. Positioned within a context defined by heightened uncertainty, anxiety and an urgency to respond to arising health, economic, and other social crises, in this paper we consider what a pre-COVID-19 normal means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and whether it is something we aspire to return to. Unpacking topics relating to Black deaths in custody and the Black Lives Matter movement we consider the systemic failure of dominant White systems of governance that continuously prove themselves incapable of addressing and responding to the Indigenous voices they claim to represent. Throughout our paper we encourage a deeper consideration of the need to create to a lasting new norm that protects, is informed by, represents, and directly involves Indigenous peoples and their representative bodies. Exemplified by the Uluru Statement from the Heart, we argue that a new norm — which is not characterised by Indigenous socio-economic disadvantages and disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations — must be one where an Indigenous voice is enshrined within the parliamentary process. A new norm must build on the foundation created by the countless Indigenous activists, past and present, who have laid the tracks leading towards meaningful reforms that engages Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. No longer are tokenistic or symbolic gestures of recognition acceptable. The time for a new normal is now.

Keywords: Indigenous; Australia; Coronavirus; Black Lives Matter; Black deaths in custody; injustice; inequity; normal

Introduction

There is little doubt that COVID-19 has disrupted life as we know it. Alongside the invasive but necessary public health measures implemented to prevent and 'flatten the curve' of the spread of coronavirus, we have heard a rhetoric that speaks to the theme of 'normality'. The everyday norms we

once took for granted, specifically those pertaining to people's movements and social interactions, have had to be rethought and reimagined. New habits of behaviour and practices of social distancing have been promoted and encouraged with the intent of creating a 'new normal'. While the pandemic has brought about many anxieties about the unknown, the 'new norm' is envisioned as a temporal state. For months we've heard people in conversation, on the radio, television, and in social media say 'when this is over ...', 'when everything goes back to normal ...' and 'when we're back to normal ...' life will be as we once knew it.

For Indigenous peoples, the norms of a pre-COVID-19 world do not represent the beacon of hope that many would suggest. We know what 'normal' was like for Indigenous people before the pandemic. At a time when the entire world has been forced into a state of self-reflection and re-evaluation, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are rejecting the very notion of normality and challenging how their future should look. Some have expressed this sentiment through the Black Lives Matter demonstrations while others have turned to social media, where people such as @Drlbram have stated that 'Any return to normal is a return to the normality of racism'. Others, such as @danhellz, have demanded immediate change, stating 'I WANT CHANGE. FOR THE BETTER. NOW'. A Kuku Yalanji man under the handle @BrissieMurri outlines that he doesn't 'want to go back to normal when normal's the same old anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, White supremacy, discrimination, violence against women, abuse of children, police brutality++ I say NO to this normal!'



For many Indigenous people 'normality' is synonymous with racism and punitive measures of control executed to maintain White dominance and authority. This was even in most workplaces, businesses, universities, and government, where the broader population might be eager to return. The pre-COVID-19 normal was one where Indigenous people faced systemic racism and suppression within an often-discriminatory healthcare system (Fletcher & Briscoe 2020; Robinson 2019). It was a time when Indigenous people lived in terror of being brutalised on the streets by police and dying while incarcerated (Human Rights Law Centre 2020; Marks 2020). During COVID-19 the health disparities caused by generations of systemic and structural discrimination have been exposed, and contributed to Indigenous

peoples' presentation as 'vulnerable'. Although Indigenous people may be at greater risk of succumbing to the coronavirus, we must remember that their classification as 'vulnerable' is part of a colonial regime through which narratives of White supremacy are reinforced through the dehumanisation of others (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Indigenous people's vulnerabilities are repeatedly used as justification for invasive and discriminatory interventions over their lives.

As state-sanctioned lockdowns have forced us to adapt to a 'new normal' it is time to consider whether the very fabric of society also needs locking down, dismantlement, and reconfiguration. In order to create change, the nation must first confront what a pre-COVID-19 'normal' means for Indigenous peoples, a topic we discuss below in relation to Black deaths in custody and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Having identified what a pre-COVID-19 normal means, we then centre our discussion on the need to include Indigenous voices and Indigenous-led initiatives within the parliamentary process so that pathways leading towards a more inclusive and empowered norm for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may be laid.

Black deaths in custody

While the systemic embedding of racism and horrific abuse of power have always been prevalent in Indigenous peoples, it wasn't until the 1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) that the issue began to receive greater recognition among the wider non-Indigenous population (Johnston 1991). After growing community concern over the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people dying under the watch and at the hands of the state, the RCIADIC investigated the deaths of 99 Indigenous people held in custody between 1980 and 1989. Although the report found that Indigenous deaths in custody was no higher than the ratio for non-Indigenous prisoners, Indigenous peoples were found to be grossly overrepresented within Australia's correctional facilities.

In the late 1980s, Indigenous people comprised approximately 2% of Australia's population but made up 14% of those incarcerated (Dodson 2016). The overall Indigenous population has slightly increased towards 3%, but the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people imprisoned in 2017 increased disproportionately, to 27% (Cunneen & Tauri 2019; Queensland Productivity Commission 2017). In response to the over-representation of Indigenous peoples in Australia's legal justice system, the RCIADIC provided 339 recommendations that addressed some of the social, structural, and political factors that contribute to the incarceration of Indigenous peoples. Many of these recommendations have never been fully implemented (Higgins & Collard 2020). Despite the federal government claiming that 78% of the recommendations have been implemented (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2018), Indigenous incarceration and deaths continue to rise. There have been over 430 Indigenous deaths in custody since the RCIADIC (Whittaker 2020).

A 2013 report by the National Deaths in Custody Program (NDICP), a watchdog established to monitor Indigenous deaths in custody, found that the number of Indigenous prisoners had doubled in the twenty years since the RCIADIC (Lyneham & Chan 2013). The normalisation of Indigenous incarceration and subsequent deaths in custody, along with wider social disadvantages and health disparities among Indigenous peoples, is demonstrated by the fact that *natural causes* were found to be the most prevalent explanation for deaths amongst Indigenous peoples. While this represents wider socio-economic and

health disadvantages (Baker 2013), many of these deaths are preventable and have come as a result of institutional neglect and/or abuses of power. One analysis attributed 38% of all Indigenous deaths in custody to a failure to provide medical care (Allam, Wahlquist & Evershed 2020). The very idea of a 'natural death' in custody is abhorrent, for it often overlooks the wider systemic abuses within both prisons and the wider community, suggesting that Aboriginal deaths are somehow normal, natural, or inevitable.

A report by the Australian Law Reform Committee (ALRC) further outlines the normalisation of Indigenous people's contact with the criminal justice system. Indigenous people are seven times more likely to be charged and 12.5 times more likely to receive a prison sentence than the non-Indigenous population. 47% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander convictions result in a prison sentence and Indigenous peoples are less likely to receive community-based sentences. Prisons are 11 times more likely to be used as holding cells for Indigenous people awaiting trial on remand. One third of those who are on remand do not go on to receive a prison sentence, if convicted at all (ALRC 2017).

A discriminatory bail system further fuels over-representation where socio-economic factors such as income or homelessness influence one's likelihood of being granted bail and adhering to the conditions set. The ALRC report found that 76% of the Indigenous prison population had previously served a prison sentence on at least 5 separate occasions (ALRC 2017: 29). Prison sentences are fuelled by wider social factors, as well as poor relations with police and law enforcement agencies. An investigation by the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (2020) found that 72% of young people identified as being at risk of reoffending by NSW Police were identified as 'possibly Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander'. Indigenous offenders are less likely to be cautioned, and feel as though their complaints about police brutality are not taken seriously. Finally, Indigenous peoples themselves, especially women, are more likely to be the victims of crimes. These statistics demonstrate the systemic embedding of punitive actions directed at Indigenous peoples as well as the government's failure to adhere to the 29 RCIADIC recommendations that centre on using imprisonment as 'a last resort' (Dodson 2016; Queensland Productivity Commission 2019). These norms cannot continue in a post-COVID-19 world.

Rather than acting as a guiding force to direct the implementation of the systemic reforms it recommended, reports such as the RCIADIC have become examples of a wider neoliberal colonial agenda that superficially engages in discourses of protecting Indigenous rights but fails to enact the measures necessary to ensure that such reforms are put into practice. It promotes a narrative of change while maintaining normality. This failure may come as little surprise when considering that those in power are the very beneficiaries of the social and political structures that grant, maintain, and legitimise their dominance and authority. In order to adequately address Indigenous people's rights, sovereignty, and ownership of Country one must first challenge the status quo and, in doing so, relinquish non-Indigenous people's power and dominance over Indigenous lives.

Shifting outlooks and the urgency for change

Since its publication in 1991, those who lived through the Royal Commission and the hope of reform it promised are now standing alongside younger generations during the BLM movement. Some are discovering the RCIADIC report for the first time and confronting the government's failure to fully

implement its recommendations and its inadequacy in addressing the underlining issues relating to systemic racism, abuse, and the killings of Indigenous peoples. In 2000, historian Henry Reynolds wrote on how many non-Indigenous students reacted to his lectures on Australian's colonial past with shock and bewilderment, collectively expressing a sentiment that questioned *Why weren't we told?* (Reynolds 2000). Despite such reactions conveying a sense of regret or affliction, the fact remains that non-Indigenous peoples were told of the continuing impact of colonisation and the systemic abuses that oppress Indigenous peoples. As some have highlighted, a more fitting response and consideration would be, 'Why didn't we listen', 'Why didn't we hear', or 'Why didn't we respond?' (Rolls 2010).

In 2000, the same year Reynolds published *Why weren't we told?*, over 250,000 Australians marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in an overwhelming display of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. While the reconciliation marches displayed an optimistic outpouring of hope through its call for unity, they have been criticised by some as tokenistic due to the perceived lack of systemic and structural change and limited changes to the racism experienced by Indigenous people. Twenty years on from the reconciliation marches, however, we are beginning to see some non-Indigenous Australians shift their outlooks from one that once questioned others for their lack of knowing — *Why weren't we told?* — toward one that takes personal responsibility. This is displayed on the signs and tee-shirts and in the chants of the BLM protesters who are proclaiming White silence as a form of violence.

As with many protest movements, the BLM movement is spearheaded by younger generations who, like those before them, have witnessed the hypocrisy and/or ineptitude of government inaction. Many younger people were children during the RCIADIC and the call for change that arose out of it. During the early 1990s, the exposure of systemic abuse and disadvantage experienced by Indigenous peoples encouraged a wider discourse of governmental and social accountability. Paul Keating acknowledged this in his 1992 Redfern address (ANTAR 2012) where he declared 'the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing'.

Although many younger people did not live through this era, they nonetheless encounter a government that continues to speak of 'closing the gap' without enacting meaningful commitments to structural and systemic change. It is a generation who have witnessed a parliamentary apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 where, like Keating sixteen years before, Kevin Rudd acknowledged that:

There comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time. (AIATSIS 2020)

Despite acknowledging the intergenerational harm caused by policies and practices of child removal — as outlined in the *Bringing Them Home* report (Wilkie 1997) — Indigenous Australians continue to live in a society where the rates of Indigenous child removal have doubled since the Stolen Generation era (1910—1970) and are in danger of tripling by 2036 (Lewis et al. 2019).

The BLM movement has exposed many of the pre-existing frustrations that are commonly experienced within Indigenous communities, a frustration directed at the continual recognition of the need to confront Australia's racist past and present, without the willingness or commitment to act. Indigenous and non-

Indigenous people have now taken to the streets to declare that tokenistic gestures or throw away comments, to which governments are not held to account, are no longer acceptable. Indigenous voices must be heard, White supremacy confronted, and structural and systemic reforms implemented.

Can systems facilitate change?

As debates over 'cancelling culture' and the appropriateness of monuments and events that celebrate Australia's colonial history are occurring, Prime Minister Scott Morrison warned of not importing the BLM movement from the USA into an Australian context (Hurst 2020). His reasoning was that while slavery continued in other parts of the world, such as the British colonies in the USA, Australia was settled under the pretence that there would be no slavery (Buchanan 2020). While he later apologised for this statement (Murphy 2020), Morrison maintains a conservative rhetoric that is marked by his refusal to engage in what he calls the 'history wars', but what others frame as a discourse of denial and conspiracy of silence towards Australia's colonial and racist origins.

Alongside demands for Black and Indigenous equality, many within the BLM movement have called for the 'dismantlement' or 'defunding' of the police force (Cunneen 2020). Such a declaration is both literal, and a conceptual means of articulating that the very fabric of society, inclusive of its parliamentary, judicial, and law enforcement apparatuses, continue to reflect and reinforce White colonial interests at the expense and exclusion of Indigenous peoples. Kevin Gilbert, an influential figure and activist during Australia's Black Power movement in the 1970s, wrote on the necessity of Indigenous peoples to empower themselves and other Indigenous peoples with the knowledge and resources necessary to overcome colonial rule and engage their sovereignty and self-determination. In his seminal work *Because a White Man'll Never Do It*, Gilbert observes:

Being done 'to' by Europeans has never worked and will never work. Blacks must *themselves* seek to strip off the crippling burdens of apathy, ignorance and soul loss that have plagued them for so long. And how can there be healing when the white man has not acknowledged that wrong was done[?]. (1973: 40)

In June 2020, actor Meyne Wyatt stood up and presented a powerful monologue on the television program Q&A (abcqanda 2020), demanding that the audience confront and acknowledge such wrongs. Through his stirring delivery, Wyatt lays bare Indigenous lived experiences with racism, in an honest, uncompromising and unapologetic manner. In doing so, he reached into the very ethos of non-Indigenous consciousness, forcing those who watched to witness Aboriginal people's pain, and confront their own complicity in White supremacy. He ends the monologue with the following:

I want to be what you want me to be. I want to be what I want to be. Never trade your authenticity for approval. Be crazy. Take a risk. Be different. Offend your family. Call them out. Silence is violence. Complacency is compliance. I don't want to be quiet. I don't want to be humble. I don't want to sit down.

A sense of urgency and the necessity for immediate change are constantly reinforced through never-ceasing examples of Indigenous oppression, discrimination and acts that are 'done to', as opposed to 'with' or 'by', Indigenous peoples. The lack of trust many Indigenous people feel towards White systems

of governance is further enshrined through the lack of acknowledgment of the harm done. It is for this reason that people such as Meyne Wyatt refuse to sit down and remain silent.

The BLM movement has encouraged some Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to revisit the words of activists and authors such as Gilbert. Colonialism has created an environment where Indigenous lives are continuously turned into the objects of governmental inquiries which discuss 'Aboriginal Affairs' or 'Indigenous Affairs' as means of addressing an 'Aboriginal problem' or 'Indigenous problem'. This is often done in ways that circumvent and exclude Indigenous peoples from the parliamentary process that develops the policies that are imposed over Indigenous lives. If a pathway to a 'new normal' in a post-COVID-19 world is to be paved, we must first confront and acknowledge the limitations of non-Indigenous systems of governance in addressing many of the social issues that impact Indigenous communities. A new normal must not only prioritise Indigenous voices, but also establish the structural legal reforms needed to enshrine and ensure accountability to Indigenous peoples and communities.

Pathways towards a new normal

The path towards a new and more inclusive norm for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is dependent on empowering and enshrining Indigenous voices within the parliamentary process so that Indigenous people may gain and maintain control over their own affairs. Since its conception at the National Constitutional Convention in 2017, the *Uluru Statement of the Heart* has provided a foundation for the movement towards meaningful constitutional reform. Based on data attained from extensive Indigenous-led community consultations, and the negotiations of hundreds of Indigenous delegates, the *Uluru Statement of the Heart* seeks to enshrine Indigenous voices in ways that hold governments to account: most notably, through the establishment of an advisory voice to parliament known as a 'Makarrata Commission'.

As noted by Davis (2018), the proposal of a Makarrata Commission and move towards Indigenous recognition builds on the legacy of past statements proposed in good faith by Indigenous peoples and their representative bodies. This is inclusive of the Yirrkala Bark Petitions (1963), the Barunga Statement (1988), the Eva Valley Statement (1993), the Kalkaringi Statement (1998), the ATSIC report on the Social Justice Package (1995), and the Kirribilli Statement (2015). Each of these statements was unsuccessful in instigating meaningful structural reform. While the Australian Government maintains the rhetoric of seeking Indigenous perspectives on constitutional reform in relation to the *Uluru Statement of the Heart*, in practice it continues the status quo through expressing its disagreement with and rejection of the reforms it proposes. It ultimately fails to hear the very voices it claims to seek.

Through its rejection, the government further demonstrate to Indigenous peoples that a *White government will never do it* — or simply remains *incapable* or *unwilling* to bring about the changes necessary to provide better outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Blatantly aware of tokenistic gestures and offerings of 'overregulated piecemeal concessions' (Moreton-Robinson 2015), the *Uluru Statement* reflects a unanimous call for meaningful change that is backed and protected by legislative and constitutional reforms. In other words, Indigenous peoples are demanding 'recognition' that translates into Indigenous *representation* — as opposed to 'consultation' — at local, regional, state, territory, and federal governmental levels. To return to the words of Gilbert, no longer is 'being done to' an option.

Indigenous peoples are calling for the resources and support needed to empower their own representative bodies so that they may continue to enact Indigenous sovereignty and control their own lives.

When the Uluru Statement was put forward, numerous journalists, elected representatives, and other community members engaged in discourses that fed into colonial anxieties that centred on giving undue powers to specific (non-White) sectors of society. Such sentiments tapped into something pervasive and deeply embedded within White Australian society and collective colonial consciousness. It played on anxieties that arose out of fear that by acknowledging and granting Indigenous people a legally enshrined voice, the normality of one's own status and White privilege will be exposed and jeopardised. Despite this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, along with their allies, continue to counter the inaccurate narratives attached to constitutional recognition (Grattan & Davis 2019; Davis et al. 2018; Synot 2019).

While movements such as the BLM protests expose topics relating to Indigenous rights through rendering them visible, Indigenous people's demand for systemic reforms is ongoing. Unlike the 'new norms' adopted because of coronavirus, the push for structural reform cannot be momentary or temporal. Megan Davis highlights the urgency and need for continuing engagement in the push for constitutional recognition and reform:

We do not have the luxury of walking away and giving up on structural reform. We have garnered enormous support, including from inside politics — just not enough support, yet. The logic of the reform, for the nation's future, is irrepressible. Substantive, concrete reform is the only thing the nation has not tried ... The conventional parliamentary system and its ancillary mechanisms have failed us. *Yet we require that very system to endorse this change. We have no choice but to adopt strategies that engage the public.* (Davis 2019; emphasis added)

In this quote, Davis demonstrates how the *Uluru Statement of the Heart* is concerned with implementing the reforms necessary to enable responsive and equitable outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Rather than overthrowing the entire system or offering symbolic statements of recognition, its focus is on working within existing structures as means to endorse change in the form of Indigenous representation within parliament. While this can only be achieved by adopting strategies that engage the public and mobilise participation from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it must be led and informed by Indigenous voices.

An inquiry into service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal communities in Queensland (Queensland Productivity Commission 2017a) outlined the necessity of implementing structural reforms that would enable community-based control of the programs and services delivered to Indigenous communities. The inquiry set out to outline 'the mechanisms for communities and government to achieve change' through enabling 'communities to develop ways to improve outcomes for themselves' and ensuring 'genuine accountability' (Queensland Productivity Commission 2017b). Such change requires Indigenous involvement in the full process of governance and implementation of service delivery — inclusive of its conception, implementation, monitoring, budgeting, and evaluation. Through its *Tracks to Treaty Statement of Commitment* (Queensland Government 2018) and *Thriving Communities* program, the Queensland Government has outlined its commitment to developing co-designed agreements that would remain respectful and accountable to local Indigenous communities.

Although the Queensland Government has expressed its commitment to empower Indigenous peoples to 'have a voice to government', the degree to which such commitment has translated into action has yet to transpire. The government's response lies in danger of losing sight of its potential to create real systemic change. Such reservation has been observed by the Cape York Institute who have noted that the implementation of QPC's recommendations 'is entirely lacking the rigour needed to have any prospect of delivering real change' (Cape York Institute 2019). The government's unwillingness to step back and relinquish some control, so that the implementation of the QPC's recommendations may be monitored by an independent statutory body that is free of political interference, remains a significant obstacle to overcome (Fredericks & Bradfield, forthcoming).

Recently, the Coalition of Peaks (a body made up of 50 peak Indigenous service providers) collaborated with the federal government to draft the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Coalition of Peaks 2020; COAG 2020). While representing Indigenous interests and advocating for self-determination, some see the Coalition's entry into the space of constitutional reform as having a conflict of interest due to its members' reliance 'on government funds to run their organisations', whose interests are often 'pegged to the governments' outcomes, not ours' (Davis 2020). While the goal of reaching parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations is of vital necessity, the urgency to do so has not translated into immediate action (Harris 2020). Davis (2020) observes how agreements such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap often take bandaid approaches that fail to address the underlying causes of Indigenous disadvantage — a system of governance that neglects to include Indigenous perspectives and self-determination.

Calls for the 'dismantlement of the police' during BLM are ways of articulating the need for a shift in power, and to redirect resources towards other, community-based and controlled initiatives. Pathways towards a new normal may take form through 'justice reinvestment' where the excessive funding and resources allocated to the criminal justice system are redistributed to community-based programs that provide preventative, early intervention, and diversionary services. The cost of incarcerating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2016 was \$3.9 billion dollars (ALRC 2017). A report by the QPC found that reducing incarceration rates by 20% would amount to \$61 million dollars in saving in Queensland alone. Its recommendations suggest that such savings could be reinvested in evidence-based community programs, creating a cycle that helps reduce incarceration while providing additional monies for reinvestment.

The benefits of justice reinvestment lie in its community-led, place-based structure that is adaptable to the specific needs of a location and delivered in a socio-culturally appropriate manner by trusted persons and organisations. As a grass roots initiative, programs such as the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project in Bourke, NSW, target the underlining causes of crime and address the wider socio-economic determinants that contribute to a person encountering the criminal justice system. In operation since 2013, the program had a gross impact of \$3.1 million in 2017, with an estimated impact of \$7 million over the next five years (KPMG 2018). Significant improvements have been made in a range of areas, including domestic violence (down 23%), education (year 12 retention up 31%), and incarceration (total days in custody down 42%). Such programs, however, are in dire need of long-term funding for their implementation as well as their monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion

Through its disruption to the *normality* of everyday life, COVID-19 has contributed to a sense of angst and uncertainty for many. The pandemic has created a temporary new norm that is often accompanied by a reassurance that everything will eventually return to how it once was. In addition to a rhetoric of normality, we have also heard discussions of *unity*, which emphasise that 'we are all in this together', and that in the face of adversity we are greater aware of our shared humanity. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people, the disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in a range of areas inclusive of health, employment, education, over-representation in the criminal justice system, and Indigenous deaths in custody have made it blatantly clear that we are far from being in this 'together'.

COVID-19 has created a sense of urgency. An urgency to follow health guidelines, to social distance, and to ultimately find a vaccine and/or cure. An accumulation of events and circumstances such as acts of racial discrimination, police brutality, deaths in custody, lockdowns, the pandemic, climate change, socio-economic disadvantages, and the BLM movement, have also fuelled a sense of urgency in regards to Indigenous rights and lives. Conversations are increasingly focused on White accountability and complicity within social settings that continue to be governed by *White* structures that prioritise and maintain Eurocentric authority and oppress Black Australians. Although acts of protest, movements on social media, and calls for accountability are positive signs, whether these translate to or provoke real systemic social change is yet to be seen.

Contextualised by countless reports, statements, movements, royal commissions and inquiries into 'Indigenous affairs' — which have amounted to little in terms of systemic structural change — Indigenous peoples are rejecting tokenistic gestures and piecemeal offering that do not directly involve them. As outlined in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, the recognition of Indigenous peoples and cultures must be backed by constitutional reform and legislative powers that ensure government accountability and provide an Indigenous voice and representative body within parliament. As discussed in relation to the QPC inquiry into service delivery as well as justice reinvestment, community-led and placed-based initiatives are most effective in addressing local needs. A post-COVID world must be one that embraces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices, perspectives, and expertise as *the norm*. Governments and the wider non-Indigenous population need to recognise their own limitations and support Indigenous initiatives through funding, providing resources, and entering partnerships where Indigenous sovereignty and agency is legally protected and adhered to.

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