



# The Day After Tomorrow

## A CASSE SYMPOSIUM ON BREAKTHROUGH RECOGNITION

Presented by Creating A Safe Supportive Environment  
(CASSE)

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at the Brain Centre  
Melbourne University  
Kenneth Myer Building  
30 Royal Parade  
Parkville Victoria



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Compilation of  
presentation  
papers

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CASSE respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet - the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present.



*Left to right: Rob Springall – Chair, CASSE Committee of Management (COM); Jamie Millier Tjupurrula – CASSE Program Manager, Men’s Tjilira Movement, Nathan Brown – CASSE Translator & Cultural Consultant, The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP, Pamela Nathan – Director, CASSE Aboriginal Australian Relations Program, Martin Jugadai – RFDS Cultural Consultant, Men’s Tjilira Movement, Senator Patrick Dodson, Anne Kantor – Deputy Chair, CASSE COM, Ken Lechleitner Pangarta – Research Officer, CASSE/CAAC Aboriginal Men’s Shed Research Project*



# Preface

What does a nation that sees, hears and knows – that recognises – all of its peoples look like?

Taking the day after recognition as a possible starting or end point, this symposium journeyed through the unrecognised trails of trauma to shine a light on dreaming breakthroughs to achieve recognition, change minds and save lives.

The invisible heart of Australia is lacerated by the racial divide, which blankets silent suffering and bleeding trauma trails. But remembrance, revival and resilience are reclaiming the ancestral lands, generating tomorrows.

CASSE's symposium provided a forum for important thinkers from Central Australia to share their knowledge and work with some of Australia's key Indigenous, political and cultural leaders.

Attendees included:

- Aboriginal people and representatives from Aboriginal organisations
- Psychoanalytic psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, counsellors and mental health practitioners
- Thought leaders, practitioners and advocates from the legal, justice, political and welfare system
- Service providers working to break cycles of trauma and violence

- Australians seeking to develop mutual understanding and recognition for a reconciled Australia.

**Videos of each of the presentations are available on the CASSE website: <http://www.casse.org.au/casse-tv/>**

**This booklet, compiling papers prepared for the symposium, transcripts of key presentations, and key themes presented at the symposium, has been assembled\* to contribute to the national conversation regarding constitutional recognition of Aboriginal Australians and will be presented to the Referendum Council for consideration.**

***\*Papers have been assembled in the order they were presented at the Symposium.***

## KEY THEMES OF THE SYMPOSIUM:

- We are all collectively the inheritors and generators of the country's psyche and national narrative. The absence of recognition has effectively silenced Aboriginal people from contributing their own story to this narrative.
- Recognition – being seen, being heard, being known – is psychologically essential.
- Recognition can only come from another person whom we, in turn, recognise as different and valuable in his or her own right.
- Psychological recognition constitutes constitutional recognition and vice versa.
- The past has a living presence. By learning lessons from the past, from each other and with each other, we have the possibility of moving forward **together** into the future.
- Disrespect, humiliation, disregard for what is important to you and your people are all extraordinarily toxic.
- Recognition needs to be followed by **respect** - for people and for the rights of people, as individuals and communities.
- 'Contact zones' – such as Alice Springs – 'the eye of the storm' are important for their transformative, generative possibilities.
- 'Recognition' means learning to appreciate each other's complexity and at the same time speaking in clear language that communicates essential facts and clear (not hidden) ideas. It is about thinking clearly, understanding clearly and listening with care. Together.
- Without recognition, a psychological state of terra nullius prevails.
- Psychoanalytic endeavour is the story of recognition. Do you see me? Do you know me? Do you see my pain? Recognising the unfolding emotional world catalyses the narrative of pain and provides the healing transformations from breakdowns to breakthroughs.
- Appreciation of the other's reality – mutual recognition – gives rise to the establishment of *shared reality and empathy*.
- why would you **not** recognise and acknowledge the history and language of Aboriginal peoples – who have inhabited this nation for tens of thousands of years - in a revised constitution of Australia?
- Recognition is about understanding how Aboriginal people can work and live in Australia's mono-cultural structure while possessing bi-cultural richness.

## KEY THEMES OF THE SYMPOSIUM CONT:

- Recognition transcends the politics of fear and guilt of the nation and works towards a reconciliation based on truth, healing and justice.
- Recognition involves an opportunity for affected individuals and communities to be supported in recognising who they are and to address their trauma/intergenerational trauma and move towards healing.
- Sharing each other's stories and emotional experiences allow us to envision and dream together. It provides a basis for significant political and social change.
- Recognition facilitates health, psychological growth, aliveness and realness.



# Introduction

**By Pamela Nathan, Director, CASSE Aboriginal Australian Relations Program**

Welcome to you all! We are here to talk about recognition. What does a nation that sees, hears and knows - that recognises - all of its peoples look like? Taking the day *after* tomorrow as the starting or ending point, this symposium will journey through the unrecognised trails of trauma and may shine a light on dreaming breakthroughs to achieve recognition, change minds and save lives.

The issue of recognition is a longstanding one. In 1835 Governor Bourke issued the Proclamation upon which British settlement was based, reinforcing the notion that the land of Australia belonged to no-one. Its publication in the Colony meant that from then, *all* people found occupying land without the authority of the government would be considered illegal trespassers. This would not change until the Australian High Court's decision in the Eddie Mabo Case in 1992, which inserted the legal doctrine of native title in law. Currently, the First Nation are seeking constitutional change. Constitutional change is not an abstract concept or a mere intellectual exercise. Constitutional change is about the real lives, the real life and death struggles of Aboriginal people today; the past has a living presence. Constitutional change is about psychological recognition and about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. Alexis Wright, *Dirt Song*, writes about the "crying shame to see the country like this" and tells us how to bring the "country back":

Listen for the heartbeat.  
The heartbeat now—with the pulse of the land,  
The bird; the tree; the grass and the wind  
Bringing it up.

Dry country some places now  
Too much  
I don't know if we will get rain soon.  
Who will make it rain?  
Some of them old people passed away now,  
You know the rainmakers.

They been make it rain.  
Make it rain and the country come back.  
You got to look after the rainmakers.  
People need to listen  
Listen carefully  
The wind blows strong  
Through the tree it blows  
Come visiting you  
Spirit talking to you  
It comes in dreams  
You can hear it too  
We are made the same, you and I.  
Hot wind bringing the goose  
Bringing fish  
Rain storm.



We will hear from speakers in Central Australia today who will give voice to the realities of non-recognition and recognition. Let us listen carefully. Let us listen to the heartbeat! Today, maybe contributions toward changing minds and saving lives on the journey of recognition can be made, renewing hope and dreamings and give tomorrows to the First Nation and, indeed, the nation of Australia. Let us today look after the rainmakers! Let us grow up country, hold country, look after country, know “that’s his story”, make the country come back, and settle down country. Let us hold in mind the heart of Australia; the ancestral lands of songlines and Dreamtime.

Let us now begin.

Let us find new beginnings.

## John, Lord Alderdice



**John, Lord Alderdice, by profession a psychoanalytic psychiatrist, was for eleven years Leader of the Alliance Party and one of the negotiators of Northern Ireland’s 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The first Speaker of the new Northern Ireland Assembly, he is the recipient of many honorary degrees and awards for his conflict resolution work locally and abroad.**

It’s a real delight to join you in Australia all the way from Belfast on the island of Ireland. Of course it’s a very different place here in Belfast - the weather is very different from the weather you’re having. We’re on a small island, you’re on a great land mass. But there are also some very common features: we are all human beings, we are all people, and in our relationships with each other, as individuals and as communities, we often have problems, some of them historic problems that go back a long way and that create great difficulties for us. Problems that we sometimes find end up with violence, and in other cases people doing harm more to themselves than to other people.

In London, in a previous generation, there used to be signs outside boarding houses that said “No Blacks or Irish”. So that question of relationships between people, and between people who are different, whether different from colour or from culture, often create deep difficulties and longstanding and painful traumas. And of course, when people experience trauma themselves, sometimes they take that with them in their relationships and visit it on other people. We know that people who have been physically or sexually abused may end up being very sympathetic to others who have been abused or on the other hand they may end up being abusers themselves.

When people went from this part of the world – from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales - to Australia some of them were leaving very difficult painful unpleasant experiences behind. Some of them had been accused of crimes and convicted; major crimes, and sometimes remarkably minor misdemeanours. They were sent out to Australia as a punishment.

Others were young children who were taken away from their families or perhaps their families were not able or willing to look after them, and they were sent out to Australia.

So whilst some people from my part of the world went out in a very positive way, others went to Australia in a very negative way. Maybe that helps add to our understanding of the fact that some of them treated First Nation people in Australia particularly badly. Whatever the reasons, there isn't any doubt that the history of Australia is littered with terrible trauma and difficulty, and indeed disease that was brought from my part of the world to your part of the world. Even in my part of the world, we have had difficulties dealing with our trauma and problem. It came forward with us in terrorism and violence. Not just for a few years or decades but actually for hundreds of years and I have spent much of my life, trying to understand why it is, and how it could be, that some people as individuals or groups treat other people as individuals or groups so badly. Treat them as though they weren't really human beings at all. Sadly, as we look around the world at the moment we don't always find that the situation is improving.

One of the most frightening things for me about the way geopolitics is going is the way in which political leaders sometimes talk about others in their own country and in other countries as though they were less than human. That's an appalling situation but we can't - you and I - necessarily change the geopolitics. What we can do is address, analyse, understand and try to make differences for the better in our own communities.

The first thing that is important of course is to *recognise* each other as individuals, and as communities, as real human beings who have their own thoughts, feelings, culture, background and hopes for the future.

That's not been the situation for First Nation people in Australia. Getting recognition as individuals, as human beings, and then getting recognition as First Nations, as first Australians, is still a problem, but I've been really pleased to understand how some progress is beginning to be made. I really, really hope that 2017 is going to turn out to be the year when a big step is made in constitutional recognition of the first Australians, the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. That would be a big achievement, it would be an enormous step, but it is only a step along the road because it needs to move on from recognition to *respect*.

When I have been working here in Northern Ireland, for most of my life trying to understand the conflict and how to change it, it became clear to me that one of the key difficulties was that at least one, if not more than one community here, felt humiliated and disrespected. There were very good historical reasons for that, and even in some cases current reasons at the time I started to work in this area. And it is clear from working with individual people and communities that this is really about the most toxic thing you can experience - disrespect, humiliation, wiping you out as a person, making you feel that all that is important to you and your people is of no value at all and can be tossed to the side; it's extraordinarily toxic. If you have the experience of being humiliated and disrespected, years after you will still remember how that felt and it doesn't feel good. As I've gone around the world to look at other conflicts, and other kinds of conflicts, this is always the thing that keeps coming back again and again: humiliation and disrespect. They are not the only things - but they are pretty much the most toxic. So recognition needs to be followed by respect, and respect for people but also respect for the rights of people, as individuals and communities.

The whole development of our understanding of civil and human rights is really critical, it's one of the great developments of the last 50 years or more. Not that it has answered all the questions, in fact sometimes it has brought forward new questions, but it is really very important. So respect must issue forth in *rights*. But that's not the end of the road. When we started at home here we thought if we could get to the point where there was mutual recognition, we call it parity of esteem, and if we could develop respect rather than disrespect, and if we could make sure that everybody's rights as individuals and communities were protected, then we would have succeeded. We would have dealt with the causes of the violence. Well those things are all important but they are all important in leading to the fundamental, which is *creating new relationships*. All our problems are fundamentally about problems of relationships between people and between peoples.

In my part of the world the politics got reduced down to who was controlling the territory – it was all about land, about the border. There were those people who wanted there to be no border - people from the Catholic Nationalist community wanted a united Ireland separate from Britain - and people who were Protestant Unionists who wanted the relationship with Britain to be maintained, and if that could only be maintained with a border then a border there had to be. So everybody got to concentrating on border or no border, United Kingdom or United Ireland, and they tended to forget that the fundamental problem was not the division of the island of Ireland but the division of the people on the island of Ireland. We couldn't agree how to share this piece of territory, this piece of earth and so the solution was not going to be found in dealing with a border on a map, or even a constitutional border between North and South, but finding a way in which the people of Ireland – north and south – could share this island in an agreed way. It might be shared

on the basis of a border with good neighbourly relations, or it might be shared in the future with no border at all, particularly in the wider context of the European Union, as we had thought at the time. But whatever, it is about relationships between people and peoples. Not just between individual people, you can have good relations between individual Protestants and individual Catholics, individual Unionist and individual Nationalists, but if there is not a good relationship between the whole community of Protestants Unionists and Catholic Nationalists then you still have a problem even if you have individually good relationships. These are really challenging things and it takes us into understanding culture, history, the pain, the trauma, the distrust, the difficulty, the abuse, the massive dehumanization and unpleasantness that has taken place in the past and that carries on not just in our memories of the past but in the way we experience the present and fear sometimes for the future. But the aim in the end is to create those new relationships.

What's really exciting for me about this CASSE workshop is that it's not just focusing on the past, although it's not forgetting about it at all, it's not just focusing on this very important programme of consultation and hopefully a referendum that will be successful in creating constitutional recognition, but it is also looking forward into treating people with respect, ensuring that everybody's rights are understood and accommodated and that in the end we create a new set of relationships. And that will mean ultimately, all of us having to move and develop.

People in the majority community, I think, have now begun to realise that many of the ways that that community is structured isn't good for them; there are issues about the politics, about the economy not really serving the needs of many ordinary people; the question of how we deal with the precious earth, the environment, people are understanding that we have



not been doing good things there; and even in terms of really fundamental questions about meaning, purpose, religion, faith, sacred values, the transcendent – these are all things that people are beginning to ask questions about and to say “You know the way that we as white people, as people from the Western world, the way we follow these things through has not actually been as good as we thought. And we need to find ways of learning and moving forward”.

For Aboriginal, First Nation People, there are also necessary changes – the world has changed. For 50 or 60,000 years Australians lived in a particular way. It was a very tough life, but it was a life through which they gained understanding about the meaning of the world, about their relationship with the world, and about their relationship with each other – but that world has changed.

So it is really important to hold on to the history, appreciate the culture, ensure that the deep insights and understandings of the past are not lost but are developed and enrich our life today and tomorrow, but also that it is a new world and that first Australians need also the chance to develop in their relationship with Australia as it is now both physically and in relationship with other people.

So all of us have lessons to learn from the past, very painful lessons, but we also have the possibility of moving forward, and moving forward together into the future, not in antagonism to each other but in learning from each other and with each other. As you do that you will not only have something to give to each other and to your children and grandchildren but something to give to the rest of the world which desperately needs to understand and learn these lessons.

That’s one of the things that is exciting for me here in Ireland. We have done lots of practical, political, legal and constitutional things; we have ticked lots of the kinds of boxes that you might expect in a peace process; but we still have to make changes of attitude and culture so that we can live together for the present and for a future together. We are learning that – and it’s not easy and we have setbacks, usually created by ourselves in these relationships - but we are also able to move forward in a way that’s positive. I think that is also possible for people in Australia. I very much hope that not only will I get the chance to learn back from Pamela and colleagues in CASSE about this conference, and about the work that you are doing together, but I hope that it will be possible not just to join you in spirit but in person before too long and that together we can find ways of learning and working and developing to create a better world informed by all the cultural experiences and wisdom of the past as well as the new relationships we develop for the future. I wish you well and I look forward to being with you again before too long.

## Kieran Finnane



Kieran Finnane is a journalist and arts writer with a commitment to recognising complexity. She has lived in Alice Springs since 1987, writing as a founding journalist of the *Alice Springs News* since 1994 as well as for national publications. She is the author of *TROUBLE: On Trial in Central Australia*.

### Meeting in the space between us

As a journalist, I am almost by definition someone who tells other people's stories – Alexis Wright talks about some of the consequences of that in her Meanjin essay (Alexis Wright, 'What happens when you tell somebody else's story/', Meanjin, Vol 75, Issue 4). I take many of her points.

Yet I live and do my journalist's work in a place where 'us' and 'other' are not always or not entirely mutually exclusive. In venturing to talk about this, I obviously need to bear in mind that I speak from a position of belonging to the dominant culture, albeit a woman's position.

Clearly, I can never say 'us' in relation to Aboriginal experience, I cannot see it from the 'inside', but I can try to see and hear when Aboriginal people act and speak, seeking to be seen and heard.

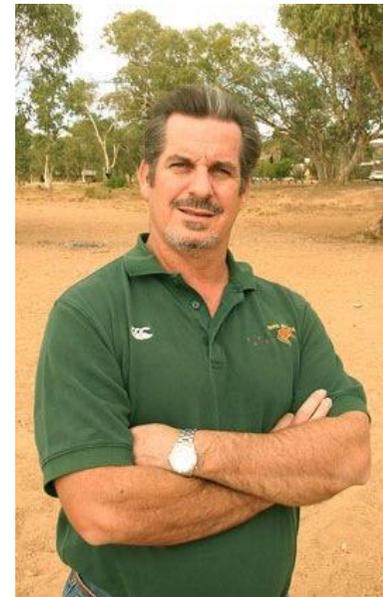
In this sense – and others grounded in day to day life in a place like Alice Springs, of school, sport, the arts, work, not to mention creating families together – it is possible to be part of a community with local Aboriginal people. A community situated in the space between us, where we must go to meet one another. Over the years I have heard a number of local Aboriginal people recognise this sense of community.



A senior custodian for Mparntwe – the Arrernte name for the Alice Springs area – is Doris Kngwarraye Stuart. She dedicates herself to the protection of Mparntwe’s sacred sites, working particularly with artists to create a better understanding of their significance. When she attends public forums, she declines to do ‘Welcome to Country’. “Did you ask before you came here?” she will challenge. She speaks instead about the sacred sites in proximity. But on occasion she will encourage non-Aboriginal people she trusts to do this speaking. She says: “You don’t have to be Aboriginal to respect sites.”

1 Alice Springs News, June 12, 2008, archived at <http://www.alicespringsnews.com.au/1519.html>

A quite trenchant Aboriginal political leader of a few years back, Darryl Pearce, in a public forum on future urban planning, recognised the long relationship between Arrernte traditional owners and the “historical” non-Aboriginal people of the town. “We just don’t want you to turn into the hysterical people,” he said.<sup>1</sup> Not everyone lives up to this hope, of course, but there are many who do or try to.



The history Darryl Pearce recognised and the bridges it has built between people was also called upon by the Arrernte Ryder and related families when their much-loved relative died at the hands of five young white men. I will say more later about their extraordinary leadership at this

And: <http://www.alicespringsnews.com.au/2012/03/22/nose-diving-cbd-it-happened-on-the-11th-councils-watch/>

time, but for now just want to recall the words of one of them, Karen Liddle, in response to the sentencing of the killers: “We all live in this community as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and long-term residents must stick together,” she said.



I have heard Ken Lechleitner, who will be talking shortly, reach out to non-Aboriginal people in this same inclusive way. And he might have something more to say on this.

Margaret Kemarre Turner OAM is a senior Arrernte woman who has operated for a long time as an important cultural go-between in Alice Springs, a role to which she brings great personal qualities of warmth, generosity, optimism, forgiveness as well as deep Arrernte cultural knowledge and commitment.



She is the author of an invaluable book called *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*, with the subtitle, *What it means to be an Aboriginal person* (IAD Press, 2010). It brings together a series of conversations, held in a mix of Arrernte and English, with her longtime friend and colleague, non-Aboriginal man Barry McDonald. She calls him *alere* – “nephew”. In the book’s concluding pages she says this:

“Two cultures can hold each other. I understand that because I know how I can relate with non-Aboriginal people as well as with my own ... Like

that *Penangke* man who worked on the big Arrernte dictionary. There's a different feeling for people when you learn, like you're really close ... it's something like being related to someone in a way that's almost as though they're your own parents ... It's a really good relationship, and it's in a really respectful way." (p220)



She explores these feelings and relationships until she gets to what becomes the final sentence of her book: "Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together as real champions for language, for culture, for Land, and for relationship. *Alakenhe athewe*."

<sup>2</sup> Peter Bishop, 'The Contact Zone as Imaginal Space', in *Placing Psyche*, edited by Craig San Roque, Amanda Dowd & David

I asked her about the meaning of those last two words, *Alakenhe athewe*. She said, "That's how it is, this belonging."

So I take my starting point from all these generous, thoughtful people when I venture to make some of my own observations of what is going on today in Alice Springs in the space between us.

...

Craig San Roque, and other writers he has made me aware of, speak of places like Alice Springs as "contact zones". I find Peter Bishop<sup>2</sup>, a cultural studies scholar at the University of South Australia, helpful in the way he argues for contact zones being recognised for their *transformative, generative* possibilities.

Contact zones arise typically, he writes, in "contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths". But they also offer "spaces where a *decolonialising* of cross-cultural communication and action can occur, where there can be alternative possibilities". (p26)

In this description I recognise the Alice Springs I live and work in as an *acute* "contact zone" in both senses. The trouble is that most of the time our contact zone is thought about only in terms of problems, oppression, full of conflict and suffering, which we can find almost overwhelming.

When I wrote my book, *Trouble: On Trial in Central Australia*, it was with the clear intention of *not* contributing to those feelings of being utterly

Tacey. Spring Journal Inc, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2011.



daunted. In following criminal proceedings with serious violence, mostly killings, at their heart, contextualising them to the point that I do – with an unflinching attention to the facts but without judgement or sensationalism, with compassion but without sentimentality – I wanted to draw attention to the ways in which Central Australia’s trouble belongs to our ‘ordinary’ – that the day of trouble begins like other days until those moments from which there is no return.

This is why the trouble can’t simply be locked away, why it is not susceptible to crude social engineering efforts.

It is in our ‘ordinary’ life with all its defects that we also find the possibilities and relationships for change.

Of course, we can *all* really struggle to recognise that ordinary – to see our own position in it and to see the position of others. The Northern Territory’s protracted dance around its heavy drinking culture, with its known contribution to high levels of violence, is a case in point: governments, including the Commonwealth, tinker at the edges of population-wide regulation while applying bludgeon-type measures to Aboriginal people.

But I actually don’t want to spend this time with you today reinforcing a sense of ‘us’ in The Centre getting nowhere in the face of crushing pressures and non-recognition of one another. On the ground, the perspective can change. What people say and do, change it, in a constant push and pull. It is in that shifting ground that we can find hope and a way forward.

In relation to constitutional recognition specifically, we have yet to hear a collective position from Aboriginal people in Central Australia. Their ‘First Nations Regional Dialogue’, organised by the Central Land Council, will be held at the end of March. From this three day gathering, they will send five participants to Uluru in April, where the national convention will consider the referendum proposal and seek consensus on the question to be put to all Australian voters.

So, taking up the broader sense of recognition that Pamela Nathan has evoked – of being able to see and know, to be seen and known, and to which I would add *being listened to and heard* – I will turn to some of what I learned in following the grim stories I found in the Alice Springs courthouse, the subject of my book.

...



Most of its action plays out inside this stern bunker of a building.

And some of it, outside, across the road, on the so-called courthouse lawns.



On many a court day the lawns provide a waiting place, where mostly Aboriginal people gather – perhaps ahead of a matter that concerns them, perhaps to show their support and solidarity with relatives who are involved.

These settings are about to undergo significant change, in a manifestation of non-recognition that is a *frustrating* big step backwards.

From the courthouse lawns looking towards the river you can see the grand old tree, a sacred site on an important song-line. Margaret Kemarre Turner describes it as ‘The Foundation Tree’.



‘The family, past and present, belongs to that foundation,’ she says.<sup>3</sup>

When I wrote my book – little more than a year ago – I was able to talk optimistically about the town’s acknowledgement of the tree, as signifying a move towards greater respect and understanding of Arrernte values held in the land.

In an urban renewal project the clutter of street furniture, signage, and exotic shrubbery around the tree had been cleared away. This made it possible to walk or stand or sit in its presence, and to look further east towards another tree of significance on the river bank.



<sup>3</sup> See Finnane, Trouble, e/n 1, p 268.

When a civic ceremony was held to launch the new look of the area, another senior Arrernte woman was doing 'Welcome to Country'.

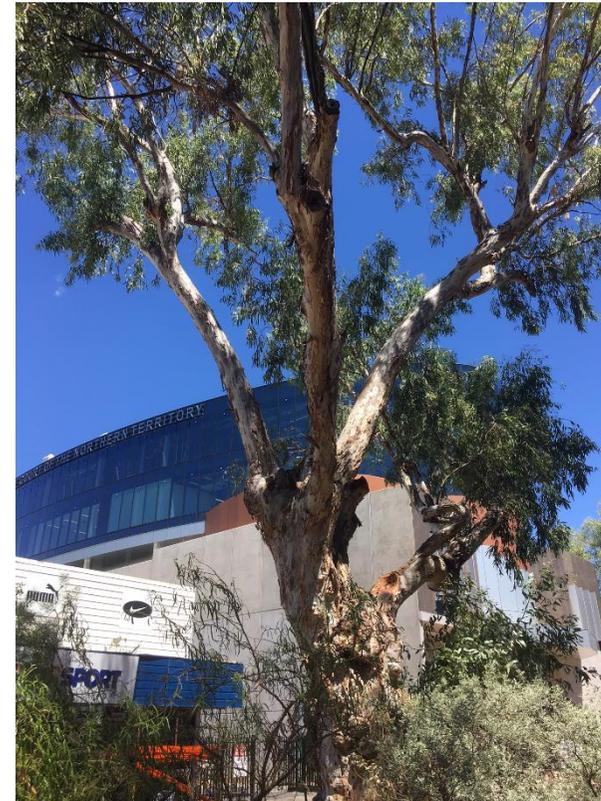
Barbara Satour good-humouredly told the crowd she didn't much care for all the cement around her now, but pointing to the tree towering above, she said: ' That's our statue – it represents all us Arrernte people of Central Australia.'



That was in 2013.

Cut to now. The tree is a shadow of its old self. Over the summer it dropped three large branches and more have since been trimmed.

This may be part of a natural process (not helped by municipal neglect) but it is hard to not see its decline as related at least symbolically to the shadow cast by this new building.



This is the new Alice Springs home for the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory.

The proximity to the tree and indeed the whole presence of this building in the town centre is troubling.

It looms over its surroundings. It is the first structure to have been built beyond the old town-wide height limit of three storeys. It has five.

As such it asserts itself within the triangle around the centre of town created by three sacred hills, which you can see clearly in this Google Earth view.



4 'Town plan on the never never' by Kieran Finnane archived at <http://www.alicespringsnews.com.au/1608.html>

Not so long ago, there was extensive discussion about future urban design and construction showing greater respect to these hills as a way of acknowledging the presence in the land – and within the contemporary town – of Arrernte culture and law.<sup>4</sup>

Since then, that aspiration has not only been ignored but actively undermined. There have been recent insensitive built encroachments on two of the hills, some of them in spite of protest from senior Arrernte custodians.

In this context the Supreme Court building can be read as an assertion in Arrernte country of the towering monolith of Australian and Northern Territory law.

Only one fifth of the Alice Springs population is Aboriginal. In the region, it's more than one third.

Yet Aboriginal people make up 80% of people on the court lists. As a senior defence lawyer working in Alice Springs has commented, 'Aboriginal people are the mainstream in our courts.'<sup>5</sup>

5 Russell Goldflam quoted in Finnane, Trouble, p 25

That is immediately obvious to anyone who frequents the courthouse. The lobby is one of Alice Springs's most intense 'contact zones'.



Comparable others are perhaps the waiting room for Accident & Emergency at the hospital, and the supermarkets, made fraught by the presence of takeaway liquor outlets.

The most benign is the public library, which has worked hard at making Aboriginal people aware of its facilities and at developing collections of specific interest to them. It's a fine example of realising the "transformative, generative possibilities" of our contact zone.

For a long time courts in the Northern Territory wrestled with the contact zone, exploring degrees of formal and effective acknowledgment of the social context of Aboriginal people in the jurisdiction, including the survival of customary law in the lives of many.

However in the post-Intervention years, the judiciary has been forced by the Commonwealth to turn its back on customary law, even for the purposes of sentencing and bail applications. The message has been that mainstream law is not interested in their difference; it and it alone must prevail.



It is in this context, and during the tenure of a conservative government in the Northern Territory, that this arrogant Supreme Court building has been erected and that its message can be clearly read.

...

Acceptance of the message though is another matter. In many ways and contexts Aboriginal people in Central Australia have proved to be remarkably resistant to 'mainstreaming'. This comes with gains and losses, but Aboriginal political voice and strength, as well as the weight of all those things that get summed up as 'Indigenous disadvantage', have

forced change.

As much as some might like to hang onto it, the romantic image of Alice as a hardy Outback town has had to recede, and with it many of the town's political and social complacencies, its oppressions and discriminations. Though others come in their stead, the old frontier / settler ways are critically under pressure from contemporary Aboriginal ways. And this is not just reactive. There are many instances of Aboriginal people and organisations setting their own agendas – Craig San Roque in his paper, 'A Glass Darkly', describes some that he's familiar with. This can even happen, to a degree, in a hardline institutional environment such as the courts of today.

...

I'll look now at some examples of different ways that Aboriginal people have sought to be *seen* and *heard* in court. I'm mostly not talking about the perpetrators here, but the people around them, what they had to say about the perpetrators' actions, whether expressed through resistance to the court's processes, active participation, or, in the case of the Ryder family, as they sought justice through the legal process, using the tragedy thrust upon them to show exemplary leadership to Alice Springs as a whole.

These examples go to, as I see it, a determination of those involved – family of perpetrators or victims – to act in the ways available to them, to not simply be buffeted by events. They also reveal different ways in which the relationship with mainstream law of ordinary Aboriginal people in The Centre is evolving alongside the co-existing and evolving governance of their everyday lives by their own mores and law.

Resistance, first.

A young man, Sebastian Kunoth, just nineteen years old at the time of his arrest, was charged with the murder of his partner, the mother of two of his children, Kumunjayi Nelson. She was twenty-two. He ultimately pleaded guilty to her reckless manslaughter.

After Kunoth had been charged and remanded in custody, there was an early mention of his case in court, by video link from the gaol. I expected the public gallery to be all but deserted. In fact it was full, of some 20 to 30 members of Kunoth's family – as became obvious from their eager smiles when he entered the tiny video-link room.

The court did its brief business, the case was adjourned, Kunoth was told he could go.

As one, the visitors raised their arms in a wave to him. There were more smiles but not so much as a murmur. As soon as he was gone, they all got up and filed silently from the courtroom.

It was a poignant moment, but who was it for? Kunoth may have been able to see a few of them, perhaps an impression of some arms raised, but no more than that. Was it for the magistrate, the lawyers? A show of clan strength, of their own judgment of this son, fiercely loved in spite of what he may have done? Was it for themselves – a way of demonstrating their relatedness, of showing support to one another in a time of trouble?

Whatever the answer, the family continued to make their presence felt throughout the hearing. There was one clear instance of intimidation of a witness (for which a man was convicted and served time) and the

prosecution generally encountered a lot of difficulty, both in getting witnesses into the stand and in getting evidence from them.

About two months after Kunoth's arrest, a man, who came from the same western desert community, was killed in what was said to be a payback for the young woman's death. The killing was carried out by a drunken mob in a protracted ordeal for their victim. Ultimately only four men were held criminally responsible (pleading guilty to reckless manslaughter), with another two convicted as accessories after the fact.

It was clearly not a payback of the kind sanctioned and regulated by customary law, but it was spoken of as a payback by the family of the victim, Kumunjayi Pollard, although they saw it as utterly unjust – he had nothing to do with the young woman's death. In fact he'd been in gaol at the time.

In these brief sketches that I delve into in detail in the book, I think we can see complicated (at times devastating and anarchic) examples of active resistance to the operation of mainstream Australian law.

(Participation)

The Kunoth case also provided a clear example of *participation* in the process, by Kumunjayi Nelson's mother. In particular, she asked for her victim impact statement to be read out loud in the court, so that it would go in its entirety onto the record. In it she spoke lovingly of her daughter's life and the anguishing loss she as a mother felt. As well she made some acute observations about the impact of the killing on her grandchildren for whom she was now caring.

In the case of the so-called payback killing of Kumunjayi Pollard, his family similarly sought justice for their relative through the court process.

In a victim impact statement that was hand-written and signed by several of them, they expressed the view that the guilty men deserved to be sent to gaol for life, and they added to this a wish for a punishment not available to the courts: that the culprits *never* receive visitors.

They also asked to have handed up – to become an unconventional part of the court’s file – a colour photo collage showing the dead man with family members.

Beyond a measure of justice for their relative, they saw that the court process could deliver a message:

‘This has caused trouble for more than this family and this community,’ they said. ‘The true story needs to be heard by *everyone* so it stops any more trouble.’



(Leadership)

My final example is also one of participation in the court's process, but goes well beyond it into the community.

This is a case of which many of you may have heard – the killing in 2009 of Kwementyaye Ryder, a 33 year old Aboriginal man. He died, as I've said, at the hands of five young white men, aged between 18 and 22 at the time. They were initially charged with murder and ultimately pleaded guilty to his manslaughter.

The case was widely covered and commented upon – locally, nationally, including by *Four Corners*, and even internationally. All of the coverage from afar focussed on its racial dynamics and saw it as an expression of the racism inherent in Alice Springs. Some of the coverage and commentary within Alice Springs reflected a similar view.

In my chapter on the case I try to situate it in a social context that is not so sharply divided between white and black and in which we can fruitfully talk about some of its other dynamics, such as the Territory's heavy drinking culture and the ready resort to casual violence – with its possible lethal consequences – by young, very drunk men.

I took my cue on this *in part* from public statements during the criminal proceedings by Kwementyaye Ryder's family. The first of these came shortly after the death, following an early appearance in court of the five charged men.

The Ryder family left the courthouse and gathered on the lawns across the road. There Thomas Buzzacott, Kwementaye's cousin, read aloud a

statement prepared by the family.

It is a remarkable document that I reproduce in full in the book (see pp 95-9). There's not space to go into all of it here, but the first thing they did was call for calm.

Needless to say there was a lot of tension in town at this time, anxiety about possible racist motivations for the killing. Some of this was in response to the aggressive actions of the five accused men towards other Aboriginal people, just before the killing.

But some of the tension was also in response to the killing of a *white man*, allegedly by two Aboriginal men, just four months earlier. That case had almost no media coverage outside of Alice Springs but it provided a very interesting testing of the court's ability – and in a way of the town's – to deliver a fair trial in proceedings dogged by racial issues from start to finish.

It was a murder trial with mandatory life sentences hanging over the accused if found guilty. In the end the jury acquitted one of the accused men – he walked free from the court. The other, who had knifed his victim, they found guilty of the lesser crime of manslaughter.

This case was still not settled though when the Ryder family were standing on the courthouse lawns and calling for calm.



‘We trust in truth for justice,’ they continued. They described the ‘random’ killing of Kwementyaye as ‘a cowardly and despicable act of violence’ – ‘regardless of race’.

The statement then took an extraordinary turn to address the big picture of social division. I expect at the forefront of their minds were the sweeping changes under the Commonwealth’s Intervention, that then was two years old. Perhaps they were also thinking about public places by-laws proposed by the Town Council, being fiercely debated right at that time, as well as the Territory’s year-old overhaul of local government that had dissolved the old system of Aboriginal community councils.

I will read their next two paragraphs unabridged.

‘We call on *the whole community* to support us in helping each other to make necessary changes to current laws and practices that are clearly not working. It is our belief that laws are there to help *all people* to build on *better relationships* and to live in peace and harmony. We need to allow for better understanding of the different cultures and work towards *respecting* our differences and beliefs. This will certainly *reduce violence* in the community which has been affecting each and every one of us. We are calling for *healing of the people* as it is human emotions influenced by drug and alcohol abuse that is impacting on our lives. Current laws are creating unnecessary conflict within the community.

‘This is a vulnerable time when *all young children and youth* need our strength and courage to protect them. It is they who need our constant vigilance and guidance. Through *our love and support* as parents and families we must help them to live better lives, to allow for cultural exchange to broaden their learning in life and help them to achieve their dreams and aspirations. This is a crucial time for the whole community and governments to come together through compassion and understanding as human beings and as one community.’

Such breadth and generosity does not commonly mark the public discourse in Alice Springs and it was not yet two weeks since the death. It was very moving to hear. In the private domain and smaller-scale contexts – some of which I spoke of at the start – there can be great friendship, creative endeavour, goodwill and kindness between people and across cultures, but in contrast the public domain is often small-minded and begrudging, or embittered and full of complaint.



More than most commentators the Ryder family saw in the tragedy of Kwementyaye's death and its circumstances an opportunity for the community to learn and grow.

I wish I could say that Alice Springs as a whole was living up to the large vision of the task before us as expressed by the Ryder family. But there *are* many people in the town, Aboriginal and other Australians, active in a whole range of fields, striving in this direction.

In our contact zone in the foreseeable future this push and pull between oppressive, damaging forces and transformative ones will continue. Bringing to the fore the latter, *recognising* them, will surely help shift the balance.

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## Dr Craig San Roque



Dr Craig San Roque is a Jungian Analyst and Psychotherapist, trained in London. Practicing in Sydney and Alice Springs since 1987, he has been involved in Indigenous mental health services since 1992. His writings are concerned with the challenge to and application of psychotherapeutic principles in complex local Indigenous settings. He has collaborated on several CASSE projects.

### A Glass Darkly

*'For now we see through a glass, darkly...*

*This presentation is based on the imagery in paintings by Japaljarri Spencer and by Rod Moss. Each depicts a contemporary situation pertinent to the psychological challenges of 'Recognition'.*

*Rod Moss is a Centralian painter renowned for his intimate scenes of people and events of Arrernte/Alice Springs life - his two books, 'Hard Light of Day' and '1000' Cuts' include many of his paintings with accounts of people and events surrounding the compositions.*

*Kumanjai Japaljarri Spencer has unfortunately passed away, December 2015. He is/was a beloved Indigenous thinker, an Aboriginal Community Police Officer and artist with extraordinary ability to distil the 'heart of the matter' of Australian bi cultural affairs. He embodied the practice of 'recognition'. The painting 'Thinking About the Future' is the conceptual basis of this paper.*

#### Orientation

This paper is developed from the visual presentation given at the Conference. The audience could contemplate a picture and I spoke to that picture. This is a typical form of communication in Central Australia, based on diagrams made on the ground while one speaks to a matter or a story. This is a natural form of conversation practised in our region where

people can be seen thinking and speaking together through the use of ideograms.

Two way 'Recognition' means that it is essential and courteous to communicate in forms that are clear and understandable. I have to challenge the conventional style of professionals who give 'papers' or address Indigenous listeners in complicated sentences in English. Conceptual patterns embedded in European languages follow tracks and mazes of their own making. So, too, the patterns of Indigenous thinking follow their own tracks and meaning. Japaljarri Spencer's paintings, for instance, may appear to be simple. A few lines and circles placed in an ordered way across the canvas. In fact many of his countrymen and women, pack their paintings and diagrams with complex, layered, subtle ideas and statements of the reality of our life. 'Recognition' means learning to appreciate each others' complexity and at the same time speaking (not in tongues) but in clear language that communicates essential facts and clear, (not hidden) ideas.

Of course, people of different cultures think from pattern systems that are specific to that culture. The pattern of the Pintubi mind and experience does not follow the patterns of thinking and experience of people raised in the cultures of a Vienna, London or Melbourne. Freud and Jung thought in German. The concepts of contemporary psychotherapy have developed through the matrix of European language. I ask you to consider in precise detail how your own enculturated thinking patterns would translate and meet (halfway) the patterns of mind of Anangu, Arrernte or Warlpiri. The practice of psychotherapy is not an act of projection. European mentalities and desires are strong forces. Psychotherapy is an act of attentive listening.



Senior Warlpiri men and Corrections officers at Mission Creek; discussing recognition of Aboriginal law and court process appropriate to non English speaking youth and defendants. Part of an historical attempt, 1993-1996, to establish some bi cultural equivalence in mediation and the collaborative management of the justice process - *photo. san roque* - note- many of the men in this photograph have now passed away.

I have learned, as a psychotherapist trained in the western discipline but working in central Australia, that practical recognition is about taking the disciplined trouble and time to think clearly together. Understanding clearly. Listening with care. Together.

(It was in secluded meetings, such as the one at Mission Creek, that I began that discipline.)

## # 1 The Interpretation of Dreams

So let us begin with this painting by Rod Moss, entitled *'Interpretation of Dreams'* or *'Freud on the couch'*.



Rod writes - *At first glance this is a simple role reversal with Arrernte elder Patrick Hayes counselling Dr Freud to 'talk about creation stories'...the outside desert is funnelled into the Viennese study via the coolamon on the left. The room houses examples of Freud's renowned collection, now however with Australian artefacts. The morphing of cultures is suggestively transacted, and possessing the driving seat gives Patrick a glint of satisfaction. Hard Light of Day p294*

The couch reminds of Freud's room where the doctor's patients lay for their treatment session, telling dreams, memories, fears, desires. This method was a way of unlocking the gates of inhibition. It was a slow, even cumbersome method. Indigenous healers/ngangkari (who I have observed) are much swifter and direct in their handling of the patient's pain but the images of symptom and treatment are of an Aboriginal poetic nature that would be comprehensible to psychoanalysts familiar with decoding psychic symbology.

The model, Howard Goldenberg, has, over the years, intentionally placed himself in a position of attentive listening to his Indigenous patients. Mr Hayes, the model for the 'doctor' in Freud's chair was delighted to be in this position. He got the joke of the reversal.

It will be enough to contemplate this image and see what it brings to mind.

But, perhaps, while you contemplate recite these lines from Paul of Tarsus' letter to the people of Corinth. 1 Corinthians 11- 12

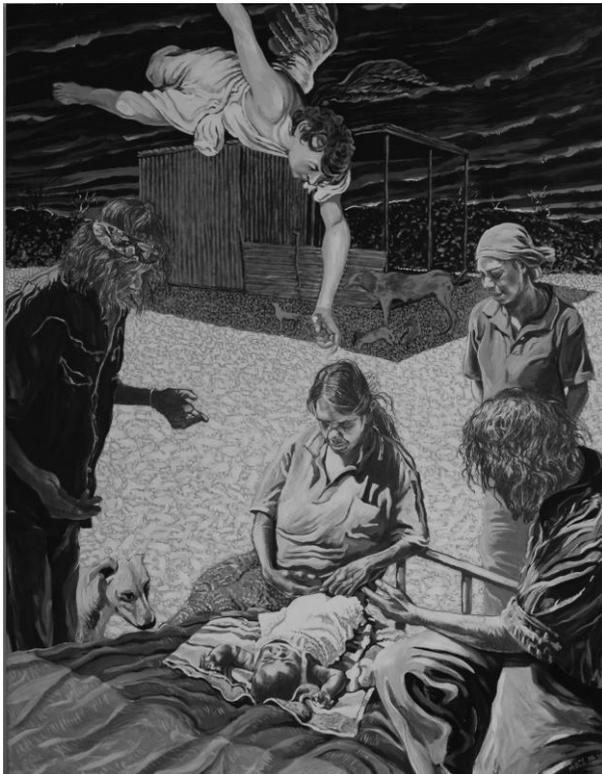
*When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child. I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things.*

*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

The act of recognition begs for a clearing of 'darkened glass'. And a movement away from paranoid schitzoid thinking and movement towards a maturational 'stage of concern'.

In some humility today, I consider the childlike state of Australia's collective self awareness and our slowness to recognise that some lines in the original 1901 constitution no longer represent the reality of the Indigenous position.

**2 # The Intervention'** by Rod Moss painted at the time of the 2007 NT Intervention suggests-



This is Rod's description.

*"The painting's title is a reference to the Howard Governments 2007 Emergency Intervention in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. But nothing short of divine intervention would be needed to reverse the consequences of Settler impact on Indigenous people, and something akin to a miracle birth would be needed to imagine the ongoing viability of Aboriginal settlements and perhaps even Indigenous culture and identity in general.*

*It is as though Carravaggio's Nativity ( 1609) has appeared in the lives of the Whitegate families ( Jack, Norleen, Shirleen and Adrian Hayes) offering a chance of rebirth, of being born again."*

*('Hard Light of Day' p 287)*

The Intervention Angel painted at the time of the NT Intervention suggests to me an intriguing (psychological) matter to consider over time. That is – consider the dynamics of 'magical thinking' in our cultural patterns.

Magical thinking is a special form of explanation of cause, effect and consequence.

Magical thinking does not follow the laws of rational (left brain) logic. The logic follows a whim or a way of the human factor, human imagination. In dream or nightmare things might take place that have no rational explanation. In a dream you may see magical thinking in action. Most cultures, religious and even political beliefs of the world's peoples operate on principles of magical thinking.

In a state of magical thinking the causes of something may be attributed to the actions of mythical beings, of God, of angels, of spiritual forces, of malevolent forces, of sorcery, of magic. A candidate for a presidency will promise miracles and he/she will be believed. Examples in contemporary life abound. People may share the same ways of thinking and participate together in actions that they are sure will influence divine forces, spiritual presences, the forces of nature or procure security, goods and money. I could suggest that magical thinking appears impotently in three aspects of human life -

- the matter of death - explanations of cause and aftermath of death
- interpretations of illness, treatment and cure
- in matters of love and sexual relationship

Clearing the darkened glass of 'Recognition' involves us all in recognising how magical thinking operates in Indigenous life – and in non Indigenous mental life, as well as how magical thinking operates in the minds of Australians who are committed to a Christian world view, religious thinking being a form of mythic/poetic/magical thinking.

Please note that I am not criticising magical thinking - it is a form of poetic, mythic and spiritual thinking that is a part of *homo sapient* history.

Magic and magical thinking continues to have subtle beauties and yet that form of logic and explanation of cause and effect brings us into deep trouble in Central Australia, where magical thinking as explanation of death, illness and sexual relations is applied to crime, murder, vehicle accidents, retribution, revenge, sexual violence, intoxication, jealousy, disease and the getting of goods. (see *Finnane's accounts of the trials in 'Trouble'*.)

We might also consider how magical thinking operates in the minds and offices of those charged with the governance of Indigenous Australians. One form of institutional 'magical thinking' is when a person in authority believes or states to a crowd of voters (generally referred to as 'the Australian people') that – "I have thought this thing. I have said this thing. Therefore this thing is true". "The Gap will be closed". "The little children will be saved". "You will have houses" "There will be an end to poverty."

Successive institutionalised fantasies on how to save, govern, control the Indigenous Australians are on record in our history. Magical thinking, is a presence in our lives. In its full spectrum - from most, most poetic to most, most psychotic - the logic of magic is a condition of the mental life of Australians. Among such latent ideas, that are worth a psychoanalysis, is a pervasive western/christian ambition and sense of entitlement to save - to govern - to control the native soul, the native destiny, mixed with ambition to occupy Indigenous country for self interest, for profit, for pleasure.

It is a hidden network of institutional magical thinking mixed in with the handling of money (and corruption), that Aboriginal people have to deal with day by day in the streets, courts, communities and offices of Alice Springs. On the other hand many Indigenous people hold magical ideas or fantasy expectations on how the white/angel/Toyota delivery system brings salvation - freedom from pain, hunger and want. The recognition dilemma probably crystallises such deeply felt desires and anxieties - desires that pragmatic politicians exploit.

'Recognition' means accepting that magical thinking is at play on both sides of the contact zone. This matter deserves some very careful analysis.

### # 3. Japaljarri 'Thinking about the future'.



This intensely compacted yet simple painting depicts the situation, as Japaljarri saw it, for Indigenous people in transition between traditional Aboriginal life, present circumstances and a bi-cultural or hybrid future. It is this future in which we now live, in Central Australia; the realities of which we are trying to recognise and work within.

Japaljarri asks - How can such different ways of thinking/being/living be able to work together? The evidence of the last 30 years suggests the real differences and difficulties as well as the opportunities.

Responsible Warlpiri people's efforts at developing a bi-cultural handling of law and justice and mediation is a case in point. The failures in this collaboration as well as the lawless anarchic behaviours of intoxicated,

violent men and women also reveals how hard it was, and will continue to be, to handle the troubles of our region. Japaljarri Spencer worked in this crossfire of cultures as an Aboriginal Community Policeman, so his formulations carry some weight.

These are the main elements of this painting

1. The entire canvas represents the Aboriginal country, the linking patterns of jukurrpa/ dreaming stories, sites and a representation of tribal group/communities across Central Australia.

The concentric circle roundels – (a form of traditional iconography) show people (the horseshoe shapes ) sitting, talking and thinking across the country. People come into a big meeting represented in the centre of the painting. Here are black and white shapes indicating people thinking together. They are looking at turmoil in the centre of the painting, images represent gaols, drunken circles, drug use, hospitalisation, early deaths. In Spencer's telling of this story he says everyone is a dust storm, no one can see clearly. We all have sand in our eyes.

Everyone is preoccupied with the same problem. It is a recognition problem, a recognition that both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal people are in a difficult situation of transition. I am reminded of the saying of Jesus of Nazareth. 'Before you criticize another person - pointing out the grain of sand in your neighbour's eye please, first clear out the sand in your own eye'.

2. Iconography of culture. On the left (western) side of the map/painting Japaljarri has a pattern of roundels that represent - in iconic form - 6 essential aspects of Indigenous cultural integrity. This kind of pattern talk,

drawing circles and lines on the ground is a familiar style of Aboriginal storytelling - a bit like the blackboard.

Simply stated, the picture is this.

The central circle of this cluster represents the act of 'taking care' (Kanyinjaku). This suggests the full act of taking care/holding care for the four circles at the rim. These are four essentials elements of culture and life bound together by the fifth element.

The five rounds.

1. The country and the place where we live. (*Ngurra*)
2. Family and kin relations. (*Walytja*)
3. The cultural stories (*Jukurrpa*) foundational to life, law and relations.
4. The individual vitality/spirit/psyche/soul (*Kurunpa*) of a person who lives within this matrix of country, kin, jukurrpa, law.
5. The entire complex is bound together by encircling lines - this represents, in Japaljarri's diagram - the binding qualities of Indigenous cultural law. It is the law, and the following of law, that holds everything together.

In diagrammatic terms this is a compact image of the foundational structure of an ordered life of survival within Aboriginal being.

3. A future hybrid Australia. On the right hand side of the painting is a variation of this original cultural icon diagram, except for two notable features. A fifth circle - a fifth element has come into the picture.

This is the circle representing the impact - the coming in - the presence of white/western people and the white Australian cultural style.

This (the white circle/wheel) has its own way of governing country, using place and its own way of handling kin relations. The Settler and immigrant groups (*kardia*) have their own cultural stories and thinking. They have their own ways of envisaging the individual (soul) and the way of handling human vitality and their own way of taking care of such things. It has its own law system. Its own trade system. Its money.

The White (*kardia*) way can be seen as part of the picture. But notice that Japaljarri has omitted the binding circle of the law. Aboriginal (*Yapa*) Law has been dropped out of the picture. There is nothing substantial to hold everything together. This is a cause of sorrow, of grief, of confusion.

We are in a situation of uncertainty. There is deep tension. No wonder the young people are caught up in a 'dust storm'. There is a fundamental confusion, a failure by the majority of *kardia* (white people) to recognise the integrity of the ties that bound the original life together. The sociological term for this condition is *anomie*. The absence of law. The psychological consequences of *anomie* include depression, rage, hopelessness, addictions, suicidal anxieties, revolt - passive or aggressive. *Anomie* provokes a cultural anxiety that transcends individual psychopathology.

I ask you to consider this representation. It states the matter succinctly. Perhaps you are one of those people gathered in the centre of the painting, looking at the situation, trying to find a way of handling the tension, the contradictions, the confusions, the dilemma.

#### # 4. Looking at the present situation. Good Stories.

The Spencer painting was made in 1993 - since then there have been many practical experiences in central Australia where bi partisan recognition and the practice of integration is in fact taking place. These are models or indicators of problems and solutions that meet the requirement suggested by Spencer. I note a selection. There are more but these I know from first hand experience.

##### I. **Royal Flying Doctor (RFDS ) remote primary mental health team.**

This group of practitioners is supported (currently) by the Royal Flying Doctor Service. It has a long history of 'on the ground' community consultations and care based upon long standing relationships, working also with the NT Govt. Remote Psychiatric service and many bush clinics. This team embodies 'Recognition' by working within Indigenous family relationships system, acutely aware of the conditions on the ground that activate depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviour, adolescent confusion sexual violence and the loss of Indigenous psychic order (anomie).

It is very hard for mainstream institutionalised health administration systems to recognise the nature of community primary mental health care in remote and rural Australia. It is nothing like hospital and consulting room services of the cities.

CASSE (the group that organised this conference) supports the Tjilirra project which started moving through the partnership of David Beveridge (RFDS mental health nurse) and Martin Jugadai (RFDS cultural consultant). Their trustworthy relationship with specific local

Pintubi men enabled the Tjilirra project to develop and then be sustained by Jamie Millier and Nathan Brown with the care and backup from Pamela Nathan of CASSE.

- II. **The Warlpiri Youth project (WYDAC) aka Mt Theo.** This project begun in 1991/2 was initiated by Warlpiri around Yuendumu as a step towards supporting young people at risk. From the very beginning it was a bi partisan, bi lingual black/white, yappa/kardia project. It has become a significant hybrid model of youth stimulation, care, containment and social work. It continues today as a nationally recognised, best practice model of Aboriginal/ Non Aboriginal partnership in governance and is an example of pragmatic recognition and collaboration. [www.wydac.org.au](http://www.wydac.org.au)
  
- III. **Alkeyulerrer Arrernte Healing and Cultural Project.** Is grounded in Alice Springs at a site in the shadow of Alkeyule/Billy Goat Hill. Alkeyulerrer operates as family, child and young people support place, a place of safety for Arrernte local family. It is low key and not an institution. It serves as a stimulus for collecting and dispensing bush medicines and traditional healing and education according to Indigenous principles. [www.akeyulerrer.org.au/ab#311B6Bt](http://www.akeyulerrer.org.au/ab#311B6Bt). (see also the Alice Spring News Online article on Alkeyulerrer by Finnane.)
  
- IV. **NPY Women's Council Ngangkari work and the Uti Kulinjaku mental health Language project.**  
*Uti Kulinjaku* is an Anangu languages term meaning 'clear thinking' or 'listening clearly'.

It began some 3 years ago at the initiative of the NPY women involved with the tradition healing/Ngangkari project to understand more clearly the language of mental health as used by English speaking professionals institutions. It was clear that the dominance of professionalised mental health language was not really understood by Indigenous patients and family members.

The women and some of the professionals in the Indigenous area mental health were not satisfied with the compliance by patients appearing to understand what the doctors/nurses were saying. As well, there was dissatisfaction with the continuous stream of professionals who had little knowledge or understanding of Anangu concepts of mind, illness, causes and cure.

This project has developed in close collaboration between the traditional healers, other senior NPY women and men and a group of committed mental health practitioners including the clinical director of the NT Govt mental health team (and myself). It has, so far, been supported by the NT Gov health management as a desired direction.

The secret of this successful project is in the bi cultural recognition of language as an essential part of intercultural diagnosis, formulation, treatment and follow through. The projects progress and direction is under the governance of the NPY traditional healer group – that is to say it is Aboriginal controlled and is subject to continuous evaluation.

This is another best practice example of inter cultural recognition and collaboration in mental health operations.  
[www.npywc.org.au/ngangka#311CE7](http://www.npywc.org.au/ngangka#311CE7)

There are more examples of inter cultural collaboration and recognition that could be cited. I note some briefly -  
The men's violence project undertaken in collaboration through Congress/Ingkintja and CASSE in which Ken Lechleitner is directly involved. The Tangentjere Men's violence project. The Yuendumu family mediation group. The Strehlow Centre, in its emerging new cultural custodial role. The Kintore Diabetes and Purple House project. A range of projects operated within the Central Land Council where Indigenous and non Indigenous collaborations and understanding is fundamental to the productive work in Ranger programmes, land management and traditional sites maintenance, feral animal control, fire regime and wildlife conservation.

The essential point I make here is that practical recognition is in action and can be demonstrated as alive and functioning in Central Australia- despite the bad press.

#### **# 5. Pushing a rock up hill**

This image suggests how hard, exhausting and disappointing the experience of recognition has been since 1967 Referendum.

Many of us constantly working and living in the midst of the black/white contact zone feel and say again and again- 'We are pushing shit up hill'.

The same is said by governance and institutional and infrastructure agencies whose task it is to help handle or solve the 'Aboriginal Question.'

The desperation in the country might be that everyone feels they are pushing this rock up hill time and time again it rolls back down.

How Sisyphus in the myth got himself into that situation is worth noting.

*In Greek mythology Sisyphus was the king of Corinth. He was punished for his self-aggrandizing craftiness and deceitfulness, while in authority, by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it come back to hit him, repeating this action for eternity. Tasks that are both laborious and futile are therefore described as Sisyphean. (Wikipedia 28 03 17)*

And it's also worth noting, as one of the Tjillirra team said, it might be easier if it was more than one man trying to push the rock. It might be easier if black and white people were doing it together.



*Sisyphus Australia - Rod Moss*

## 6 # 'Eagle and Crow'



*Dr Tabart (psychiatrist) and Japaljarri at Inteppe Camp consult on a matter.*

This complex teaching story, 'Eagle and Crow,' by Japaljarri Spencer, sets out the choices an Indigenous man can make in the contemporary circumstances. In a parable like way the aboriginal 'everyman' character grows up and comes to a fork in the road – he follows the Crow Jukurrpa into blood letting, predatory intoxication, family violence and self destruction. Later he is seized by the Eagle - a totemic being for Japaljarri - who by taking the higher view indicates the potential for working both cultures in an intelligent and practical way and thus sustain the life of his people. Spencer himself, in his life, demonstrated this resolution and integrity – as do other indigenous men and women in Central Australia.

The point of showing you this image is not the 'Eagle and Crow' story as such but rather so you see two men seated together in recognition of each other's thinking about the problem and solutions presented in the painting. They are in the recognition zone.

## 7 # Cast the First Stone.



*The contest of the drains- 2008. Rod Moss*

*'This is a capricious contrivance of an idea marking a point of agreement between two groups - bush and urban people – over land and water flow. It is based on Breugel's 'Christ and the Adulteress' 1565. Moss in Hard Light of Day p 289.*

This image - people holding rocks, people holding government folders – a woman in the middle, a man drawing on the ground - returns us to Rod's painting based on the story in the Bible of the woman taken in adultery, faced with stoning as punishment according to Jewish law.

The Rabbi Jesus faces the stoning people. The Priests bait him. He responds by first bending and 'writing on the ground'.

He then says to the retribution group (custodians of local law) - *'let he who is without sin cast the first stone'*. The retribution group slink away.

Here Rod has replaced the holy land crowd with a group of Alice Springs people debating a water and development issue - change that will disturb local sacred sites. This image captures conflict and consternation in the local contact zone. The disturbance and derangement of sites of Indigenous significance, of locations of cultural memory, is a constant anxiety for many locals (black and white).

'Recognition' implies recognition of the mental and emotional significance of local sites and bi-cultural stories. Time and time again such sites are neglected and destroyed. Those of us who come from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa know that we come from a history where sites of significance have been bombed and obliterated by successive waves of war and invasion. This continues in Syria. It would be nice if the value of the ancient sites of Alice Springs could be recognised as having profound and lasting value for our shared and hybrid culture.

As it is, recent history in our town shows that many sites are wilfully, dogmatically destroyed. This is a symptom of a psychological disorder.

# 8 This is Nampijimpa.



This is photo of a friend and a family member – she might not like to have this shown but I believe it is crucial to understand that recognition is a matter of personal relationships. This photo was taken by my daughter, in my house while Marlene and her husband, Japaljarri were completing the painting ‘Eagle and Crow’.

When Nampitjimpa was a child and her mother, Nangala, was around 20 years old they were among the Pintubi picked up by truck and helicopter by Jeremy Long to ‘bring the Pintubi in’. Nancy and her brother Jampijimpa were nicknamed ‘helicopter’. She is the chairperson of the Kintore Diabetes project with Sarah Brown. This project, as difficult as it all is, is handling the problem - sugar, diabetes - consequences of the transitions from hunting and gathering to shopping in supermarkets, takeaway and the Todd Tavern.

This is Marlene. Her daughters and granddaughters stay at our house. Her sons spend time in gaol, her younger brother is dead from petrol sniffing. I know the story. There is no bleeding heart here - only the attempt to maintain recognition of the difficulties endured by all. I ask you. Please regard Namijimpa. I ask you why would you not recognise and acknowledge the history and language of this woman in a revised constitution of Australia?

Her family was here before me. Her language was active long before English, German, Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and all the sundry lingo of the planet staggered south. This is a Pintubi woman who inherits the country west of Kintore and Kiwikurra. It is considered that the Pintubi inhabited the western desert 32 000 years ago.



She has made the transition - she has crossed the floor and recognises you. I ask - why would you, as an Australian, not recognise Marlene in our constitution? What is it in the minds of Australian men/women that would not, could not recognise the unique substance of Marlene Nampijimpa Spencer, her kith and kin?

For myself; removing the obscuration in my own eyes and the confused assumptions in my own thinking and attitude has been the discipline of the last 25 years working here. Kieran Finnane's book, *Trouble*, Rod Moss' *Hard Light of Day* and *1000 cuts* and Japaljarri's paintings; Alexis Wright's works, Ken Lechleitner's speeches today demonstrate the daily realities of this arduous process of psychological intercultural recognition.

# Pamela Nathan



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I dedicate this paper to kwemenje Lechleitner, who fought for the recognition of his people 35 years ago, fighting for "No More Empty promises". He stands alongside.

## Wake Up Strong: From Terra Nullius to Recognition.

### Prologue

In Margaret Mary Turner's book (2010) called *Iwenhe Tyerrtye* she tells the story of the cicadas. I read a brief excerpt:

*When the sun gets too hot, people end up getting bad in the head, and all they can hear are the cicadas singing inside their ears. It can make people get over the bend a bit, that hot heat, or may even be from the sound itself...They scream out 'til they drop down dead..... I mean it's not a nice story, but it's a good thing for you to know (p 173-175).*

CASSE work began in sorry business and the relentless, suffocating heat in Central Australia in January. I fell into the furnace of the molten coalface of the lives of Aboriginal people, who walk the streets at night, neither sleeping nor dreaming, with no place to be, night patrols cruising, drowning their sorrows, facing cruel condemnation in the courts, fighting to the screaming noise of the singing cicadas, their pain suppressed, their hopes repeatedly whiplashed and dashed, and found the word trauma was deleted from my mind. Mindlessness and indigestible panic

prevailed. Terra Nullius and the shameful heat of it all. An Aboriginal leader, JJ, over lunch said: “We all throw up our hands, we live under constant threat and constant sorry business and everyone asks ‘what to do?’ as the gaols and the hospitals are all full and our people are homeless.” “The cycle continues and it gets wearing” said another leader. JJ continued saying: “People are never happy. There is so much constant sorry business, always problems. People are deadened or despairing.”

What do we know of this world, this war zone, a veritable Holocaust created, unleashed and disavowed by Whitefellahs, when they declared the continent of Australia Terra Nullius? The red Centre of Australia is like a bleeding heart of lacerating pain and the blood of those murdered has haemorrhaged throughout the ancestral lands seeping and congealing into the very foundations of the nation of Australia which has been built on an oedipal crime, a colonial crime and a crime against humanity. It has been a country of soul murder and not a country of soul making. Fearful rage silenced and silences lament. Only the deafening cicadas make the noise, likened to a psychic noise, making sleep impossible and wakefulness, an eternal mental indigestion. Aboriginal Dreamtime lives on but what might become an Australian dream, remains timelessly suspended, in no-man’s land, which psychoanalyst Ogden (1985) describes, as a land where there is neither imagination nor reality, neither forgetting nor remembering and neither sleeping or waking up, (and I add a land where there is no doubt and no hope and no yesterdays or tomorrows), which is different from and worse than a nightmare. **The opposite of a good dream is not a nightmare but no dreams, where a dream cannot be dreamt** (Ogden 2004). It is a land in the words of Bion (1962a) of indigestible panic, a panic which can only be evacuated or annihilated but cannot be symbolized or held. Aboriginal people, who live today in the ruptured world of the racial divide, suffer these imprisoning

crimes ghosted in living memory; at best surviving with love and salvaged goodness and at worst without place, without continuity, without holding and with deadened, un-lived lives.

The red Centre is at the point of impact of first contact--the emotional epicentre of life and death, cultural oppression and cannibalised collision--where anguishing pain and primordial anxiety, threat, danger and dread become manifest and where the immediate traumas and longstanding traumas, disturbances and conflicts, converge and songline the dreaming of Australia into a country of breakdown. There are however, breakthroughs of hope and vitality which illuminate this bedrock of death and indeed, this pivotal point of generational impact, can be galvanised and provide a critical, crucible from crisis to change.

Aboriginal people do not have constitutional recognition and many Aboriginal people are not free to live their lives without misrecognitions or with recognition.

### **The problem with no recognition?**

There is a terrible price to be paid for renouncing the recognition of another person. Recognition is as essential to life as oxygen. For an individual who receives no positive recognition it heralds psychic and emotional death. A community or society that receives no positive recognition heralds a communal psychic death and equates to a denial of freedom.

Recognition is a seemingly simple word. But recognition entails life and death struggles. Recognition entails being able to see and know, and to be seen and known. If we cannot see we remain blind. And if we are not

seen, we are a nobody. A lack of recognition heralds a 'nobody's land state of Terra Nullius' – and a nobody state of mind becomes sovereign. Everyone's birthright is to be recognised. Recognition is only possible in a peopled land of equal and different relationships – a land belonging to and populated by people. A world without recognition spells death to humanity and to life itself; only pathological relationships can flourish in an unchanging world of what is.

### **The Day before Yesterday: Historical reality of post-colonialism**

*Paul Keating, in his infamous Redfern speech, December 10, 1992, truthfully described the day before yesterday; a yesterday without memory or imagination:*

*That it was we who did the dispossessing.  
We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.  
We brought the diseases. The alcohol.  
We committed the murders.  
We took the children from their mothers.  
We practiced discrimination and exclusion.  
It was our ignorance and our prejudice.  
And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.  
With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds.  
We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me?  
As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us."*

What is the state of play of recognition in Aboriginal Australia? There is currently a struggle for Aboriginal people to achieve legal, constitutional,

cultural, political and human recognition. This has been a longstanding struggle since the first landing in 1770. There has been a progress of sorts. Aboriginal people were declared citizens in 1967, albeit only 48 years ago. Recognition of the First Nation has led to land rights and a national apology.

The past lack of recognition for Aboriginal culture and identity has a living presence heralding a borderline world of breakdowns, racism, trauma, loss, cultural erosion, violence, suicidality, criminality and substance usage to anaesthetise the pain. Alice Springs, as a case in point, has been called the "stabbing capital" of the world. The brutal force of stolen lands, lives and children, storyline the land of Terra Nullius, written in traumatic songlines.

### **Trauma trails of Terra Nullius**

#### **No language**

In the land of Terra Nullius colour coding determined the terrible fate of many Aboriginal children; leaving them with no language to name their pain or communicate in the language of their kin. The trauma trails are alive today.

At the end of a recent meeting in Alice Springs with CASSE and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC), a leading man in the community voluntarily told me something poignant. He slowly said:

*"We were sent north because we were the darkies and the light ones were sent south. There were eight of us. We were all split up. I found my way back to my people and country. I still have the anger. I try to use it*

*constructively. I've worked with Aboriginal organisations and channelled it. But I don't have the language."*

That language was his birthright.

The cry for recognition is buried deep in the psyche of the Aboriginal Man. The cry is wordless and unrecognised. Rex Granite, a senior elder Aboriginal Warlpiri man from Yuendumu spoke at a town forum in Alice Springs (Walk in My Shoes), convened by (CASSE) and The Central Australia Aboriginal Congress (CAAC). At the end of the forum he stood and spoke again with deceptive simplicity, such poise and such truth, saying:

"You do not speak my language".

What is he saying?

You do not know me. You do not see me. You do not know my world. You do not know my name. I do not have a voice in your world. Terra Nullius.

Then Rex Granite said:

"I speak yours".

He speaks our language but we do not speak his language. No. We do not speak the language of Rex Granite. He is forced to speak ours.



CAAC/CASSE 'Walk In My Shoes' Town Forum, Alice Springs, 2013

### **The language of mothers**

Then there is the language of mothers. At a meeting with CASSE at *Ntaria* in 2013, some Aboriginal women sitting huddled in the corner, finding their voice, began to speak about a child, Family and Child Services, (FACSIA) had taken. The women had returned the child to the grieving mother. They were angry. Another woman said she had looked after so many children herself. She quietly said: "They're 'hurting' if they are not with their mothers. They want to be with them!" Another woman went on to say in an anguished voice, "The mother wanted to be with her son and the son wanted to be with his mother". This woman acknowledged the drinking and the drugs but also the humanity of her people. The

woman looked at me beseechingly. The grief was palpable. There is a new stolen generation.

The gut wrenching book *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (2005) is searing and salutary and it is about slavery and bondage. Sethe, the mother of Beloved is a slave. She kills her baby Beloved. Is she a monster or was she driven by anguishing need and oppression and a will to protect her child?

*"If I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her."* (p 236)

How can a child see self or mother as subjects when the society denies them that status? The mother is made incapable of recognising the child and the child cannot recognise the mother. Mother and child are without names. As Sethe said: *"There is no one to want me to say me my name."* Australia forcibly removed children from their mothers and the 'half caste' children, so-called, blackened their faces and ran to be invisible from the Welfare; they did not want to be stolen from the arms of their mothers. As Sethe said:

*"Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Dismembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no-one was looking for her and even if they were how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim she is not claimed".* (p 333)

Recognition is an early vital need beginning in the first days of life and it is a vital source of psychic nourishment and growth. If the infant is traumatically frustrated in its first love relationship with the mother and fails to receive recognition, then infantile rage is unleashed and love is

made hungry. The induced fear is that one's love will destroy. A pathological internal object relationship, psychoanalyst Winnicott says, develops whereby the mother is the misnamer of feelings and the infant misnames and these mis-recognitions can become a lifelong relationship of despair of not knowing feelings and self. Non-experiences of substitute formations and breakdown replace playing, aliveness and creativity. Psychic noise, using the thinking of psychoanalyst Bion, replaces meaning in a no-man's land of indigestible panic, emptiness and the atrophy of dreaming; of neither being able to sleep or wake up. Herein lies some of the inter-generational trauma inflicted on Aboriginal people.

Then there is more. Separation from the mother heralds trauma. The traumatic environment is the opposite of a holding one, which enhances growth and creative being. A traumatic environment intrudes, inhibits and restricts psychic development. It ruptures concepts of ongoing being and of a human place to experience living and becoming whole. A child who experiences trauma will live with a hypervigilant, fragmented or frozen state of mind. There is not a story self. There is not imagination or possibilities. Sadness, anchored in traumatic rupture, is the legacy of the world of Terra Nullius.

AO Kemarre sadly told me they "call me MK nowadays." She can't be called Margaret-Mary any more as this was the name of her daughter who was murdered a few years ago. Kemarre's words found a permanent place in my mind: "I still have that grief, and tear, and rip in my heart like it happened yesterday. I still have that grief, *Alakenhe*".

To be recognised by the beloved, psychoanalyst Benjamin says, is all the nourishment one needs, bringing coherence into meaningful existence. Recognition, provides in the words Winnicott, a continuity of being.

Aboriginal people have experienced massive ruptures in being, culture and country. Australia has not been a good mother country.

### **Psychoanalytic work – the story of recognition**

Psychoanalytic endeavour is the story of recognition. Do you see me? Do you know me? Do you see my pain? Recognising the unfolding emotional world catalyses the narrative of pain and provides the healing transformations from breakdowns to breakthroughs and from yesteryears to tomorrows.

Recognition is made possible by a facilitating environment, a holding heart and a home. Put simply, mutual recognition, determination and reciprocity in a facilitating environment allows the person or patient to breakdown, emotionally experience, represent and share the truth of suffering, find his/her voice, understand his/her story, undo it, transform it and be rejuvenated in a more human and alive life-world. Therapists do not know what will unfold or emerge, do not intrude, and do not dictate a script of what to do. In fact they sit with no memory and no desire, nor a script of what to feel, what to be or what to become. Not knowing, seeing, reverie, dreaming, concern, care, surprise, respect, empathy, engagement, aliveness, reflectivity, relatedness, freedom and authenticity are both the ingredients and the outcomes of a therapeutic process and each person leaves with their own true story named, recognised, transformed and transforming. From no man's land, a no-one, a no-body, can become a somebody. The story is discovered, on emotional ground, altering what is found and jointly, new truths are created in a dynamic, dreaming, third dimension. In knowing their story, they can tell it, and live the un-lived life of new stories, unfettered by the shackles of a story untold.

Indeed the work of the consulting room can provide a template for living everyday life and the development of human relationships and a recognised way of life for Aboriginal Australia.

### **Psychoanalytic (and some philosophic) thinking on recognition**

Some psychoanalysts, Winnicott (1969) and Benjamin (1995) in particular, have written specifically about recognition and some of their work has canvassed the field of philosophy. Winnicott traced our need for mutual recognition from the earliest relationship between mother and infant into adult relationships, sexuality, and public life. Winnicott's famous saying – "There is no such thing as an infant" – describes the mutuality of the mother-infant relationship.

Winnicott, asks and answers a question indirectly posed by Hegel, namely: what is the process by which mother and infant detach themselves from each other in such a way that, ultimately, they learn to accept and love each other as independent, different persons? His account provides some solution toward how recognition can be achieved in Australia and how a recognised state of mind can replace a Terra Nullius state of mind.

Winnicott saw recognition as the emotional response that makes our feelings, intentions and actions meaningful. Recognition, he believed, can only come from another whom we, in turn, recognise as different and valuable in his or her own right. 'Aliveness' or 'being real', Winnicott found, is not inevitable, it can only be achieved through recognition.

Interestingly Winnicott says recognition can only be achieved through destruction which can paradoxically only occur in a facilitating environment. He says we find the realness of those we love and their differences in our unsuccessful (and unconscious) attempts to destroy them, those, who in turn feel pain at such attempts, and then we find relief in their survival and their ongoing aliveness and loving feelings are restored. If not, aggression, mental illness and violence can prevail. Benjamin says that it is this appreciation of the other's reality – mutual recognition – which gives rise to the establishment of *shared reality and empathy*. Ogden says this process of recognition, in the mutual experience of pain, in the face of destruction and survival, both necessitates and heralds, emotional responsiveness, lively presencing and the ability to dream.

Hegel defined the elements of mutual recognition in *Ethics of Recognition* (1997, p 69-84). The first feature, *reciprocity-autonomy* heralds freedom but a freedom which holds that an individual is only truly free only when the other is free. The second feature holds that freedom involves *mutual reciprocal union* with the other. The third feature is *self-overcoming* which is the union with another thereby enlarging the individual. The fourth feature *freigabe* (to release) is the relinquishment of domination of the other and achieves in Heidegger's words, *dasein*, an authentic 'being in the world', a being and becoming.

Hegel goes on to speak about a servile consciousness which is the antithesis of mutual recognition. Australia has not been a country of master-slave but a servile consciousness has prevailed. Relationships of condemnation and submission have often dominated the courts and traditional law is no longer recognised.

I think of the magistrate who sentenced a 16 year old girl. Anne and I watched with a cascading sense of horror. An Aboriginal girl was pleading guilty for assaulting a non-Aboriginal woman in a car park. She saw a non-Aboriginal woman staring at her. She walked up to her, poked her in the forehead, spat in her face and punched the woman. She had been drinking with two cousins and was intoxicated at the time of the assault. The lawyer said in her defence that there was "no rational explanation" for the assault. The magistrate suddenly lashed out in fury. "No rational explanation? She [the assaulted woman] had probably had enough of looking at drunks! She probably wanted to tell you to go home! Oh, there is a completely rational explanation." He stared at the girl in the dock. "You were drunk! You were OFFENDED by someone staring at you when you were drunk!" He repeated, "This is her responsibility. She failed... No rational explanation?" "You took offence. You poked. You spat! You stared. You failed! You have no idea what a civilised society is. You have no idea how to behave in a civilised fashion! This is a serious offence...no matter what government, what party, what policy, DRUNKS CONTINUE." He fined her \$800. The magistrate, using legal denunciation, could still be said to be in breach of the Racial Discrimination Act S18c which prohibits actions (or racial vilification) "reasonably likely, in all the circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people. One might hypothesise the Aboriginal girl could not speak but only spit and evacuate her Dante's hell which held no rational meaning. Her parents were from Whitegate; a so-called "unauthorised" town camp with therefore, a paucity of infrastructure, on native title land. With increasing horror, I recognised the magistrate as a friend from the past. What happened to you? Later, another lawyer, in answer to my question, said simply: "He stayed. In bearing witness and not protesting - "Stop this humiliating, racial tirade, in the name of humanity" - I no longer

recognised myself. This day became a trauma for me and no doubt, for the Aboriginal girl in the dock.

### Recognition - the story of transformation

What can we learn from Winnicott and Hegel? You might say the White colonialists nearly destroyed Aboriginal people but Aboriginal people survived. If we follow Winnicott here we can postulate that this destruction has not led to total extermination or to absolute conflict and domination. Aboriginal people have indeed survived and White Australians need to face the implacable reality of their survival and the reality of their differences.

We need to be constantly challenged by contextual questions of recognition: How does one know? What does one know? How does one find a language for what? How does one not reproduce or enact the post-colonial and racial relations and tensions in the very talk of recognition, problems and solutions? In what way do we dialogue? How does one wait for articulation and representation and not lead with omnipotent scripts and yet not be passive or idle? Indeed, we need to discover what is true and for whom? Recognition of the existence of actual oppression and dominance and of the silence on matters of racial trauma, which permeates and pervades the unconscious and conscious world in Australia, is imperative. Recognition of the concrete, the urgent, the powerless, the rupturing pain, the trapeze of life and death, the trauma of it all is critical to having tomorrows and dreams of tomorrow.

Today Aboriginal people are struggling to reclaim their selves, remembering and telling their stories of the homelands. In rediscovering the yesteryear, new emotional experiences expand and increase

generative life experiences and celebrations, for tomorrow. Kathleen Kemarre Wallace (2009) from *Ltyentye Apurte* tells us of the homeland song:

*“This sadness is part of the whole experience. Remembering stories and remembering songs... But parts of the Homelands song were still in my mind. We had nearly forgotten how to sing it, but when my aunties started singing together they remembered the whole thing, little by little. We sang the Homelands song. That song is celebrating; it is about a beautiful journey through our homelands, guided by the ancestors and the country itself.”* (p 159-161)

How can we put our songs and stories alongside? We have to allow each other to be in ‘*dasein*’.

How can there be a mode of story transformation? Psychoanalyst Bion (1989) “asks us to be in the eye of the storm”. We need to allow the raging river to rage between two banks where catastrophic change can occur, but where the danger of catastrophe lies as well. This is the almost impossible place Bion asks us to be in – the emotional turbulence – without gripping onto any banks of certainty to halt movement, and to loosen the grip on familiar anchors until the next storm.

Then the two stances of radical hope described by Lear (2008) and radical doubt by Civatarese (2008) can inform a facilitating environment to transform a terra nullius state of mind to one of recognition. Doubt, *radical doubt*, serves for the attainment of truth through emotional experiencing, which provides a sense of belonging. We need to move forward from a position of *radical doubt*. We know when there is a rupture or a massive disturbance moral certainties and fundamentalist

thinking can be often invoked in order to find solutions quickly. Yet the search for emotional truth *requires a position of radical doubt, a tolerance for uncertainty, for ambiguity and for not knowing*. It is important to feel the pain and frustration of the crisis. In doing so, we may move from crisis to containment and creativity.

Radical hope is the concept that anticipates a good for those who have the hope but as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it, and, I would add, a future yet to be articulated. We need to move forward from a position of radical hope. Searching for the truth assumes that all have a voice, that we are all in a position to have a voice and that all the different voices can be heard. Searching for the truth requires emotional experiencing, potential spaces, and the polarised “yours and mine”, the two-dimensional “them and us”, becomes obsolete, by forming, a newly found, dynamic, third creation of becoming.

The “eye of the storm” becomes a holding place of lived and living emotional experience, metamorphosing raging turbulence into dynamic anchorage, dialectic potential spaces and fluid, vital, new beginnings.

### The Men’s Tjilirra Movement



CASSE has facilitated the Men’s Tjilirra Movement in collaboration with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). The heart of the Men’s Tjilirra Movement lies in Australia’s remote central and western desert region. Tjilirra are traditional tools of ancient ceremony, Aboriginal Dreamtime and Law. The men of the western desert, many who were the last to ‘walk in from the desert’ – to cease living a traditional nomadic lifestyle - in the 1970s say “they are proud” when they make them. One of the headmen explained: “If we do not have these we have no language, no culture. We have nothing. We are nothing. It’s our history. A part of us”. The elder men are passing on their knowledge of making tjilirra to the younger generation in recognition of the importance of tjilirra to their cultural and emotional being. They are telling their story in memory and it is transforming their world today. The Men’s Tjilirra Movement titles their

second film “*Wake up Strong*”. They are recovering their Dreaming on country, a holding place, and it is now a dreaming from which they can wake up, live in memory, converse, digest and dream.

Tjilirra symbolise being, continuity in being, in cultural being, affirmation of cultural worlds, cultural place, holding men, kinship relationships, differences, potential spaces, transmissions and transformations. The making of tjilirra is an emotional and cultural experience of recognition for young and old men and for the community. Their emotional experiences are inextricably linked, ground and found on their ancestral lands of songlines and stories. Sorrow, meaning, connection and responsibility is embedded in the culturally sacred, “in memory”. As Martin, ngangkari, says: “making tjilirra is special - it is the spirit of our grandfather inside you”. Tjilirra have survived the destruction of colonialism and of being outlawed. In the making of them, cultural differences are palpable between Aboriginal and *whitefella* worlds.

When the individual is able to move freely through a generative, spatial environment and select objects through which potential is released, the true self will become emergent. The tjilirra is also therefore, a transformational object, from the dead to the living, an object of recognition.

*January 2013. That night we travelled through amazing country to Mt Liebig and the next day visited Papunya. We were having a meeting with the elder Long Jack Philipus Tjakamara, an original Tula artist. When we arrived he was sleeping. A little later, he was sitting down, tired and at times silent. Jamie Tjupurulla suddenly left the meeting and rummaged in the V8 four-wheel drive emerging with some rusty old tools of chisel, tomahawk and so on. He gave them to Long Jack in an act of generosity*

*and kinship. Long Jack you might say woke up! He was overjoyed and kept looking with disbelief and delight at these old rusty tools. They are worth about 150 dollars. Martin Jugadai, beamed and nodded in approval. Long Jack, then inspired, jumped up with alacrity, picked up his spear thrower and held it with pride. He told his wife to go and fetch his spears. He told us about the payback spear. He showed us how to throw a spear. Martin spoke about the one with a barb-the only way out is right through the thigh. He showed us the kangaroo sinew at the end of the miru, the ingenious leaf-shaped spear thrower made from mulga. Long Jack said he was going to be busy making tools in the next months. His aliveness was palpable and unmistakable!*



*Long Jack Philipus Tjakamara inspecting his tomahawk*

## Conclusion

So, in conclusion, we can use psychoanalytic and philosophic thinking to take us forward into a new world of recognition – a land of the First Nation. We can share a world – the inter-cultural world – in between two worlds and dream of tomorrow.

Russell Goldflam, the senior lawyer of Australian Legal Aid told me of the wisdom of Kemarre. He was defending one of the gang of young non-Aboriginal men who were alleged to have murdered her innocent, hardworking and much loved Aboriginal nephew, kwemenje Ryder, in the broad daylight of the town at the foot of the sacred hill. RG told me how terrible it was for him to meet her every day in the courts. One day he walked up to her and said, “I’m sorry” and shook her hand in acknowledgement of sorry business and said: “I’m only doing my job”. Kemarre replied: “I know brother” and hugged him.

Let there be a meeting of two worlds and two minds. Let us find a hearth for the hurting hearts. Let us put our stories alongside. To do so, Aboriginal people need to be allowed to live, to determine and tell their story, their story of old and of now. Let us want to name, see and know both worlds in a world of recognised relations, finding freedom and the humanity in the other. Let there be a world where we want me to say me my name! Let us discover and create new stories together in new dreamings.

Paul D, the man who was beaten as a slave in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (2005, p 322) and had a bit put in his mouth so he was rendered speechless without a voice, said to Sethe in the final scene: “I want to put

my story next to yours.” “Sethe” he says, “Me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow.”

A tomorrow is needed that revokes the world of yesterday and today, depicted in the not so nice story of the cicadas, screaming in the stinking heat of the suffocating mind, over and over, embodying the stabbing, suicidal violence, the terrifying pain and primordial fears, the vitriolic condemnation residing in the courts, a bit like a curse, which can make somebody a nobody, go crazy, go to desert ground, keel over, empty, exhausted, neither sleeping nor waking. There needs to be a new Australian story, to wake Australia up strong, in the cool of sundown and sunrise, which can fill the holes of unlived lives, silence the shrieks and fertilise the dry, desert lands with rainstorms of new truths and dreams, transforming terra nullius to breakthrough recognition. This story can be found on the ground, at the pivotal deathly epicenter, the emotional cataclysm cradled in the heart of Australia.

Recognition does cut to the heart of what an individual needs to have a sound mind - let alone the well-being of our national psyche. To treat the mind we need to address issues of recognition at a personal and individual level. Then healing and dreaming can come in the unleashing of emotional experiences and humanity can prevail. To treat our national psyche we need cultural and constitutional recognition. Australia – WAKE UP - you can – in the words of Martin Jugadai - WAKE UP STRONG.



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## Ken Lechleitner Pangarta



Kenneth Lechleitner Pangarta is a Western Aranda and Anmatjere man fluent in Western Aranda, Anmatjere, Warlpiri and English. He is the Research Officer for the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) and CASSE Aboriginal Men's Shed Research Project, investigating bi-cultural tools for addressing the issues and meeting the needs of Aboriginal men in Central Australia.

### Research into establishing an Aboriginal Men's Shed within the Central Australian Region.

Today we will discuss some findings in truly understanding how one should go about working and living in this mono-cultural structure while possessing Bi-Cultural richness. We need to release knowledge to remedy the collective problems that we have created while trying to manage each other, by legislative force.

We need to unmask our personal and collective fears towards each other's system of cultural civics as people of this Country... now!

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So, let's do the unmasking, by me beginning, like this!

I use this opportunity to acknowledge the local Aboriginal tribal groups of this region in Victoria for this part of the area of "ampere" place, past, present and future members, as the "**Kulin Nation**" made up of the "**Boonwurrung and Wurundjeri**" tribal groups.

I also use this opportunity to extend this acknowledgement to all the visitors that came and settled this country, past, present and future. We

don't do this enough my fellow countrymen.

When we start doing this kind of address towards ourselves, we are beginning to unpack and begin to liberate ourselves from our own mental shackles of the past, and recognizing the weight it still has when we choose to carry it into the future.

If we don't deal with these mental shackles, that we all carry with us every day, we choose not to see each other as people with dual heritage and dual responsibilities in shaping the future together, that's ours for the taking.

Our mental shackles will remain with us for ever, as a Nation that struggles to define its self on three calendar dates; Australia Day, ANZAC Day and on NADOIC week. We just go through the motion, in hope that someone will say and do something to truly realise what we have in common as Australians..., it's licking at our heels, some like it and others don't like it at all. We choose to remain closed to all opportunities and possibilities. Only we can turn that around, by seeing each other as human beings.

Here is some unpacking via the research as issues, background, current situation and evidential findings as a guide for this conversational discussion today.

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<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal name for a place where young unmarried males sleep and live to learn about life's skills

#### Issues:

Research into Aboriginal Men's Shed, as the modern-day word for 'Ingkintja'<sup>6</sup> where it does this, for men, *Kurruna Mwarrelijka*, to make my spirit strong within a male's place.

#### Background:

The research as a tool has led to modern day discovery of Aboriginal men in need of cultural revival.

To reset own roles and responsibilities amongst despair of being stripped of own worthfulness as an Aboriginal man, simply put, you now no longer have your cultural tools to work with.

The need for Aboriginal men to now listen to **David Unaipon, "As a full-blooded member of my race I think I may claim to be the first – but I hope not the last- to produce an enduring records of our customs, belief and imaginings"**.<sup>7</sup> We as Aboriginal men have to create places that can reshape our own body, mind and soul. To then imagine our future into what is it going to look like, feel like and taste like.

The empowering step taken by some men, is taking the responsibility as men within the community in shaping the research directives to be reflective of their desired direction.

They are starting to see that being in control of the research is finding

<sup>7</sup> Fifty Dollar Note

that they can have their say through this very important tool called research, that was used on them to script their lives in the past. But now, a tool to share, as to what they think should happen in an Aboriginal men's shed.

A very important mind shift is taking place amongst men in the modern world and traditional world, and this research is giving them this opportunity in finding oneself as Aboriginal men again. Here are some stories that I share with you all today.

Let's begin with a very fitting little quote from a small Australian movie called *'Charlie's Country'*, where Charlie was put into prison for drinking in public and assaulting a Police Officer. His countryman was visiting him, and Charlie had just been processed into the prison system, by having all his facial hair removed.

The Countryman was visiting Charlie, to remind him of his role and responsibility back home on Country. However, he makes this statement to Charlie, **"I can't talk to you, when you don't look like yourself"**<sup>8</sup>. Wow, **"I can't talk to you, when you don't look like yourself"** <sup>9</sup>! How powerful is that, as the image one portrays, out bush and in Town? It's no wonder we are having a crisis in our minds of how one sees another person. Now, I am not a specialist here today, but I will just let you all think about that.

#### **Current situation:**

The Aboriginal men from the community of Alice Springs make up the

Male Leadership Group, as part of the Community Reference members from the community. The empowerment of these men having been advocates on behalf of Aboriginal men for a long time had come to this point.

In the past, there has been numerous researches done on Aboriginal men and in to what an Aboriginal man should do and look like.

These men had historical evidence of what happens to research, and how it can be subjected to funding constraints, that leads to good work being shelved and looked at again in another five to ten years down the track, and nothing done.

These men making up the Male Leadership Group (MLG) all came from different Aboriginal Organisations as their workplace; they recognised the conflict up front where this researching is going to go to manage the outcome recommendation of the research.

Therefore to their credit in exercising their voice as men shaped the research direction, in establishing a mutual body or entity for them to work through in partnership as collective interest group in fixing the Aboriginal men, to then fix the family and community in going forward.

A community cannot live without men being present to build the future and shape it, a community cannot live without women to build the future, and we need each other to make this happen. The men are seeing a much bigger picture for men to play and be taught in how to do this; therefore an entity was established as part of its directives from the Male

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<sup>8</sup> Movie Charlies Country

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

Leadership Group.

This led to the formation of Blokes on Track Aboriginal Corporation (BOTAC). While it has been the direction from the Males Leadership Group, they are feeling the slight side effects of euphoria - oh what have we done! - because what they said was done and it's led to this new unknown sound problem... what do we do now?! We have created a body that can do all things we as men desired in dealing with our social determinates, by us having a voice and say in the design of meeting our Criminogenic needs.

### Evidential finding

The new word Aboriginal Men's Shed, has led to rediscovery of an old Aboriginal Cultural Institution that had roles and responsibilities to teach its young people in the past to understanding its Cultural Civics.

These institutional terms are 'Ingkintja' for the males and 'Alukura'<sup>10</sup> for the females. Both words come from the Aranda word.

These two Aboriginal Cultural Institutions provided the cultural inductions to its newest members towards understanding of who they are and what roles they play in maintaining sound cultural governance to its people as valued members within its own society as full body and soul.

To be able to participate in cultural economy of hunting and gathering and adding to the humanism of living according to laws give to follow in

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<sup>10</sup> Aboriginal word for young unmarried females place where cultural induction takes place

life via the Altjira from the Dreamtime creation.

Kurruna Mwarre Ingkintja make my spirit strong males place research has highlighted some very exciting points for men within Central Australia to recalibrate men's thinking, to allow oneself to fully understand what is really needed to hunt and gather in this new modern world, but on the same ancient landscape.

When many men feel that they don't have the power to turn their life around and are stuck in the middle of a structural frame work that determines their lives for them without their input, where life is being scripted for Aboriginal men, in what they should look like, is also not really that clear, because it begs the question.

When so much demand on the Aboriginal men to change behaviour, but, not knowing how, is a mystery that presents a challenge to the scribe of laws, on what does an Aboriginal man look like, in this modern world that doesn't allow for him to participant in the law-making part to guide him as a person. These are some of the whispered position of Aboriginal Men within the Central Australian Region.

1. The legislative erosion of Traditional Cultural Civics and its responsibilities in controlling and commanding of its own members and its members wanting to live by its processes is being denied.

2. There is no place where intercultural teaching takes place for the Aboriginal men as a group, to self-assess and recalibrate own working cultural polices, by culturally analysing the process, to give it meaning first at hand to then develop the understanding to go with it.
3. The dilemma of carrying too much baggage, in what we want, to trusting each other as Aboriginal people setting new directions, because who talks for whom within the Aboriginal world.
4. The end of this research will confirm, by having some real sample of what men are thinking within this region. Along with which men are committing towards a dream building exercise in securing a parcel of land to host all the required activities to teach young and the old men's understanding of WWKISS - Western World Knowledge Ideology Societal Structure.
5. There is going to be more conference within the year 2017, and yet Aboriginal men's voice is going to be silence, somehow, they are suffering in silence and lashing out at the very people that they love, because it's the only kind of attention or recognition that they are getting, regardless of it being negative, it's still attention. These are some of the story from the men's group session on talking about their own behaviours; stories are slightly different to de-identify the men.
6. Many men feel that they don't have the command of the English language to fully express what is it they would like to say.
7. Here is this one man's story in trying to stop the repeating of offence, that he has tried reporting the action of the wife to the Police. That his wife was giving him a hard time, and coming over to him, and breaking this DVO Order. But the Police looked at him as if he was stupid, wanting to report his partner for breaking the DVO Order. He said he can't move anywhere. He runs away to drinking with other people, however, she finds him drunk and then threatens to ring the Police. He then has enough, so he really did hit her and now he is back in prison again<sup>11</sup>.
8. The same old story, the men would also get from the female lawyer, about the story surrounding the offence. The Aboriginal Man loses his voice, even via legal representation, because all matters regarding this man is now being interpreted for him from this point on, where the man is told, that being in prison is for your own good, where the man is prepared to plead guilty, even if it was in self-defence from the female attacker. These are many of the Men's stories, when they do talk, it's enough to make another man cry, simply because, the English language and total misunderstanding of this justice system lets them down.
9. In some ways, men are fighting back via running away from the girlfriend or partner. A relative stated this; he was knocked to the bitumen by his partner. But, when he got back up, she had ripped his shirt off him. Where before he would have hit her back. He just said, ok you can keep that shirt, I am going, so he took off and removed himself for that situation and found some more

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<sup>11</sup> Male member sharing a story about their life in and out of prison.

friendly people to drink with. He had been in and out of prison for over 20 odd years. Then to hear this story brought a smile to my face, for two reasons. One is, he is not going back to prison anytime soon, and the partner is not hurt and lesson learnt in saying enough is enough to being attacked and reacting, and having the strength to walk away or run away for the girlfriend or partner.

10. Ladies and Gentlemen, I will leave this talk at this point, simply because its real and I have witnessed some of these scenarios, even as interpreter, where I had no voice in the matter, because it's not my role to argue for the Offender, and tell the lawyer to do their jobs properly, where it comes down to time and money, there is no justice for the indigent.
11. I presented some finding from the research, it's a work in progress, that allowing Aboriginal men to find our footing to step up to taken on the challenge with gusto in getting themselves right for this new journey in life, with modern day skills to living with ancient principles. To truly understanding how one should go about working and living within mono-cultural structure. While possessing our Bi-Cultural richness and applying it to ourselves as our guiding mechanism in life.

But today is a good start to put this out there, thank you all for your time.

## The Hon Mark Dreyfus



The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC, MP Member for Isaacs, Shadow Attorney General, Shadow Minister for National Security. Elected to Parliament in 2007, Mark studied Arts and Law at the University of Melbourne, has worked with NT Indigenous communities, was involved in the landmark Stolen Generations case and is a leading advocate for retaining Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

I acknowledge the custodians of the land on which we meet, the Woiwurrung people of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respects to their elders past and present, and acknowledge their continuing culture and the contribution they make the life of this city and this region.

I am tempted to say ‘and now for something completely different’. I came earlier today to get a sense of what was being spoken about here, and I am going to sound a lot drier. I’m a politician, and I’m going to talk about the politics and legal framework within which recognition is currently being considered, and how we might start to get somewhere with that objective.

I would like to thank my good friend Pamela Nathan and the organisers of this conference. I would also like to thank this morning’s speakers and to acknowledge my colleague and friend, Senator Patrick Dodson. In some ways I’m the warm-up act for Patrick, who will follow me.

As I said, I’m here to talk about the political and legal path to achieving constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and the strong leadership that I think is necessary to achieve that change.

It was good to hear Ken Lechleitner talk about the hooks, I think the phrase he used was, ‘the hooks that we need to hang new laws on’. And if I could take that as my starting point, the reason why we are engaged in this recognition of Indigenous people in the Constitution; the reason why we are engaged in amending, changing our Constitution is precisely because that document was, and is, the founding document of our nation. I have used both tenses there, because it was of course the

founding document. It is what Australia was based on, it gives us the legal framework for our federation, it brought the six colonies together. It has continued to set the rules under which we govern ourselves. That was then. It still is our founding document in a rolling sense because it is what governs the way in which the Commonwealth Parliament makes laws. It is what governs the way in which judges go about their work. It is what governs the relationship between the Commonwealth and the States on an ongoing basis. And it's actually up to us to change that founding document to reflect the kind of Australia that we are, and the kind of Australia that we want to be. And it's because of the framework, that provides the hooks that Ken Lechleitner was talking about that it is so important that we get it right. I do think that we have been missing strong leadership on this point. And I don't think it's going to happen without stronger leadership than has been shown in the last two or three years.

Just to give you an example, Australia endured the terrible doctrine of terra nullius for 200 years, but when the High Court finally acted to get rid of it, Paul Keating as Prime Minister seized the opportunity to give our nation a legislated regime of native title. We need the same drive and leadership that Keating showed then if we are to achieve constitutional recognition now. Because, as I probably don't need to remind anyone in this room, except perhaps the younger people, legislating those native title reforms was resisted strongly, with a deeply dishonest scare campaign launched not only by extreme right fringe-dwellers, but also by others within the Liberal party itself.

I strongly believe that now, some 25 years later, the support for change is there, both among the Australian people and across much of the political spectrum. We worked hard to get to this point. We fought against the conservatives who sought to minimise the changes that are necessary to

achieve recognition. And I think the case has been made for substantive change for sections of the Constitution that currently enable discrimination against Indigenous people.

It's been a long journey from the Bringing Them Home report of 1997, which showed a path to justice for the stolen generation, and ignited the push for reconciliation. I'll digress for a moment and say that I worked on the Stolen Generation case, and one of the reasons why I accepted the brief was that I thought that while the case itself was a very difficult piece of litigation, it was something that would, even if we lost the case – which we did – have a tremendous political significance in Australia. And I would like to think that in keeping the spirit of that report by Sir Ronald Wilson of the Human Rights Commission alive for a number of years after Howard had rejected the recommendations – most of the recommendations – of the report, we did the right thing by bringing that piece of litigation and arguing it before a single judge in the Federal Court, the full Federal Court, then the High Court. As I said, that Bringing Them Home report, the effort that was made on behalf of the stolen generation ignited a push for reconciliation and I'm sure everyone here can remember the huge crowds that marched for reconciliation in 2000, that marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, down St Kilda Road here in Melbourne, and many other places. And most of you will remember what I will call the 'lost Howard years' with a Prime Minister stonily refusing to apologise. I thought that the momentous apology given by Prime Minister Rudd on my first day in the Federal Parliament in 2008 would speed up the push for Constitutional recognition, but progress has been achingly slow.

Progress which has been made since then is the result of a tireless campaign by the Indigenous community, and supporters across Australia,



in particular, the lobby group Recognise, which was set up to promote a referendum. The role of Recognise is an important one, because they raise general awareness of the need to end the exclusion of Indigenous people from our Constitution and change its discriminatory nature. There are hundreds of thousands of people who have already signed up to the Recognise campaign who will rise to the occasion if and when the public debate for the referendum needs it. The role of Recognise in raising awareness continues to be vital because without it, we won't see the groundswell necessary to achieve a yes vote.

But I really want to emphasise the complexity of referendums in Australia and the need for both a push from the community and the strong political leadership which is need to respond to that change.

Labor in government knew that it would be extremely difficult to hold a successful referendum. And that's why under the leadership of Julia Gillard, in whose government I served briefly as Attorney-General, we established an expert panel on constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians. We did so because achieving any constitutional change in Australia is a journey on a hard road. I'll give you some of the dreadful stats in a minute but one of the reasons I'm speaking about this is because we can talk all we like about the importance of recognition. We can talk all we like about the impact recognition would make, and I doubt that there is a single person in this room who does not support the idea of recognition and indeed understands, all of you, why it's important for the kind of Australia we want to be. But we're not going to get there without a successful constitutional referendum. And the brutal truth of this is that only 8 of 44 proposed changes that were put to Australians since 1901 have been successful. The last successful referendum was in 1977, which is forty years ago. Since then there have been attempts

made to change the constitution in 1984, in 1988 – they were both efforts made under the Hawke government – and in 1999, which was the republic referendum – and all of them failed.

The 1988 referendum failure was particularly startling to me, because it was under the cover, if you like, of the bicentennial celebrations. The four questions that were put to the Australian people in that 1988 referendum were to my mind, unexceptional propositions like extending the right to trial by jury, and requiring that the states acquire property only on just terms – which is the same obligation that the Commonwealth has under the constitution, and a couple of other pretty unexceptional propositions. All of them failed. But they failed so badly in 1988 that there wasn't a majority in even one state, though a single question did receive a majority in the ACT. So that's the level of difficulty. The republic perhaps you might say stands in its own category. But I mention these failed attempts just to show how hard it is.

You could put it another way. Every decade since 1901, there was at least one referendum, up to 2000. Between 2000 and 2010 we had our first decade in the Federation's history without a referendum, and we are well down the track to a second decade without any referendum, not just an unsuccessful one, but no referendum. So in a very real sense the project of looking at our constitution, of amending it in ways that make it match the Australia that we live in, has stalled. And it is against that level of difficulty that this project of a referendum to change the constitution to recognise Indigenous people and to take out the racist references in the constitution has to be considered.

In truth, the case for constitutional change has never been harder. So starting the process with an expert panel, seemed useful, and I think it

was valuable. On 16 July 2012, the expert panel presented their report to former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, and the expert panel told us that significant common ground exists across the political spectrum on this issue. And that the options outlined in that report are capable of succeeding. They told us and I quote “it’s now for government and the parliament to take the panel’s recommendations forward.”

Leading up to the election in 2013, there appeared to be bi-partisan support for constitutional recognition but even with this good will, the recognition referendum has become bogged down. After the September 2013 election, Prime Minister Tony Abbott set an admirable target of holding the referendum on the 50th anniversary of the successful 1967 referendum, which took the first steps in removing discrimination against Indigenous peoples contained in the Constitution. That anniversary is this May and sadly we won’t be seeing a referendum happen then. In fact, to me, it seems unlikely any time this year.

In his two years as Prime Minister, despite describing himself as “the first Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs” (that was Mr Abbott’s self description) Tony Abbott did not provide the strong leadership which was needed. I think he is more likely to be remembered for cutting half a billion dollars out of the Commonwealth’s Aboriginal Affairs programs than for anything else. Even the way that Abbott spoke of recognition, of the recognition referendum as, and this is his phrase, “completing the constitution – not changing it” – was actually completely unhelpful. It may have meant something to right-wing conservatives in his own party. But to most Australians, a referendum is for changing the Constitution. The founding fathers (they were all men) put s128 in the Constitution for a reason – it was so the Constitution could be changed to meet changing circumstances in Australian society as they arose.

I just want to make a few comments about the content of this referendum too.

It’s likely that a referendum that goes beyond what’s been called a “minimalist position” will seek to do two main things. One symbolic and one practical. Just on the minimalist position, there was some news coverage last week of what’s been happening in the Indigenous consultation that is underway as we sit here. It’s been underway since late last year and will be completed in May. My personal view is not what’s going to determine this, but personally, I was pleased to see the reports coming out of that Indigenous consultation to the effect that a minimalist position will not cut it. We had a little playing with this by Mr Howard back in 1999 when accompanying the Republic referendum we were asked to express an opinion about a preamble drafted by Les Murray. That wasn’t good enough then, and it won’t be good enough now. There is no point in the vast effort that has been spent on this project if all we end up with is some minimalist position and I’m happy to see those expressions or at least a tentative view coming out of this Indigenous consultation – that a minimalist position will not cut it. But as I said, if we get beyond that, and I sincerely hope we will, there will be two main things, the symbolic and the practical outcome. It’s likely that the proposed changes will seek to make specific mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the constitution and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of our land. You’re probably all sitting there thinking why on earth doesn’t it already say that? Indeed why didn’t it say that when it was adopted in 1901? Because it is not something that we suddenly discovered. Captain Cook worked it out when he arrived. Arthur Phillip worked it out when he arrived in 1788, 18 years after Cook. And the people that gave instructions to Governor

Arthur Phillip when he came here with the First Fleet gave him instructions about the first peoples of our land. But for whatever reason, we have no acknowledgement of the first peoples of this land in our Constitution and that's if you like, the symbolic thing that should happen. It's a very important step on the long road to reconciliation. It's a change that on one level is symbolic, in seeking to address historic elements of our Constitution which reflect racism. Symbols are important in politics. And the right symbols can help to change perceptions in a way that paves the way for changes of a more practical kind.

The second part of what I hope to see in a referendum could focus on more substantive change to our constitution. It is truly unacceptable that the founding laws of this country allow the Federal Parliament to make laws that discriminate against Australians adversely on the basis of race. This was necessary according to former Prime Minister Edmund Barton, our first Prime Minister, speaking from his colonial position in 1898 when he said this; "we need to regulate the affairs of people of coloured or inferior races who are in the commonwealth". So that's the spirit in which the Constitution was drafted. We have truly come a long way since then. And we need to make the document speak of who we are today, not what we were, or what Australia was, or what those white men thought when they drafted this document in 1898, 1899, and 1900 – but who we are today.

To go back to the expert panel's suggestions, the expert panel proposed that the racist power of s51(xxiv) be deleted so as to remove the ability to pass laws that discriminate against Indigenous people adversely. They recommended that there should be a new Section 51A in the constitution that would recognise Indigenous peoples and preserve the Australian government's ability to pass laws for them, the Indigenous people. It also

seems likely that constitutional recognition would involve the removal of section 25(2), which recognises that the states can ban people from voting on the basis of their race. I'll bet there are people in this room that are shocked to learn that in Section 25(2) of the Australian Constitution, there is still a provision that says that if a state makes a law that prohibits a person of any race from voting, that person doesn't get to vote in a Commonwealth election. And you might think that it's not that likely that in 2017 or anytime soon a state could legislate in that manner. But nevertheless it's a shocking thing that that provision is still in our constitution. And it ought to be removed. What the expert panel said about this is in diplomatic language – they recommended its repeal on the basis that it would "contribute to a more unified and reconciled nation". The expert panel had a couple of other suggestions. One was adopting a new section 116A, prohibiting governments from passing laws that discriminate on the basis of race, and also inserting a new section 127A recognising indigenous languages were this country's first tongues, while confirming that English is Australia's national language.

Following on from the expert panel's report, some of those changes were met with resistance. That's why a Parliamentary joint select committee on constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was set up against to assess these proposals and to consider options for addressing any issues with the expert panel's proposals. I'm not going to spend time going over the slightly different way in which that Parliamentary joint select committee produced its recommendations. But certainly, it was long way past minimalist and I'll leave it at that.

There is general agreement that change must happen. There is general agreement that change is well overdue. The push for this referendum is bipartisan. In fact, it is deemed so important that this referendum passes



that the only question is how to get the referendum process absolutely right. The Referendum Council, of which Senator Dodson was a member before he entered the Parliament in April last year, is now charged with preparing the framework for the referendum. The reporting dates for their proposals has shifted. Hopefully they will be reporting on the 30th June this year.

The Indigenous consultation process, which is going to feed into the referendum council's report, is well underway. It will end at Uluru in May, actually on the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, with the National Indigenous Constitution Convention. And that's a historic event. I hope that a simple proposal for the referendum emerges from that Indigenous consultation process that is underway now, and that we get a report from the Referendum Council on 30 June, with which the national leadership – meaning the government and the opposition working together, can go forward. The danger that I am concerned about is the sense of urgency to have this matter dealt with will be lost, and the momentum that we've achieved that's the result of tireless community action and activism, will not bear fruit. Without political leadership, we risk missing the opportunity that is now presenting to us, to have the unjust and unfair state of our constitution finally dealt with.

Once the council's proposals are put forward, I hope that the government and particularly, the Prime Minister gives them the serious attention the issue deserves. I hope a date is set for a referendum that is considered immovable so that the "Yes" campaign can begin in earnest and ensure the highest possible degree of success for this referendum. It is too important a question to fail. We will not know the precise shape of this referendum until after the council reports later this year. The Prime Minister has claimed that he is committed to constitutional recognition. I

hope that for once, he surprises us, and makes that commitment real. As I've said, we won't succeed without leadership on this issue. Bill Shorten and the entire Labor team are committed to working with the Turnbull government to lead the national debate that lies ahead of us.

Thanks very much.

## Senator Patrick Dodson



Senator for Western Australia, Shadow Assistant Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Patrick Dodson is a Yawuru man from Broome in Western Australia. He has dedicated his life work to being an advocate for constructive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples based on mutual respect, understanding and dialogue. He is a recipient of the Sydney International Peace prize...

I want to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land, members of the Kulin Nation, acknowledge any of their leaders here today, and acknowledge Indigenous leaders from other parts of Australia that are also here. I'm privileged to stand on this country.

I want to also acknowledge Anne Kantor for her work in many of these areas in the background but for her tireless contribution to trying to make the place liveable for all of us despite our diversity and differences and contrary views at times.

I was not sure what I was going to do when I got here but I thought I'd start with a poem from one of the great Indigenous leaders, Oodgeroo Noonuccal - Kath Walker - because as you know Kath was the coordinator of the movement around getting the 67 referendum up. Her and many many of those leaders have passed on but they were a unique group of Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and Kath of course was a fantastic poet and if you have never read any of her works I would encourage you do to so. She wrote the poem 'The dawn is at hand' back in 1966, the year before the most successful referendum campaign in our nation's history, where more than 90% of the nation voted in unity, they voted yes for Aborigines. In keeping with the theme of this symposium, talking 'the day after tomorrow - breakthrough recognition' as a possible starting point, the poem offers us an opportunity to contemplate how far we have travelled in the 51 years that have passed since this poem was penned. And I'm not a great reader, but I'll try and do justice to Kath's poem, and I'll read it now:



Dark brothers, first Australian race,  
Soon you will take your rightful place  
In the brotherhood long waited for,  
Fringe-dwellers no more.

Sore, sore the tears you shed  
When hope seemed folly and justice dead.  
Was the long night weary? Look up, dark band,  
The dawn is at hand.

Go forward proudly and unafraid  
To your birthright all too long delayed,  
For soon now the shame of the past  
Will be over at last.

You will be welcomed mateship-wise  
In industry and in enterprise;  
No profession will bar the door,  
Fringe-dwellers no more.

Dark and white upon common ground  
In club and office and social round,  
Yours the feel of a friendly land,  
The grip of the hand.

Sharing the same equality  
In college and university,  
All ambitions of hand or brain  
Yours to attain.

For ban and bias will soon be gone,  
The future beckons you bravely on  
To art and letters and nation lore,  
Fringe-dwellers no more.

Now that was Kath Walker 51 years ago looking to the prospect of a referendum in probably a totally different way, and through a totally different lens, than we might look at the current opportunity and we have just heard Mark [Dreyfus] explain some of the challenges in it. The victory she said of the referendum was not a change of white attitudes, the real victory was the spirit of hope and optimism which affected Blacks all over Australia. This is a quote from her work: 'We had won something, we were visible, hopeful and vocal'. Two days after the vote on the 29th of May, Mrs Walker wrote to the Prime Minister, Harold Holt, and I quote again: 'It is indeed very gratifying to know that members of both houses of the Parliament were in favour of the 'yes' vote. Undoubtedly the people of Australia also favour a better deal for the Aborigines as shown by the result of the vote. May we look forward to further enlightened policy especially around education, housing, employment, health in the near future'.

The spirit of hope, of visibility was also palpable 9 years ago when Prime Minister Rudd delivered the apology to the Stolen Generations - a time for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history of righting the wrongs of the past, a new dawn at hand. Like the 67 referendum the positive responses of the wider Australian public was heartening, affirming that with the right political leadership we could transcend the politics of fear and guilt of the nation and work towards a reconciliation based on truth, on healing and on justice.

Flying down on the plane today, I wondered what Oodgeroo would make of the current suite of policies aimed at education, housing, employment and health, and the mantras of getting kids to school, getting people to work and making communities safer. They are laudable goals and objectives and they are important but they come packaged to the Aboriginal Nations without respect for our sovereign position and sovereign status.

We know, as Mark has reminded us, that the audit office report when it reviewed the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, that it's a total failure from top down, through the centralised decision making that leaves our nation on the margins and again as policy fringe-dwellers. The Closing the Gap report has been constantly unsatisfactory and, while marginally improving in some areas, we know that the state of the Aboriginal nation is not satisfactory. Indeed, it is cynical, frustrated, angry at the direction of public policy.

Before lunch, and I am sorry I missed the presentation by the Elders and men from the Tjilirra Movement, working with young people to restore their *liyan* with community designed solutions. *Liyan* is the word we use in Yawuru (the people I come from) - we talk about *mabu liyan* - 'good inside', we need to be good inside and we need what we call *mabu ngarrungunil* 'a good community, good people, good human beings' and we talk of *mabu buru* 'good country'. If any of those things are not in balance then we as a human being, as a Yawuru person, get out of balance and it can lead to all sorts of problems in our own spirit. *Liyan* is a very important concept - similar I would imagine to what you were told by the men this morning out of that Movement in the Centre.

I try to look at the richness and goodness of the Aboriginal people and their contribution, not only to the historically rich cultural origins and traditions that we all share and have, but also there are people who struggle and battle and who try to make ends meet and who are on a shoe-string budget whose services are being cut back and yet they soldier on. These cuts that were made by the government affect services: legal services, women's services, kids' services - and so they do have an impact and you see those marvelous individuals out there struggling away on a daily basis with bread and butter issues that affect them, or their children, or their grannies or someone in their care.

So it is primarily the Indigenous people who keep me focused on what needs to be done. And there are good people in other parts of our society, and in particular in the judiciary and other places who are going to raise their voices against the appalling incarceration rates and the appalling out of home care of children. The incarceration of Indigenous people - you can almost hear Kath Walker's poem in the back of your head - 'fringe-dwellers no more' - well where are we in the spectrum of things? We are back on the fringe, at the margins, the height of the deficit analysis which wasn't the vision or the hope or the anticipation that the people of Kath Walker's period, and those of us who followed soon after, hoped for and looked forward to as a consequence of the change in the referendum. We didn't expect the white folks to change their attitudes but we did expect public policy to be more enlightened. And we did expect the shift in the Constitutional change and the bringing in to the public policy space of the federal government that things would improve. And they did for a while under the self-determination policy of Gough Whitlam and others.

Certainly, the Howard era and some of his colleagues, and then the contemporary position - the last two days I've been sitting on a Senate Committee dealing with amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act where the chair of the committee wouldn't even allow the Indigenous legal services to make a presentation on the nature of the bill. Where the president of the committee wouldn't even allow the spokesperson for FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia) to have an opening statement. And where the substance of that piece of legislation is not only going to change the words (of Section 18C) and bring in harassment, but it is also going to change the standard, if it gets up - and Labor will fight tooth and nail, I can assure you, that it won't get up. But it will also change the standard of the base upon which discrimination is to be assessed to the notion of 'a reasonable member of the Australian community'. Now what is that? Who is that? Where's the jurisprudence in relation to all of that? Now there may be the argument about the common man, and all of that stuff, but this is - imagine some of these people in our society who say to individuals who are Australians but from another culture and who are enriching our society because of that 'go home to your own country' - is that the common member of our Australian society? This is horrendous stuff and I would be contacting your local members and putting some pressure on them about it because if it ever got up I think our country will be headed in the wrong direction.

So it is people like yourselves and others who give people like me and Mark and other members this power to make laws. It's a huge burden and we do our best, when we are in opposition at least, to try to make sure these laws are not going to impact adversely or unjustly upon people. And, let me tell you, when they tell you politics is the art of the possible, it is the art of the numbers, that's what goes on in the senate. Nick Xenophon, Pauline Hanson, Leyonhjelm, Darren Hinch, who line up

with the government on most things, against Labor and the Greens in most instances to bring about changes that, in my view (and not just because I am in the Labor team), are not constructive for our nation. We have just cut money off childcare, or the senate has - it is going to go the house of reps - and there are a lot of poor people in remote parts, and that includes farmers' wives and people like that, who are going to be affected by these changes. So there is a real hard-heartedness in the **politic**, in Canberra at the moment. It will swing back from there because that is the reality I see in the cross-benchers and the senate. So when we come to Indigenous recognition contemplate the receptivity in the Senate where the bill has to be passed, that sets up the question or endorses the question to come back to us as the voters. Given the composition, the generosity in the Senate may not be, it certainly will not be what was back in '67 because there are some people in there who do not think with an ounce of generosity to the concept of diversity and difference within our society.

So it is important, not only to reflect on the vision or the expectation and the hope of people like Kath Walker had for the change that was necessary to try and create the social equity that we all hoped would eventuate through health, education, employment - let's not get sidetracked around what needs to happen. And I am afraid there is a bit of side tracking happening in the debate around recognition.

It is not about recognising Aborigines - sounds funny doesn't it? This is about the parliament recognising that Aborigines exist in our constitution under a head of power when it comes to make a law. At the moment it can do what it likes, and it does what it likes, and it does what it likes contrary to the interests of Aboriginal people because it is embedded as Mark has said in the racist thinking of 1901. That was pointed out by



Menzies back then when the argument got up about the '67 referendum - you won't fundamentally change the discrimination against Aborigines by tampering with the particular head of power [Section] 51 [Clause] 26 by making it clear that the Federal Parliament will have power to make laws for Indigenous people. The erudition of that is beyond me, I am not a lawyer. But clearly that power we thought, back in '67, that was going to launch positive policies and create justice and restitution, fix up the mess at a legal level, and the recompense and restoration for the bad policies and laws that were made that took kids away and all sorts of other things, the hope we had around that change - if that head of power remains as it is embedded in that history and is not changed, the same consequences will take place in the future. That's why that has to change. That's why the 51A, that the expert panel proposed, needs serious attention. Lawyers will tell you this will give the high court too much power because it has a preambular statement that governs just that one clause, not the whole of the Constitution - just that one clause - 51 26 - tremendously significant. After 200 hundred years surely to goodness the Parliament of this country, if that was the head of power, needs to take note that the Indigenous people lived here and still live here and still have a viable culture and are still practicing and related to their lands and their traditions and their songs and their ceremonies. An enormously important head of power to be passed and entrenched in the Constitution. The question of treaties, and sovereignty and these others, they are political issues. I am not dismissing them, they are very important issues. But the Constitution as Mark says (and he's a lawyer) is the backbone that sets out how this democracy in Australia operates. And that head of power, if we do nothing else, except demand that 51A is picked up.

I am also keen on 116A, obviously, because I was part of that panel that recommend these things - the non-discrimination against people in this society. And just have look at some of the people we've got in the Parliament - Ms Hanson - she wants to inoculate us against the Muslims, for goodness sake! And they have power, it is not as if they don't have power. They are making deals with the Liberal party every day of the week. They have power in that parliament now, today. And imagine if some lunatic in the government was minded to come up with some piece of legislation that took us down that road because of the pressure and the demand in the deal making that goes on from the cross benches. We could be going down a track, and we might see that in the Racial Discrimination Act amendments, there is no guarantee that Labor and the Greens will get our way. We will do our best, but if the people on the other benches support the government, then it will go the way they are proposing.

So we are in a real political context faced with real difficulties of political good will. There is no doubt about Labor's intentions in relation to the Constitution change, we will wait for the rounds of dialogues and discussions that the Indigenous people are conducting through the Constitutional committee and if you read some of the tripe that goes on in the public press there is no political model, there are three Indigenous members of the Labor party, there is one member of the Liberals who is a Minister, Ken Wyatt, and then there is Jacqui Lambie, and we are a pretty robust, particular group but we are only a small little caucus, within the bigger caucus and the bigger Parliament. So we will wait until the report comes back from Uluru and I would encourage my comrades and friends in the Indigenous community - don't get lost on the notion that we need an entity and we need a hook in the Constitution - I am all for Parliamentary representation and entities. We saw what happened to

ATSIC and a range of other things, unless it is secure then there is no guarantee the government will enact the particular head of power or use that head of power to enact anything. This is the real politic that works today in Canberra. I've only been there 10 minutes, I am not an expert. It hasn't taken me long to work out that it is hard to get real reform, to real justice for Indigenous people. But I am glad that I am a member of the Labor party because it is focused on those issues and it is trying to ensure those better standards are upheld.

Now I wanted to finish just with the notion that recognition of the First People actually starts to send a message that we are actually valued. If we got this referendum up, a bit like Kath Walker's view, we are visible now, they can't walk past us, we are visible, we have hope and we expect positive change to public policy. My hope would be that it will send a message that we are valued, that we are important and we want to deal with the things that cause us division and discord over the past - and that's about treaty making and that's agreement making, that's about a whole range of things, but we want we want to deal with those things. But we want to be valued - our culture, our responsibilities for our own affairs and our position in this society. We want to be valued as the people who are capable of resolving those matters, not because some bureaucrat comes along and says your expenditure is out of kilter with what the senate requires and demands you conform to a certain set of financial guidelines. These are big issues. As Kath Walker pointed out clearly in her poem 'We are recognised. We are visible'. If you remember the context was Aboriginal humpies and little fringe-dwelling towns, our places were on the fringes of all our towns back then. Some of the early reporters or the reporters around that period brought the spotlight into those places for the Australians to see and understand. Thankfully they did that - to make visible what was at the very heart of our society that

most of us knew was wrong but didn't know much about it. We know a lot about Indigenous peoples today. We know about the treatment that they have received under governments. We know about the Stolen Generations. We know about the Deaths in Custody reports. We know about the number of kids in out of home care. We know about the awful process of welfare impacts. We know all of these things. My vision is that we have recognition in the Constitution, again philosophically, should send this message 'that you are a valued, unique part of our society, our Australian society, as Indigenous peoples' and it is important that we acknowledge as the Australian people that you want to deal with the things that have caused the division and discord of the past. We can't run away from that and thankfully the state of Victoria and the state of South Australia are embarking upon that through their Treaty making process with the local Indigenous Nations and peoples - a fantastic thing! They are not frightened of the word. Those two governments are at least embarking upon that and the Northern Territory as well. Let's hope other states pick up this enthusiasm and ultimately there is some agreement at a national level where whatever it is that for the nation's sake we will need to agree upon. They are about the reshaping of our relationship and of going forward and it is the greatest way that will give a new sense and strength to achieve the change that we know is possible.

Thank you.

## Dr Timothy Keogh



Dr Timothy Keogh is a psychoanalyst, clinical and forensic psychologist and couples psychotherapist with over 30 years' clinical experience. He sits on the Board of the International Association for Couple and Family Psychoanalysis, is an honorary senior lecturer in the Medical School, University of Sydney and has significant academic publications.

### “Facilitating Recognition: Listening to You, Dreaming Together”

#### *Summary*

*The paper proposes the value of psychoanalytic concepts in the understanding of the intra-psychic, interpersonal and transpersonal processes that are involved in recognition. It is argued that there is an urgent need for such understandings, given the current disadvantage gap indices. The importance of dreaming (as a manifestation of what Bion calls “alpha functioning”), especially in dreaming together in the form of collaborative partnerships which can facilitate recognition, is highlighted. The value of an adaptation of the Endopsychic Model as a means of understanding tensions that may develop in such partnerships is also considered, as is Bion’s concept of the “container contained” in facilitating the working through of such tensions. This latter concept is also proposed as a useful psychoanalytic lens through which to understand how a colonial invasion destroyed a vital container contained relationship for Aboriginal people and the traumatising effect this had on individuals and communities. The paper concludes by suggesting how partnering initiatives, especially those which involve psychoanalytic understanding, might make a modest contribution to the aims of recognition and their over-arching goal of uniting our nation and bringing all Australians together on an equal footing.*

I would like to begin by thanking the conference organisers for this important event and to say how grateful I am to have been invited to contribute. I also want to say how valuable it was for me in my own journey of recognition, to have been involved in a week's visit to Central Australia after the last CASSE conference and to have visited Congress and Aboriginal communities in that region. This was very personally impacting and allowed an intellectual understanding to meld with a deeply emotional experience. This has helped me appreciate what it means to talk about recognition, that is, what needs to be recognised. For me, this is reflected in the verse with which I will finish my brief presentation today.

So now I want to consider with you about some particular ways in which I think psychoanalysis, as a means of facilitating change, can foster recognition.

In doing so, I want to suggest that the overall process of recognition involves:

1. An opportunity for affected individuals to be supported in recognising who they are and what has happened to them. This process involves healing as their trauma / intergenerational trauma are addressed;
2. Communities being assisted to recognise and deal with the trauma they still bear, often in the form of externalised pain, resulting in manifestations such as violence, substance abuse and suicide;
3. Developing ways in which non-Indigenous Australians can be faced with the reality of the experience / history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for children, in particular, to

be educated about this in away that engages them at an emotional level;

4. Encouraging Aboriginal communities and organisations to work in partnership with those (non-Indigenous) who are advanced in their capacity to recognise;
5. The use of such partnerships as a platform for increased non-indigenous recognition; and
6. Mobilisation of the larger group to achieve political / constitutional change to address the serious socio-economic inequities that contribute to the continuing overall unequal status of Indigenous people.

Psychoanalytically, this means working at the *intra-psychic, interpersonal and transpersonal levels*.

I strongly support the current wisdom that the provision of mental health interventions that may assist at the individual level of recognition needs to be established and implemented through appropriate cultural consultation with Aboriginal elders and others guiding their development and implementation. For this to happen though, functional bi-cultural partnerships need to be established. Such partnerships can also help the process of recognition (in this sense, of traumas past and present) and in doing so mobilise communities in terms of social change. Partnerships driving this first step recognition can then become vehicles for achieving recognition in those groups which are still blind to the suffering of Aboriginal people.

In this regard, when we examine the disadvantage gap indices, we realise that there is an urgency to progress recognition. This is because these indices are highly illustrative of the lack of progress with recognition.

These indicators include:

1. That as of 2010, 40 % of all youth suicides were committed by Aboriginal youth. This represents a rise from 19% since 1991,
2. That the proportion of Aboriginal adults reporting high levels of psychological distress increased from 27 per cent in 2004/05 to 33 per cent in 2014/15, and hospitalisations for self-harm increased by 56 per cent over this period.
3. The proportion of Aboriginal adults reporting substance misuse in the previous 12 months increased from 23 per cent in 2002 to 31 per cent in 2014/15.
4. The adult imprisonment rate increased 77 per cent from 2000 to 2015 and, whilst the juvenile detention rate has decreased, it is still 24 times the rate for non-Aboriginal youth.

Moreover, as of February 2017, there has been a failure with respect to:

1. Closing the gap in life expectancy within a generation;
2. Halving the gap in child mortality within a decade (currently, 6.2 per 100,000 compared to 3.7 per 100,000 in the non-Indigenous population);
3. Halving the gap in reading and numeracy for Indigenous students within a decade; and
4. Halving the gap in employment within a decade.

In a recent article in The Lancet medical journal, which will bring international attention to such issues, the personal side of these statistics is revealed. The article opens with the story that "Mervyn Eades once contributed to one of Australia's most shocking statistics: that one in 13 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males in Western Australia is imprisoned--one of the world's highest incarceration rates." By the age of 13 years, Mr. Eades had lost his father and grandparents and moved around multiple care homes before ending up in prison on and off for the next 18 years. Eight months after being released from prison for the last time in 2002, his younger brother committed suicide whilst also in prison.

Such a story brings home the shockingly stark human face to the gap indices.

In the light of these issues I want us to urgently consider how psychoanalysis might be able to contribute to getting to the day after tomorrow, that is, to a fuller recognition of the circumstances past and present which is the reality of Aboriginal people.

There is so much psychic pain reflected in these individual stories that at times the total situation can feel overwhelming. For such pain to be transformed, however, it needs to be talked about so that it can ultimately be thought about or, as Fonagy describes it, *mentalised*. Bion calls this process alphabetisation where he refers to un-metabolised emotional experience, or *beta elements*, being transformed into alpha elements, emotional experience that can be thought about and therefore potentially transformed. This is no easy task, but when thinking can develop it becomes possible, as Bion notes, to be able to dream or envision things being differently. Moreover, when people share such a



dream, it can become the basis of significant political and social change. Clearly, that is the importance of conferences such as the one in which we are participating today.

In his 1963 “I have a dream” speech, Martin Luther King said:

*“We refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we’ve come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.”*

*He continued...“This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilising drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promise of Democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.” (p.2)*

For the King dream to become a shared reality in order for change to come about, it needed to be *dreamt together*. That is, change in the individual starts with the articulation of dream thoughts / the capacity to envision things being different. To become social change, this dreaming has to be shared. As the famous psychoanalyst Bion said, “When a conception can mate with reality, it becomes transformative.” Ogden, another contemporary psychoanalyst, giving support to the idea of the value of a partnership, notes the importance of another mind in facilitating our “dreaming ourselves into reality”.

CASSE has had a dream. This has been to create safe, supportive environments for individuals, families and communities through

psychoanalytic awareness. Its approach is based on the current psychodynamic understanding of how the mind functions and how individuals relate to one another. CASSE’s approach seeks to understand and address the underlying causes of problem behaviour such as unresolved trauma which can lead to conflict, self-injurious behaviour and violence. It achieves its aims by promoting safe, supportive environments through the psychoanalytic understandings of the emotional, psychic and social worlds of individuals, families and communities.

CASSE has also found ways of dreaming together with others, to produce projects that ultimately support the overall process of recognition. That is why I wanted to be part of and support CASSE as an organisation. As an example, CASSE’s Aboriginal Australian Relations Program works with Aboriginal people (through a partnership with *Congress*) in the here and now to understand the emotional experiences of psychic pain, trauma and violence. CASSE has been working in partnership with *Congress* since December of 2011 to understand and address issues of violence and underlying trauma that currently exist within communities. One of its projects entitled (Kurunner murre) “*Kurruna Mwarre*”, meaning ‘to make my spirit good inside me’, has employed a psychoanalytic approach to develop and implement culturally appropriate demonstration projects that facilitate and empower Aboriginal people to heal from their traumatic experiences *in the Aboriginal way*. Other examples of dreaming and further partnerships together are to be found in the Men’s Tjilirra Movement in the central western desert region, which is empowering men and communities to reconnect with their cultural practices in order to reconnect with each other and the men’s “Breakthrough Violence” program, co-run by Ken Lechleitner in Alice Springs, which operates with a similar approach, focussing on the

recognition of mental states in the context of secure, attachment relationships.

The success of such partnerships, I believe, has come about through listening first, verifying one's understanding from such listening and then finding ways of dreaming and envisioning outcomes together.

Thinking about partnerships that might foster dreaming together, I am also aware that, like all relationships, they can encounter difficulties that need to be worked through in order to maintain their important function. Thinking about such partnerships, it seemed to me that it would be helpful to have a model from which to view possible difficulties and suggest ways of resolution.

### **The Endopsychic Model**

Fairbairn's Endopsychic Model, in its form developed by the Scharffs, shows how conflict between couples can be explained in terms of emotional functioning, which can collapse under pressure. In psychoanalytic terms this is referred to as regression in the relationship such that, when upset, there is a tendency to see the other as problematic and become aroused by this in a way that blocks thinking and understanding. I have proposed an adaptation of the Endopsychic Model (show PP of Model) as a means of thinking about what might happen at stressful points in a larger organisational partnership which could cause such defensive regression.

Partnerships of all kinds often become stressed by challenging issues about which there might be strongly opposing views and, rather than finding a way of reconciling the views, unhelpful perceptions of the other

occur. At these points the other party can become defensively and unconsciously split, with the result that good feelings towards the other become lost and are then viewed as negative and frustrating. In my adapted model perceptions of the other are viewed as bi-directional. What is helpful in this regard are processes which encourage awareness of these regressions and splits and a capacity to manage them which this adaptation of the Endopsychic model, I believe, facilitates. This can then lead to renewed integration and growth and, for our purpose again, foster recognition. It is only when the defensive processes can be contained and integration fostered that the other can be seen as separate and not containing projections of (that is, unacknowledged aspects of) our self.

### **Container-contained**

For unhelpful splits and projections to be worked with and modified, a container-contained relationship is thus essential. When I refer to a container-contained relationship, I am talking about a psychic process involving the unconscious aspects of communication where the container performs a function aimed at receiving and containing both projections or un-metabolised bits of emotional experience: what Bion called and I referred to above as 'Beta elements'. That is, what is contained are the unmanageable aspects of experience which need first to be contained in order to be made thinkable and therefore tolerable. A container can thus be thought of as a structure able to assist the mental representation of difficulties that can then be thought about, rather than acted out.

As Twemlow points out, collaborative partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parties need to be able to contain mutually difficult feelings concerning trust and power in order that they can become

transformative. This highlights the need for a container-contained relationship where the large group structure and agreed upon leadership can assist the formation of a container for the difficult to manage experience of both parties. In envisioning a container-contained relationship I find Ogden's (2004b) view of it particularly useful. He notes,

"The idea of the container-contained addresses the dynamic interaction of predominantly unconscious thoughts (the contained) and *the capacity for dreaming and thinking those thoughts (the container)*." (p. 1349)

#### **Intergenerational trauma and the rupture of the culture container**

I would also like to consider briefly the value of the concept of container-contained as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of ongoing trauma in individuals and communities, particularly by considering how culture performs an important function as a container.

In terms of the container-contained model, I view the rupture of the container of traditional Aboriginal culture to have drastically impacted on the sense of group (and consequently individual) cultural identity. As a psychological mega-container its rupture in turn, I believe, affected links to "Country" and "Dreaming" (themselves containers) which provide an important function of preserving cultural coherence, through their capacity for symbolically representing experience. That is as I mentioned earlier, through their ability to transform unthinkable/unmanageable experience (beta elements) and through symbolisation turn them into something that then can be thought about and modified.

Through a psychoanalytic lens, I view the rupture to Aboriginal culture as being so severe that it could be seen to have caused a fragmentation of the cultural self, accompanied by the formation of what Bion (1957) has described as *bizarre objects*, that is, bits of the group-self/self emerging from the traumatic fracturing or rupture which can contribute to feelings of persecution, already a reality for many.

The rupture to the psychological container of traditional culture was of course originally caused by a colonial invasion and genocide along with subsequent policies of discrimination perpetuated by a European culture, captivated by its own narcissism and omniscience.

The ongoing intergenerational trauma caused by this rupture, however, now forms part of a complex etiological equation which accounts for ongoing high rates of suicide, homicide, drug and alcohol problems and chronic feelings of inferiority and poor self-esteem which impact severely on the quality of life of Aboriginal Australians. The latest disheartening report concerning the disadvantage gap, whose statistics I referred to above, is testimony to this.

Related to understanding the impact of the rupture to a traditional psychic container is the concept of *cultural transference*. In terms of Aboriginal culture, this can be understood in part to involve (quote) "the subtle movements in feeling, thought and bodily sensation that go on inside oneself, between oneself and others and between oneself *and Country*" [italics added] (Cameron & San-Roque, 2013). *To understand this concept requires a deep appreciation of the connection between identity and the connection to land or "Country" and the significance of "Dreaming."*

In terms of understanding the concept of *Country* and how ties to the land are intimately connected to the sense of identity for Aboriginal people, Dowd (2009) has pointed out that, from her understanding from listening, that there is a specific Aboriginal way of thinking about the “container-contained” relationship in Aboriginal culture “where the Western notion of the bounded relationship between self and other and self and land as other, collapses” (Dowd, 2009, p.105). This is because it is as if land or Country for Aboriginal Australians, in a significant way, is mind.

She notes that San-Roque’s account of (Tee uka pa) *Tyukurrpa* (a form of Aboriginal “Dreaming”) “lays out a description of the indigenous pre-conceptual matrix that enables the organisation of mental and emotional experience into thought, *transferred onto the geography of the Country itself*. Here, she suggests, “he seems to be describing the same idea of the background of meaningful containment imagined differently and definitively and *trans-located onto the land itself*.” (p.107).

The implication of these issues for me is that no meaningful dialogue about recognition and reconciliation, and in turn no transformation, can take place without an acknowledgement of the importance of these “containers” (“Country” and “Dreaming”) and the central container of traditional culture which binds them together as a “mega-container” that allows for meaningful links between alpha elements [thoughts] which can lead to a coherent sense of identity, being acknowledged (Keogh, 2014).

### Some conclusions

In conclusion, I believe that psychoanalysis can potentially make a modest contribution to the overall process of recognition. In particular, I see the

role of partnerships that facilitate dreaming together as being crucial. I see the importance of the healthy functioning of the bi-cultural couple relationship *as both a vehicle for developing important mental health interventions to help individuals, groups and communities as well as a model for recognition and reconciliation*.

Secondly, for such collaborations in the area of mental health to be successful, I believe they need to be rooted in an intuitively deep understanding of the impact of the rupture to the “mega-container of traditional culture” (along with related disruptions to connections to “Country” and “Dreaming”) which I have described.

This thought encompasses the somewhat obvious but often disregarded issue that there needs to be a recovery of ‘cultural agency’ before reconciliation can be achieved.

Consequently, there is a need for all interventions, where possible, to be linked to the repair of the container. This has implications not only at the individual level, with meaningful ways of understanding and transforming trauma (e.g. a “Men’s Shed” concept where the link to the restoration of cultural practices is implicit or the MTM where it is explicit), but also at the group level (by helping communities develop frameworks that allow for the processing of trauma) and contributing psychoanalytic understandings and processes which can foster recognition, reconciliation and related political and social change in the broader society. Today’s conference, the previous Reconciliation Conference in Melbourne and the *Walk in my Shoes* Forum in Alice Springs, I think, are good examples of this latter application.

In terms of assisting individuals, families and groups to recognise and work through their own traumas, as an important step in the over all process of recognition, it seems important to build on commonalities and come to understand and respect differences in philosophy. There are, I believe, considerable areas of commonality in philosophy about health and wellbeing between Aboriginal culture and psychoanalysis which can be built on, especially between an emphasis on Dreaming and the focus on the unconscious level of experience within psychoanalysis. Such connections also underline the comfortable fit between the psychoanalytic and Aboriginal worldview, especially as espoused by the (Nang kaaree) *Ngnangkari* or traditional healer (Nathan, 2014).

Moreover, the endorsement of a model of health in Aboriginal culture, which places a premium on the social and emotional wellbeing of people (where *Wellbeing is articulated by Garvey and others, as a bio-psych-socio-cultural model of health*), appears to be a further fundamental area of philosophical similarity between Aboriginal and psychoanalytical culture.

In this regard there appears to an implicit acknowledgement about the value of psychoanalytical approaches which involve transforming emotional experience by talking through (especially “Mentalisation Based Therapy” (MBT) or therapy that transforms beta elements [aversive sensations] into alpha elements [thoughts]), rather than otherwise “evacuating” them (Bion, 1962) or ‘acting them out’, such as by drinking, taking drugs or being violent, are helpful.

At the institutional or community level, the usefulness of concepts such as negative capability, containment and psychoanalytical empathy, and what Singer (2011) has described as “*living in an in-between space*”

*between groups*, which allows for an understanding of how un-identified psychic pain can cause disruption within groups, are, I believe, useful concepts and again seem to have a comfortable philosophical fit.

Ultimately, I believe we must continue to dream together to brings these possibilities into a reality so that we can continue to work towards becoming a nation that can of one voice in saying:

*“Aboriginals and children of the future  
relate to the sunshine and sky.  
I am all you, as you are me  
We are centred to be together forever.”*

*(In Transformation, Lionel Fogarty, 1982)*

# Alexis Wright



Alexis Wright is a member of the Waanyi nation, Gulf of Carpentaria. An author and essayist, she has written widely on Indigenous rights and organised two successful Indigenous Constitutional Conventions in Central Australia. Publications include *The Swan Book* (2014 Aust. Lit. Society Gold Medal) and *Carpentaria* (2007 Miles Franklin Award). *What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else's Story* received the 2016 Hilary McPhee Award.

## What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else's Story?

*(Excerpts from the full essay, published in Meanjin, Vol 75, Issue 4)*

Through many years of researching stories from all over the world and through my own communities, which I have always felt I had to do to understand how to be useful in my work—including being a writer—I have grown more curious about what would impact on my ability to tell stories that might be embraced anywhere in the world.

It has been a life's work of growing increasingly aware of how other people were telling stories on behalf of Aboriginal people in Australia, and how stories are used in campaigns to achieve certain goals. I think it would be fair to say that we are the country's troubling conscience and managed by its most powerful power brokers through a national narrative. I saw the fallout of this changing negative narrative in our communities, and in the lifetime of hard work our people do to fight against each political story-making trend.

I knew the style and intent of the national narrative would always be one of the greatest challenges I would have as a writer. We are all collectively the inheritors and generators of the country's psyche, and I wanted to know how I would be affected by this. The way that this country shapes

its people would constantly be on my mind while trying to tell stories of who we are, how we see the world, what our traditional ground means to us, and our desires and ambitions. The cloud is always present.

Aboriginal people have not been in charge of the stories other people tell about us. The question then was, how should I be an Aboriginal writer when the stories that were being told nationally about us would shape and impact on what I can do as a writer? I wanted to explore what happened in our imagination and our creative efforts when we write under the cloud of those who fear us, and who instil their fear in us. Why do I write at all? And why do I write what I write? These are questions I wanted to explore while trying to create stories more authentically; and on the other hand I wondered, am I just telling stories I have been conditioned to tell by the stories other people tell about us? How would I free my mind to write differently?

When it comes to how our stories are being told, supposedly on our behalf, or for our interest or supposed good, it has never been a level playing field. We do not get much of a chance to say what is right or wrong about the stories told on our behalf—which stories are told or how they are told. It just happens, and we try to deal with the fallout. I think we often feel it is pointless to take on the endless stream of other people's points of view about us that comes through the media, or to make the effort any more to turn around each new and mostly negative storytelling trend. The truth is, we have simply become other people's subject matter in the stories they tell, and pay the high price of their foolishly playing around with the Aboriginal sense of self, aimed at dismantling our knowledge and belief in our rights, to have us question our truths and our times.

Foolishness is another word for stupidity, and this is generally what the national narrative about Aboriginal people has been, because its bottom line has never changed. The plot line has always been for one outcome, to erode Aboriginal belief in sovereignty, self-governance and land rights, even when it has gotten to the point where most Aboriginal people have been silenced, or feel too overwhelmed to fight any more. Look at the years where it was impossible to mention the words treaty, sovereignty or even land rights without creating a major backlash in the media. The term 'native title' was non-existent in the national lexicon of Australia until the 1990s, when Eddie Mabo overturned the commonly accepted term of terra nullius—empty country on white settlement.

I have seen firsthand the shameful and injurious impact that many public stories have had on our people over a long period of time. We have been boxed in by the Australian psyche, its fear of the other. It is widely understood that we are being pressured by this country to assimilate, to abandon our culture in order to survive. This was confirmed in a recent study undertaken of hundreds of Aboriginal people in Darwin by the Larrakia Nation in the Top End, together with the University of Sydney and the University of Tasmania. A former head researcher of the Larrakia Nation, Penny Taylor, noted that Aboriginal people hear a lot about themselves from the non-Indigenous population: 'They run the newspapers, they're on air, there are the politicians that are speaking out, but we don't hear much from the Indigenous population themselves.'

Many of our people continue to be treated like third-class citizens in every aspect of their daily interactions with white people, from the bus drivers who keep driving because they see blackfellas at the bus stop, to harassment by police and being over jailed in an overpoliced Northern

Territory, or the brutal treatment of our children as we saw at Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in Darwin. We are not able to choose a future of cultural independence while the burden on Aboriginal lives grows greater due to the continued denial of hundreds of millions of dollars on a yearly basis, over decades, by the governance arrangements of the Northern Territory. Take your pick. All the statistics are linked to the national narrative, to story-making, to the way that stories are told, to keep the status quo in place.

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This means that we work to other people's direction whether we want to or not, to what the government has prescribed for us to do to keep us busy and distracted. We are in a cesspit, and far from concentrating on any meaning drawn from a fuller Aboriginal-defined sense of self, where we may have learnt more from the legacy of ancestral law stories that had been passed down through the ages from our own people for the purpose of keeping this country alive. We need these laws for understanding others, to realise ourselves fully and to give ourselves a greater capacity in understanding how to live on our own culturally attuned economic, social and sustainable terms. Instead, we have just about been overcome, smothered by and immersed in the control of outside narratives. It is almost a miracle wherever you find a really solid Aboriginal-defined vision forging its way through a maze that only seems to work to destroy possibility.

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In about 40 years of working for Aboriginal rights I have never really seen a fully Aboriginal-defined and -endorsed vision being given serious attention in the Australian media. What I mean by an Aboriginal-defined

vision is one I saw formed by the elders in Central Australia across some of the very best of their communities during the 1990s, where they called for Aboriginal self-government in the Northern Territory. There has never been a real discussion in Australia about how to create Aboriginal self-government in the Northern Territory.

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The story of the call by elders of Central Australia for Aboriginal self-government, for instance, was killed before it could breathe. It was like so many other good stories from Aboriginal people that have either become compromised, gone underground to survive or are only shared in private and safe environments. Yet why is it that there has never been the will in the country as a whole to listen to an Aboriginal-defined vision?

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Once upon a time I believed that we had the right to tell our stories and articulate our vision for developing the health of our people, culture, land and economic power. I believed that our survival depended on strengthening the cornerstones of our humanity through our ideas of self-governance in the modern age, even with a reliance on government to overcome the long-term damage caused by dysfunctional and unworkable government policies. In reaching this vision I always thought it was about having hope, where our stories were the most valuable tool of the heart and mind for maintaining hope in the struggles that were taking place.

The publication of story after story blaming the victim for failing to demonstrate any responsibility for their struggling and poverty-stricken

communities has had the intended effect. Even some of our people started to believe they could not handle self-determination, that they were violent and lazy, welfare dependent, did not care for their children and needed to be controlled. From the beginning of that highly orchestrated conservative theatre, the story war has run on. It is in the blood. Everyone has caught the disease in some measure. It is now accumulated history, just as what was learnt through the history wars, which were basically a pitiful argument pushed by conservative academics who felt disenfranchised and unheard, to question whether the killings of Aboriginal people during the early colonial settlement were acts of genocide, and whether such killings actually happened.

The roll-on effect of a politically hyper-charged race-based strategy for controlling Aboriginal stories is to keep Aboriginal self-censorship in place, and at no real cost to the government. It is a cheap strategy. But the cost of what has happened to us is enormous. Think of the cost of removing Aboriginal self-censorship, and the cost of allowing Aboriginal people to have real storytelling rights and justice platforms to work towards their vision of the future. The cost will continue to escalate, and the cost at this point in time, would possibly be more than the country could afford. It would mean the end of a history of wasteful government policies that have never worked, or were not meant to do any work other than to ensure votes at election time, and so keeping everything contained at a minimum cost, to ensure that real money will never be spent overcoming the injury of colonisation.

The only solution that Australian governments have really come up with is for the complete assimilation of Aboriginal people, even as the cost of this failure increases but it may not even be the goal, when it is always easy to accuse Aboriginal people of failure for political expediency, and of

being victims if they do not hit the road to assimilation. So there is a general assumption that Aboriginal people are victims and only tell victim stories. This results in further loss in our ability to create some of the best stories of this country, as we lean in to do what is expected of us. In the injurious nature of the realities for Aboriginal people, the full cost will be borne in the stories we can tell to shape our world. Our heritage will always be weighed by how prepared we are to compromise or lose sight of our cultural storytelling vision. The further we bend our stories to suit mainstream Australia, resulting in further loss of our cultural norms, the more we hasten our total acculturation into mainstream Australian society. Why? Because we will lose what is special about our inheritance if we cannot understand it or fight for it. One might ask, why can't we have it both ways? This is the tricky question about Aboriginal storytelling.

Stories from Aboriginal people about rights will be ineffective if these stories fall on deaf ears—even our own. Our stories may never be heard or taken seriously by those who pay lip service to Aboriginal rights. These stories mean nothing to them and will be unappreciated and not run in the mainstream media, or will be rendered unfathomable. Who would know how to read stories encompassing all time, when most are incapable of understanding the stories of the earth and the long cultural heritage of this country?

With no dedicated platform for developing stories about Aboriginal rights, including cultural and economic sovereignty and security, as time goes by there will be even fewer options for Aboriginal people to tell their stories without compromising or further eroding fundamental principles of culture and belief. Aboriginal storytellers may feel the need to make more deliberate choices in the way we tell stories, as many did from the

force of criticism during the early Intervention years. We might ask, how will my story be heard? What is the new benchmark of articulation here? We risk our cultural existence, authenticity and voice if we accept a pattern of compromise by trying to construct a story or belief that matches the mainstream national story for Aboriginal people.

A number of us might just allow other people to continue looking after our communities as the storytellers in the current pattern of Closing the Gap, because we have lost confidence in our ability to articulate our own stories. Some of us may have taken the decision to live in a more specialised form of interior separatism, where we only recognise and remain familiar with the value of continuing cultural laws, ideas and beliefs, where our lives seem to make sense, have security and surety, while the surface appears both patronised and controlled. We will continue, despite government policies, practising a rich Aboriginal culture in virtual isolation, and in relative peace, even though the struggle to maintain culture without resources, or being dependent on outside resources, will always be there, and one of the biggest issues of our survival. But vision is not beyond us, in spite of the national narrative that belittles us.

The repetitive Closing the Gap narrative and platform has become even more firmly established in the mind of Australians, and works to deepen Aboriginal self-consciousness and self-censorship. Australians have been trained to think in this new way, and now expect Aboriginal people to reset their behaviour to approximate the official story. How we choose our own reference points, and how we develop these practices, will be one of the most important stories of our times.