

Mining boom 'classic case of colonisation'

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A PROMINENT Aboriginal academic has compared Australia's commodities boom to the 19th century colonisation of Africa and accused the nation's political leaders of ignoring evidence-based solutions to the plight of indigenous people in favour of "political grandstanding".

Marcia Langton said Aboriginal Australia was a failed state, a "heartland of instability" within a booming economy, 40 years after the most successful referendum in Australian history gave Aborigines the vote.

As urban industrialists got fat off the land, its traditional owners were being left behind with no economic future. "But so little of that money is going back into the community. It's a classic case of colonisation ... like Africa in the 19th century, when all the wealth was extracted out for the people of Manchester and London while the people in Africa went poor," Professor Langton said. "That [mining] wealth flows through to you in the cities but it's based on the extraction of all that Aboriginal people can rely on in the future."

Professor Langton, who is the foundation chairwoman in Australian indigenous studies at the University of Melbourne, made the comments in a speech at last week's annual lunch for the Jessie Street Trust held at NSW Parliament House.

She said politicians were in the thrall of opinion columnists who have never visited remote communities but who describe their disastrous state "like a form of pornography".

An absence of evidence-based policy from all Australian governments had created the situation, she said, pointing to the Federal Government's policy to fix the town camps around Alice Springs as another example.

Last week, the camps voted against a plan by the Indigenous Affairs Minister, Mal Brough, to turn the town's Aboriginal settlements into "normal" suburbs. It would require the housing authorities that run the camps to relinquish their perpetual leases over the land in return for \$50 million of federal spending on housing and infrastructure.

But the camps could be fixed using examples such as that of the Northern Territory's Utopia community, Professor Langton said.

As the anniversary of the 1967 referendum approaches, she said, indigenous issues needed to become part of the Zeitgeist once more.

