

Sniffing Petrol, Reclaiming Story and Valuing Kin: An Interview with Craig San Roque

Jeff Power

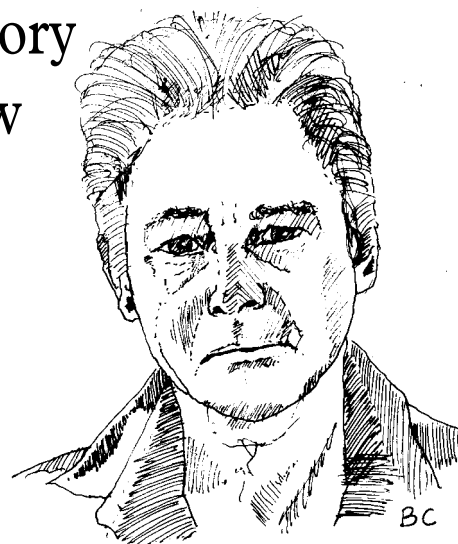
Community psychologist and Jungian analyst Craig San Roque was instrumental in producing a dramatic re-enactment of the ancient Greek myth of Dionysus (most familiar to us as it is presented in Euripides' *The Bacchae*), as a therapeutic paradigm and an intercultural resource for indigenous communities in their fight with alcohol abuse. The *Sugarman*, a documentary of this event, was produced by David Roberts and Bob Randall. After his twenty-year sojourn in the UK, first training, and then practising child and family therapy, Craig returned to Australia in 1986, and moved to Alice Springs in 1992, to focus on Indigenous matters and intercultural dynamics. Family therapist and fellow Jungian Jeff Power was interested in finding out what had led Craig to take the direction he did.

Jeff: Let me begin with the *Sugarman* project. How did the whole thing start?

Craig: My first recollection that's relevant to this whole issue was the police sergeant in the Central NSW town where I lived during the 1950s beating up Charlie Goolagong. Charlie had been looking after me over many years, he had practically been a member of our household. The sergeant smashed the bottle he was carrying, which was kerosene, not grog. But on the basis of that, Charlie was told to 'Get out of town by sunset'. I remember this very vividly, through a child's eyes. Now this man probably did drink, but this particular incident was an abuse of power, and the police response was to throw Charlie out of town. This affected me profoundly as a child, because this man had had a deeply emotional influence on me. That was the last time I saw him. We are talking about Evonne Goolagong's uncle or great uncle, incidentally.

For me his absence created a gap. It planted the idea in my head, 'Is there any way to deal with this problem other than throwing out or obliterating the person who is said to be making the problem? And in any case, who is making the problem?'

So when I was in central Australia in the 1990s, on one of the several visits I made, it was obvious that there were many Charlies, many men and woman who were obsessed with alcohol. They could not get it out of their system and the police system was unable to handle it.



A Walpiri Indigenous man, Andrew Spencer, tipped me off to the possibility that you could approach a substance abuse problem in terms of the mind rather than by rejection of the body. I'm just giving you some history. When I came back to central Australia, that was 30 years after the incident of Charlie Goolagong. During that time I'd been to London, France, Spain, to India, to Egypt, etc. These were the countries in which alcohol, and wine in particular, but also beer, were part of the social structure. Of course, they had laws against alcohol abuse. But what I had observed was that in Aboriginal culture there were no (visible) continuous, historically traceable signs of Aboriginal people having made alcohol or managed intoxication, except for a few areas around the north coast of Australia where there had been contact with the Macassans. The use of intoxicating substances, or even serious drugs, has not been a part of Australian Indigenous culture. There hasn't been the same sort of tradition that's so much a part of many other cultures around the use of marijuana, opium, alcohol.

Jeff: So when you travelled, that question was germinating. You may not have put the pieces together, but there was a question about how other cultures deal with this.



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Editors' note: See also Craig San Roque's article 'Coming to Terms with the Country' in the volume compiled by Heather Formaini, *Landmarks: Papers by Jungian Analysts from Australia and New Zealand*, published by the ANZSJA in 2001. Warren Colman reviews *Landmarks* in *Australasian Journal of Psychotherapy*, 22, 1 (2003). (Eds.)

Craig: What was there was this memory that Charlie had been treated wrong. When I was in my early twenties, I wrote some plays. I was a bit of a dramatist — some of them were produced. And I wrote one called *Brandy*, which was about a young Aboriginal of mixed racial heritage, who got into trouble with both black and white law. He couldn't resolve the conflict of the demands of the two laws. This was in the early 1960s. So even then, the cultural preoccupation was seeping into me, against a background of 'You're not supposed to talk about it'. It was coming through, but I wasn't sure how to express it. I went to England in 1967. That was when Timothy Leary, etc. were advocating LSD as a spiritually intoxicating facilitator for knowledge. And I was deeply involved with some of the people who were associated with Leary, and others who were debating this matter from 1969–71. Because of the influence of my spiritual director and master, it was quite explicit to me that the use of the drugs as a method of enhancing enlightenment and relationship was complete bullshit. If you got caught in that, you had had it. Illusion within illusion! So this is when Meher Baba got a whole lot of guys together and said, in effect, 'This is not the way to go! If you want to do something with spiritual life within your own culture, then you've got to know that it is fantasy that LSD and marijuana are going to pave the golden path to spiritual satisfaction! Don't touch them!'

This was the first time that I realised that there were authentic spiritual traditions that had handled the use of intoxicants before, and that there was a resource that we naïve Australians could draw upon if we wanted to outrun the delusional seductions of the dope gurus and the drug barons.

In 1991, I was involved in a series of conversations with Indigenous people working with the Healthy Aboriginal Life team who were dealing with petrol sniffing and alcohol in Central Australia. The issue that Andrew Spencer Japaljarri brought up was still significant. He put it to me that there is no 'dreaming story' (Tjukurrpa) about the use of alcohol. There is no established framework of understanding that's passed on from generation to generation that when you get drunk, this is what you do. Even in our society, there is still some concept that says you can start 'hitting the piss' when you are fourteen or fifteen, but this is what happens, you do this and then the consequences are this, and this. We know there are people who go too far, but there is still something that's embedded in the European culture that says 'This is what alcohol does. This is where it comes from, this is what it's for, this is when you use it.' But within the Aboriginal society, it's only within two or three generations really that the invasion by alcohol has exponentially occurred. It entered the system like an epidemic and the Indigenous system hasn't evolved a psychological or biological 'immune system'. I think the way Andrew Spencer was putting it is that there's no dreaming; which means there's no cultural stories as cultural precedent, no way of framing cultural laws and boundaries about drunkenness, no way of dealing with cultural offences when under the influence of alcohol. So he's saying 'Where does intoxication come from? What is its origin story? From whence do

we get that cultural story which would underpin Aboriginal action to contain intoxication and the violence and neglect which travels with the grog?' He is actually pointing to a philosophical dilemma.

Jeff: That dilemma comes to you as a Jungian analyst. You're trained more in individual approaches to therapy.

Craig: Are you saying how come someone trained mostly to deal with individuals, in one to one relationships, gets involved with a massive cultural issue? 'Cause I'm stupid [laughs].

Jeff: Perhaps, but there is a leap there. How did you make the transition from being an individual analyst to working at a cultural level? What was it like?

Craig: If I took the individual line, we could probably do psychoanalysis and go back to the incident with Charlie in the small country town and say, this was my first witnessing of Australian terrorism. It made an impact. Small, an incident, something that happens in a country town many times a day. But it's the first thing you see as a child, and it makes an impression and made me ask questions. After a while you add all these events up. Some of us, as therapists, start to think systemically and culturally. There were hundreds of Charlies and thousands of witnesses like myself. What have we done with that cumulative knowledge? Is it still repressed and unconscious?

As a psychoanalyst, you begin to wonder what the cultural elements of these problems are, these psychic pains you are being confronted with in your own and others' lives. You follow the logic through to the recognition that so much original psychoanalytic work came out of the desperation that individuals were feeling about the situation in Europe in the early part of the century, WWII, the effect on the Jewish people, the Poles, the Gypsies, Nazism, Fascism. In a sense, psychoanalysis was a response to that cultural problem. Those analysts made a choice by saying that some of us need to attend to the individual responsibility — 'How much is this war being created out of my psyche?' — and some of us have to attend to it from the political side. But if you attend carefully to what generated so much of the analytical investigation into hate, envy, destruction, the impact upon children, refugee work, you see that increased theoretical understanding came out of the social conflict and conditions of the time, when people decided that they had to make an individual response.

Jeff: The stereotype is that psychoanalysts ignore the cultural factors. You're saying the opposite, that they found a way to deal with the cultural factors within one individual at a time?

Craig: We have to be specific about who we mean, let's call it the 'psychotherapeutic community', as that includes a lot more than the Jung and Freud circle. The psychotherapeutic community on the one hand has been hijacked by the individualists who see it as a good way of having power and making an income — but the hijackers will be there always, no matter what you're dealing with. On the other hand, some people recognise that the psychic pain held by an individual is generated by family,

systemic, social and cultural conditions, and if you treat the individual you also have to manage your own cultural idiocy. If we are to be ethical, we have to be prepared to be engaged with the individual, social, systemic and cultural. It's not surprising that if I am faced with an issue of psychic pain in the cultural context in central Australia, my psychotherapeutic mind starts to work on it. Whether I do it right or not is another matter.

Jeff: Can you say a bit more about how Sugarman works, how that has evolved to be what it is today?

Craig: Well, Andrew Spencer put a problem to me and I don't say it has been solved. He wasn't specifically saying 'There was no dreaming you know, therefore we cannot treat alcohol abuse'. His point was that there's no available culturally supported idea. His next question to me at that stage was 'Has your own culture embedded in it culturally supported ways of dealing with alcohol?' That is to say, do you understand it, or do you blindly impose your drugs upon us or upon yourselves in the same way? I mean, are you all mindless, or do you have a mind about it?

So my response to him was, Yes, in fact we Europeans do have a history. We did make alcohol. We do know how to do it. There is a science about it, there is a popular culture about it. We've got a mythology about it. There are stories about it. We understand intoxication. It comes to us in various forms. We have methods of dealing with it. The Jewish people had a method, for instance, the ancient Greeks had a method, the Hindus had a method, the Islamic world has developed a position that fits into their spiritual system. Actually we've thought about this, Japaljarri. It's not all just empty minded alcoholism. We do, and so we ask 'How do you bring from one culture to another the psychologically useful constructs that go with the substance that you bring?' You can say 'What about chips and fried chicken? What laws do you bring to a hunter gatherer society in the use of that kind of food?' The consequence of not transmitting that cultural story is that now you have heart disease, diabetes, alcoholism and obesity, which go with the package of fast foods and sugar.

The alcohol manufacturers and suppliers to Indigenous drinkers never, as far as I know, ever supported or introduced any system of culturally attuned education in the use of their products. Go through the list and ask 'Have they brought a story or a method of using the food or drink?'

Jeff: So it's purely commercial. They're selling a product, not informing the Indigenous community of consequences at all, not even the warning they give on cigarette packets?

Craig: Of course not. So some Indigenous mob, in order to justify anarchic use, are saying 'Well, you know, here's the stuff. You haven't given the manual with it. We can do what we like and you cannot police it anyway.'

But basically, my view is that many Indigenous people have figured out that we are the anarchists when it comes to the use of drugs, alcohol and fast foods. 'Anything goes, so yes, there is no Tjukurrpa — no

dreaming'. I might say, 'Well then, look at the old Greek story. Look at Jesus in the Last Supper, or look at the way the Jewish people managed the ceremonial handling of alcohol.' Basically the Indigenous people can say 'Well, that's fine for them, but what you white fellers really propagate in Australia is an uncontrolled use of it, and why should we bother, we see you twist your own laws. Why shouldn't we?'

Jeff: You said more specifically how Sugarman emerged as a response. You mentioned a Dionysian story a few times, which obviously an Indigenous person wouldn't know of and many whites haven't heard of either. Can you say more about how you wove that story in?

Craig: Well, I'll just say a bit about it, or this could go on all night, ok? Andrew Spencer showed us a painting of the Central Australian ceremony that's associated with the sugar that's extracted from a particular flying ant, Parma. The sources of sugar in a desert society are few and they're sought after because they're an energy source, and they're a delicacy. He showed the painting and said 'Here is the painting of the sugar ant ceremony.' In the way Walpiri-Pintubi people think, the ceremony increases the availability of the sugar that comes from these little ants. A ceremony holds and demonstrates for each generation how you find, make and spiritually increase 'sugar' and what's it for biologically and symbolically. It's also linked to other ceremonial activities and patterns of symbolism.

So Japaljarri shows this and says 'Do you mob have anything as complex as this? I mean are you people completely ignorant, or do you have things as delicate as our ceremony?'

My response was 'Yes we do, we're not ignorant, you know. We do have many traditional stories. They come out of Egypt, Greece, the Black Sea, Turkish areas, the Middle East, and so on, where wine probably has its origin.' We have a long history of stories, myths, which are associated with alcohol. I could joke 'You guys think you've got the best stories in the world, well, we have some good ones too!'

So then Andrew sort of looks at me and suggests, 'Prove that you know your own story'. So that's what I did, we visited those countries — absorbed as much as I could through research, so that Andrew and anybody else could ask me any old time, 'What is the story of such and such?' and I could tell it. We have a culture that deals with the origins of very specific aspects of the law, the management and the control of delusion, madness, incest, violence, intoxicated states, female rage, dismemberment, hopelessness, depression, homosexuality, castration, all types of erotica, the transmission of the knowledge of the use of alcohol, and so on. Many of these primal elements are wrapped into the network of the Dionysian legends.

I've told numerous tribal people these great tales in many different settings. Whether that makes any difference in the use of alcohol or not is another matter — no one's given me that job. My job was to collect the stories, analyse them for therapeutic potential and demonstrate that potential. I was never given the job of devising,

testing or managing an Indigenous campaign. This is something the Sugarman critics have never quite grasped. Ours was the grassroots research and development job, that's all.

But the fact is they're good stories, and in the process of telling those stories, an exchange begins. So many a time I've said in quiet conversations, 'Well, ok this is the story of Dionysus going down the hole into the spirit places to find his mother'. And then, an Aboriginal bushman will say 'Well, that's good, but you should hear this spirit story that we've got!' [laughs]. And I'll say 'That's nothing! You should listen to this one!' and so then you've got communication across a cultural range. You could say 'Well yes, you've got Tjukurrpa, and well, *we've* got Tjukurrpa! Listen to this.' In the right setting, with the right sense of humour, you can do this. We learn from each other. This is what Japaljarri Spencer is about. Mutual exchange and pooling cultural resources for a healing purpose.

Jeff: The questions around the training of therapists in Australia today are?

Craig: Well, in Australia you can do therapy by numbers. You can learn a system developed elsewhere, you can do, for instance, a CBT style process and you might have discharged your professional responsibility, and everybody's happy. (I'm just using CBT as an example, right?) The point is, if it's like a franchise, you go and you learn it, you think you've managed to understand human nature, and you can pass it on to another human being. You expect a client to meet you in the interactive space around a shared understanding of your framework and it may or it may not work.

This methodology is pragmatic but limited and perhaps in the end anti-human. I'm one of those who believe that, ethically, you have to be able to engage personally and directly with some individuals some of the time, in order to be of any therapeutic use. And I particularly believe this is true in inter-cultural work and in depth psychology.

I believe that, in this country there is a great deal of work to be done between one person and another, and as well within the family systems — whether the family system is a biological family, or whether it's a kinship system or cultural family. There's a great deal of valuable work to be done with the collective cognitive systems that underlie our current Australian cultural lives. Quite frankly, 'therapy by numbers' developed in the United States of America does not help very much when you want to engage with the substance of a human being in this culture (unless, of course, one has become a North American globalised clone).

What I'm trying to advocate is not repeating the mistake that was made time and time again in country towns in the 1950s, where the effort to deal with a difficult problem was by rejecting the human being associated with the problem and by setting up fences — 'Don't come back to town'. That's a preemptive strike on a problem, with no thought to the follow up. It's a heroic cowboy-style solution.

Now Charlie Goolagong was gone at sunset, but he's still there. The consequence is still there; the family is still there. Evonne is still there, the problems are still there. The stolen generation, the alcohol's still there. It wasn't *dealt* with. So my issue really as a therapist is, if we have the courage and the intelligence, we ought to be analysing how we deal with this complex matter of our actual lives in Australia; including the Indigenous and non-Indigenous conflict, the refugees pressure, the 'whatever' else. And not simply throw the troublemakers out of town by sunset.

This metaphor is about short-term prescriptive therapeutic methods that get patients back on the other side of the fence. I believe that much of our current psychological methodology is an extension of corrective services and the imperialism of accountancy. The training projects in which I am involved through the Jungian professional body and the University of Western Sydney Analytical Psychology project are about therapy as resistance.

Jeff: So Craig, you've been in Alice Springs for ten years working with Indigenous communities. As a white therapist trained in England, what have you learned from another culture in that time?

Craig: Well, there's a long list. More than I can say here but we'll have a go at 'kinship' together, all right? [laughs].

One of the first things I learnt is that it's very unproductive to approach a person who is presented for therapeutic intervention, *as an individual*. Time and time again, people who work within the Indigenous framework realise the extent and the complexity of family obligations and family systems. The consequences of a breakdown in the kinship system will often be seen in a therapeutic set-up. Whether it's through suicide or sexual abuse, you can trace the presenting problem to kinship confusions or breakdowns, or failures of obligation within the family cultural system. Getting some sense of that individual who's presented, say as a young suicide attempt, means that you have to go into the family system. I would say that work with systemic family therapy prepares one for Indigenous work, but Indigenous people can also revolutionise Australian family systems therapy.

And it appalls me quite frankly that the nature of Indigenous kinship systems has been obvious to European medical-allied health practitioners for over 100 years. You can go to Strehlow's, Elkin's and Olive Pink's accounts of family-culture, and yet therapeutic methodology that's supported by the government has still, in my opinion, failed to recognise structurally that psychological, therapeutic interventions have to be conducted at a high level of awareness of family systems.

I don't want to be unfairly critical. All of us struggle to deal with individual situations, but our western methodology has not been brought up to scratch with the reality of living in disordered community and rearranged family systems in Indigenous Australia. Somebody must be held responsible for the Commonwealth Health Department's failure to encourage the development of family systems style work with Indigenous people. The literature has been there. Indigenous thinkers such as Japaljarri Spencer and Alex Minutjukur (deceased) have

advocated for it since 1986. We became fixated on the individual or nuclear family model. Why?

I know there are forthright people who are working on this, such as Pearl Wymarra in Western Sydney and Judy Atkinson and the transgenerational trauma work that her circle has been developing in the Queensland area (see *Trauma Trails* by J. Atkinson, published by Spinifex Press in 2002). It's encouraging to see someone who's struggling so gamely to apply that therapeutic method of intergenerational family systems work to the stolen generation, to family breakup, and a whole range of things. To answer your question, Indigenous kinship system instructs us in therapeutic method.

The other area which has been very formative in my circle's thinking about therapy is what you might call the 'country-mind connection'. I can't speak for everybody, and I'm talking about Central Australia, and the way the Indigenous people who are closely connected to that country frame their whole mind and the substance of their mind as a relationship to each other and to the country and to the dreaming or Tjukurrpa or Alchere. When there are breakdowns in the relation between family and person, that's one thing, but when there are breakdowns in the relationship between person and country, then what seems to happen is that those individuals fall out of country and 'country mind'. And they sometimes end up in a very disordered state.

Many of us ex-Europeans have also fallen out of our 'country minds'. Many of us have become obsessed with individual ownership of property. I believe the property obsession is indicative of a 'disorder of the self'. This matter would bear some analysis. This might take us into Self-psychology (Hobson, Meares, Gordon, Kohut and company), where there's been sensitivity to disorders of the self as a consequence of falling out of the mind of other people. In the Indigenous area, I'd say the 'disorders of the self' occur as a result of falling out of the 'mind of the country'. Now, this could lead us into Animism and, if you like, the unique philosophy of how the mind of the country is felt and experienced. The country may well have a mind of its own. Somehow or other, the Indigenous people mediate in Australia the relationship between specific place, its psychological numinosity or terror, and the human beings. I would say that 50 percent of the disruptions that I've had to be involved in are as a result of people (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who have lost their transactions with country.

But the healthiest amongst the Indigenous people are productive, creative, consistent people who have maintained the integrity of their relationship with their country, even though they have to face appalling obstacles or resettlement and reorganised ownership and very irritating interferences, like not having enough vehicles, not having enough men to go back to country if they want to. I don't want to idealise Aboriginal country business. That is a pathology of romance in itself which some folk love to exploit. But I do think from a psychological point of view that the relationship between the country and the human being is something which Indigenous people in Australia have much to instruct us visitors about.

Jeff: I know there's no simple way of saying this, but therapeutically the problems that whites experience — I don't know what the question is ...

Craig: Are you wondering if the country could be helpful as a healing methodology for the European or Asian inhabitants in Australia? Potentially I would say yes. Theoretically, I would go to Winnicott first of all and build upon his notion of the 'potential space'. He describes the building up of an interactive space between a child and another person. For some people, it's possible to establish a potential interactive space between one's self and the country. You know, without getting sentimental about it, there is country. And there is one's self. Or a group of one's selves. There is the country, which can have a nurturing, supportive, instructive and also disciplinary role upon ourselves as individuals.

But then you have to go into the question whether the 'child' has the capacity to enter into that interactive space, or whether the relationship between oneself (as the child) and the country (as mother) is schizoid or dysfunctional, or where the users of the potential space are continually overactive or defensive or in a state of exploitation, that is, the greedy guzzling of the mother's psyche/body which Winnicott and Klein talk about — where mutuality's impossible — it's only an exploitation, or a relationship in retreat. We have to put our relationship with the country on the couch.

I want to say a little here about method as something which one learns from Indigenous life. Mostly my work from 1992–2002 was involved with petrol sniffing, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence. The point that rapidly came clear to me was that, if I was to be working in an Indigenous community, all my work would be conducted in an atmosphere of ever-present danger, and so one has to modify one's method. Most Indigenous health workers and therapeutic practitioners that I know in Central Australia live in a situation of ever-present danger.

This can take the form of burnout, by having to continuously give out energy, goods and time; or the danger of violent attack from a member of one's own family in an intoxicated state. One has to live with the loss of brain through perpetual abuse of alcohol, the danger of relationship where the integrity of the human being is more or less gone. Hate, envy, jealousy or love become expressed as dangerous acts with a star picket, an axe, a machete, or a motorcar. You never know from whence cometh that attack. As an Indigenous person (but also as a person who works there), you have to develop a kind of an alertness, an awareness system that every word and action that you take could lead to dangerous consequences, either for yourself or for another person. This drastically modifies how you place yourself, what you say, your mode of operation, and your latent aggressiveness.

I have had to learn to be very quiet, to be supportive, to keep to the background, to be a chameleon, to make links, to be subversive, to be diplomatic, to be wrong and to take no big notes to myself. This has been part of my success in some intercultural operations and it has also been a failure for my professional profile. My professional ambition and aggression has had to be effaced.

Many Australians are extremely aggressive towards people they don't understand. They take up defensive attitudes and the Indigenous people read that tactic as fast as anything, because they are on the lookout for attack from whites or blacks. It doesn't take very long for you to learn how quickly your own motives and your own attitudes are read by Indigenous people.

Jeff: And I can see a circular thing happening there. You come in with some defensiveness and you get violence or whatever back, which just reinforces those prejudices.

Craig: It does, yep. In a hospital, say, in Casualty, with accident and emergency there's ever-present danger there, too. There's adequate staff and good, efficient, fantastic people who work in Alice Springs in the Casualty department, and the police are available. There's a system of chaos management, which also helps contain the danger, but in bush areas and town camps, the danger is always in your mind and body and you have to behave differently. It is a war zone. A colleague of mine from South Africa described the same sort of atmosphere in Africa; this alert tension one has constantly around one when involved in these situations. [Laughs] It's not a picnic! A form of covert war is going on in Australia and as soon as you get involved in it, it becomes very miserable very fast. You have to reconsider your therapeutic method.

I think we therapeutic practitioners, both black and white, have a huge amount of theoretical re-exploration to do. Some very good practitioners come into work with Indigenous people with good theories — narrative, trans-generational family therapy, biological drug therapy — and they're seized by the messianic, redeeming qualities of their own method, and why not! They're enthusiastic about it, but their work just laps up against the great rocks of Indigenous being [laugh] and breaks away. And I've done the same thing; water off a duck's back! The thing is not to repeat the old pattern where you set out to carry your new found theory, your approval by a government department — which doesn't talk to another department — and you go out bravely and wisely to deliver it to the poor benighted maiden in distress — and then and then ... We might laugh at the quixotic delusion in that story, but we still do it. It's endemic in our European colonial and empirical systems — the 'mission'. The exploitation of others for personal gain. There's a lot to be done about reexamining our own healing theories and therapeutic actions. You have to put that and the Indigenous history and method fairly and squarely down on the ground together, and work out of that interaction.

Jeff: It's a hard question, but do you see any threads coming together? Any signposts from where you have been for ten years?

Craig: I'm not sure. What I know is that the Curtin University mob, the Indigenous Psychology unit there, a few individuals here and there, Julie Smith (UWS) Mary Edwards (UTS) all try to bring threads together — the Social and Emotional Well Being counselling groups, Tangentyerre Council, CAAAPU, the Rhelakha-Intjartnama projects in Central Australia

— others try to think this through. It is hard, there is no milieu for thought. The Jungian psychotherapy group that I'm part of (though we are reviled for old-fashioned theories about the collective unconscious), we *are* making contributions. Five or six of us are dedicated to this kind of interaction. And within Alice Springs there's several independent Indigenous family groups working at this vigorously in their own way, Margaret Mary Turner, the Abbott family, and Alexis Wright, whose novels are a psychological exploration of the Australian unconscious. They're guiding — I see their guidance — people who want to deal with the unconscious process in our life.

I just think we ought to be able to set up a more systematic exploration together of the Kinship system, of the relationship to country and dealing with danger. That would include the danger from American culture. But don't forget that — there is a danger to white Australia from the Indigenous mind. It's pretty powerful and can be incredibly destructive. I think we have to look much more carefully into the relativity of our theories of treatment. We have to give a lot of attention to differing modes of our perception systems, from extra sensory perception to psychic perception to psychotic perception. We have to notice the way Indigenous people move in and out of a sort of a psychic/animistic perceptual system. There is a fluidity in that movement in and out of the psychic worlds, in and out of different ontologies. There are no inherently fixed systems. The signposts are about using therapeutic methods to deal with impossible situations, where the practitioner develops the capability not to depend on obedience to fixed systems. Where you can work with multiple family demands, with no fixed address, not defer to the big names, can work with 'no blankets' and above all read the history of Australia as it is being re enacted in the present.

To conclude, there's a really interesting book on New Guinea by a group of linguists and anthropologists, called *Fluid Ontologies*. It is about the way certain PNG groups have evolved notions of life and being based on fluidity, on what water does. In Australia we also have arid land ontologies. That's the key to it, I think, to study the ecosystems that produce our ways of thinking. We have to have our concepts of the nature and being of psychological illness and therapeutic 'treatment' re-dealt with, recognising that what we have in this country are multiple fluid *and* fixed ontologies. Things move and change, there is hardly any fixed position any more. (Well, there is, but you're going to have a breakdown if you insist on a fixed position!)

I would say that if one could draw upon linguists and anthropologists as well as psychologists and medical practitioners and Indigenous thinkers on these matters, we might be able to evolve therapeutic methods that work for us now, based on 'fluid ontologies', not fixed ontologies.

Reference

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