

## **DRAFT SPEECH – SYDNEY PEN, 4 JULY 2007**

### **A QUESTION OF FEAR**

**Alexis Wright ©**

The essay I have written for Sydney PEN on the subject of fear covers a lot of ground, but tonight I would like to talk to you as a writer of stories and will start with some ideas about poetry, then concentrate on just four areas of the essay. Firstly, I would like to talk about the fears of my own early childhood; Second, some thoughts I have about Indigenous religious thought and its tolerance of other religions; Thirdly, some of the fearless dreams I have worked on in Central Australia; And, fourthly, to talk about whose fear is heard, and how some writers are writing about and investigating humanity's basic fears in the world today.

1. A QUESTION OF FEAR: If you tell me about your fears, I will listen, and then I will tell you about mine, but I fear we will only discover what was already commonly known about fear - it's frightening, and rather than confront fear, or imagining how we might reconcile a place, a nation, or a world without fear, we let our fears slip to the back of the mind. We feel that our fear is personal, that no one else would understand, but fearfulness is universal, and universally, each of us has the potential to use our fears destructively against others or ourselves. Fear is the back seat driver in busy lives that leaves little space for deep thoughts about how to understand oneself, let alone other people. If we try, our fears cry out - what about us? – what about all our clutter of self-preservation? – you won't

survive without it. So it is too hard. We feel we must preserve the status quo. It is too frightening to think otherwise. But, what of the future if we take comfort in allowing people more powerful, and more fearful than ourselves to do the thinking for us?

I wonder if we as a nation, take as many opportunities as we should to learn more about other people. This is what one of the world's leading philosophers Kwame Anthony Appiah has suggested we do in his moral manifesto for a planet we share with more than six billion strangers, by understanding the ethics vital to living in the world, and in which he states: 'I am urging that we should learn about people in other places, take an interest in their civilizations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement, but because it will help us get used to one another.'<sup>1</sup>

I doubt that even to this day, many people outside the Aboriginal world in Australia have a reasonable understanding of the first literature composed on this land, which is still contained within the enormous archive of epical storytelling poetry held by each Indigenous nation across the country. These are the ancient stories of the ancestral creation beings that are still learnt and stored as mind maps defining the philosophical understanding of Aboriginal law, and which, taken together, embrace the entire continent. With this Indigenous memory men and women can name, and tell the individual story of thousands of sites in their

country, and in doing this they are continuing a long tradition of watching over and maintaining the ecologically sustainable life of this country.

I want to talk a little bit about poetry because it is the art of defining essential things worth remembering about ourselves. This idea can be found anywhere in the world where people describe the soul of who they are in their stories. Irish poet Seamus Heaney described Joycean ideas in *Finnegan's Wake*, as 'eddying with the vowels of all rivers,' remembering everything at the level of the unconscious, because there is much amnesia in people that they do not learn from their own history.<sup>2</sup>

We desperately need to focus on the lessons of fearfulness by listening to the poet's deep sense of consciousness, so that we do not continue making the same mistakes. The Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish is one such poet who is speaking to the universality of our feelings of spiritual crisis. Searching lost realms of Arab culture, he seeks to reconnect with 'the original spirit of mythmaking,' and through this understanding, he expresses all times in the 'intimate depths experienced by every exiled human psyche on earth.' He strikes deep into the core of remembering the meaning of belonging and the loss of its essence in the soul of who we are, so deeply afflicting all people through the

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<sup>1</sup> Appiah K A 2006. *Cosmopolitanism – Ethics in a World of Strangers*. Penguin – Allen Lane, London.

<sup>2</sup> Deane S 1999. Introduction to *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce. Penguin Books. Page xviii. Also, see page 157, *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis, 1994, essay

experience of separation from the traditional roots that provide the spirit of their humanity. Mahmoud Darwish writes:

*This is my absence,  
A master who imposes his laws  
And mocks my visions ...  
All the prophets are my kin.  
But heaven is still far from its earth  
And I am still far from my words.<sup>3</sup>*

I think that Australia is exposed throughout the world as being engulfed in a spiritual free void, from never adopting, or coming to terms with the original values for understanding this land voiced time and again by Indigenous people. Surely, many countries must find it difficult to develop a close understanding or respect for a country that appears to be a child without a set of beliefs that are grounded in strong, long-term cultural principles. Perhaps the way for Australia to create credible relationships worldwide, will be through the development of a literature that understands not only how Aboriginal people think, but the cultural matrices of the foundation myths that Australians of immigrant backgrounds still cling to. In this way also we might begin to build a road to accepting Indigenous

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Meeting the Myth: Station Island by Barbara Hardy where Heaney describes Joyce's work.

<sup>3</sup> Darwish M 2000. *On a Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea*. From *Eleven Planets* (translated by Mona Asali van Engen), in *The Adam of Two Edens*. Jusoor and Syracuse University Press, New York. Pages 77 and 81. Also, see introduction page 33.

spiritual sovereignty of land, rather than continuing the wasteful absurdity of simply mouthing about practical measures for reconciliation.

I would like to refer to one recent example of how the original spiritual values of this land have continued to clash with Australian values. The Yanyuwa, Gudanji and Garrawa people in the Gulf of Carpentaria have long voiced their fear about the mining developer Xstrata's proposal to divert the McArthur River, which is home to a giant "rainbow serpent," because it will bring storms, cyclones and other disasters. The Yanyuwa people have fought relentlessly for three decades for the return of their island country. A senior traditional owner once said in 2003 on the ABC television's Stateline program: "It is no good. I will be sick if they cut the place, because my spirit is there. All my songs are across the river. I don't want to see that thing happen in the McArthur River."<sup>4</sup> What value has this country placed in this belief? Do we understand how the ancient knowledge of Aboriginal law governs through the stories lived and made by Aboriginal people today? In May 2007, the NT Government enacted legislation in the dead of night that will allow mining development to go ahead.

When I was a child I instinctively knew how thinly spaced I stood from potential harm. For instance, a fear that lasted throughout my life began when I was about five or six after my father died, through the growing understanding of what it

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<sup>4</sup> The Mineral Policy Institute web site concerning - Xstrata proposal for mining in the tropical McArthur river violates indigenous rights and threatens proposed Marine

meant to have him disappear forever from my life. I feared for the future without having him around, and I felt that a lot of fear did live in our house through my Mother's personal crisis that was as much to do with the affect on my family of a colonising history, as it had to do with her hard efforts as a widow to raise my sister and myself in a world that she felt was without sympathy, and unjust.

I was already fearful that our home would be struck by lightning when I heard thunder so close that it shook the house, after a flash of lightning had struck a child nearby. I feared drowning, before reaching a seemingly far distant middle pylon under the bridge with the rest of the kids, while teaching myself to swim in the only place possible to learn to swim at the time, the flooding Cloncurry River.

As a child, I feared most adults in the small town where we lived because of the colour of my skin. I remember fearing the ghosts and spirits of the night, as much as I learnt religious fear at my Catholic primary school. Obviously, I survived this childhood of mixed fears. I claimed the status of bravery at an early age with the other fearless children swimming in flooding rivers after a good storm. I also had a kind and doting grandmother who nurtured her granddaughter's wildness and recklessness, while at the same time reining me to her nurturing role with the stories Aboriginal children are told. It was these two childhood influences, from my grandmother and from other children, that probably helped keep in place the hairline fracture so easily traversed, between

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Protected Area. <http://www.mpi.org.au/campaigns/indigenous/McArthurRiver> - viewed 6

being and not being fearful of a hard world my Mother was also teaching me to understand. It is interesting to reflect on how fear was generated and maintained for various purposes in childhood and its continuing legacy into adulthood. It helps us to grapple with the complexity of understanding how fear is being developed worldwide, not only by terrible acts of terrorism, but by deliberate attempts by government to frighten the public in supporting a 'war or terror,' where our respect for the dignity of human rights can be trashed, as we have seen through our Government's cowardly endorsement of outsourcing torture. Experts on national security studies now tell us that if the aim of terrorism is to terrify, than terrorists can be defeated simply by not becoming terrified.<sup>5</sup>

Now you might ask why do we keep on making the same mistakes with one another, and what has any of this Indigenous issue got to do with a lecture on fear? On one hand the mistakes are about the method of spell casting imbued in the overall consciousness of Australia. In my wildest imagination, I suspect that the ancient knowledge of fear still locked away deep in the consciousness of many unsuspecting non-Indigenous Australians is continuously whispering to them, but the cauldron's magical power is malfunctioning, and can cast no spell that totally works for this land. The power of wizards and witches transported from European cultures is being diluted and misused here. The cauldron

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June, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Allard T. *The Vicious Circle: Focus Terrorism*. (Exaggerating the threat posed by terrorism leads to a more fearful society – and may embolden extremists to carry out deadly attacks). Quoting Ohio State University's chair of national security studies, John Mueller. *The Age*, Monday, 11 June, 2007.

conscience improvises with the wrong ingredients, refuses to grant the vision of white supremacy as far as the eye can see. Nevertheless, Aboriginal people live in the mire of the spell caster's fear, which in turn creates our own fear of not being able to fulfil our responsibility to the spirits of the land inside ourselves.

I know that our senior men and women of high degree in religious laws understand much better than I do the seriousness of the clash of religious beliefs, which exists between Indigenous thought and laws based on the philosophy of religions introduced in this country since colonisation. A way of explaining how introduced religious thought has been practiced on the Indigenous world, is through understanding how thought operates through the prism of an egotistic projectile imagination which has a linear sensibility towards invasion, suppression, and always changing laws. This idea of imagining, through projecting outwards and colonising by sinking down roots over the deeply rooted native realm, as a rhizome would spread and grows another, was originally described and analysed by the French-Caribbean writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant in *Poetics of Relation*. For Glissant, by contrast, Indigenous religious thought is of an 'epic' voice, of being and belonging to one place, while sitting stationery in the 'whorls of time.'<sup>6</sup> Our people say our law is constant and understandable but white law always changes.

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<sup>6</sup> Glissant E 2006. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. The University of Michigan Press. Page 35.

The values associated with colonisation as the repressiveness that Glissant speaks of, is also about the fear engendered in nation building by boundaries that work for containment and control. This form of containment built through aggressive fear, is also how Aboriginal people are governed in the Australian psyche, as objects that are owned, while anyone outside is involved in the management of the contained area e.g. the tax payer.

I have often thought that Indigenous people cannot break through the deafness caused by the walls of the status quo that surround our containment, even if we wanted to, because of the layers in the maze of institutional violence. Although individuals might create something for either themselves or their people, as we see in the difficult work our people undertake across the country in the unconnected government policies of health, education, employment etc, our desire to survive as people in our own right, with a plan for our cultural future, has been impossible to achieve.

2. TOO MANY SPIRITS: The spiritual beliefs that belong to this land have long been challenged by the religious/spiritual beliefs others have used for conquering and oppression. While the spiritual world connects us to the land, many of our senior people have thought about the other religions that have been introduced to this land. They have tried to understand how other spiritual belief systems such as Christianity might exist here, why it is here, what use is it to us, and some Indigenous people have incorporated these other spiritual beliefs into their

thinking. I bring up this subject of religion, because religious tolerance will be more important for Australians to understand in a world predicted to be severely affected by climate change. I want to demonstrate that during our own two hundred year war with turmoil, Indigenous people have shown not necessarily fear, but interest in and respect for other people's spiritual beliefs. While we have endured the onslaught of those who wished to indoctrinate our people by ruthlessly attempting to destroy our beliefs through horrific methods that have been well documented and described, a tolerance for religious view points has been intellectualised by our Aboriginal religious leaders. They have thought about what might be achieved in thinking about the spiritual and religious worlds of other people, and have found ways to incorporate elements of other religions into our own, while never accepting the proposition that other religions could replace our beliefs.

If I were to conduct a search throughout Aboriginal Australia, I would not have to go far to find examples of our ability for religious tolerance. Some widely known examples in Central Australia demonstrate this acceptance of a wider sphere of spirituality. In Yutju (Areyonga), the donkeys that live in the area are thought about as being a part of the life of Christ. Aboriginal people throughout these parts of Central Australia are very protective of donkeys and do not want them culled. The same applies to camels because of the significance of these animals in the birth of Christ. On a hill near Hermannsburg (Ntar), there is what looks like a large footprint in a rock that is said to be where Jesus ascended to heaven and

is featured in a song sung in the local language. There is also a spring at Santa Theresa that is believed to be holy water with healing properties, and in another place in Central Australia, a split rock that has an image of an old man with a beard said to be Moses. I am told that on a road running past Camels Hump outstation on the Meereenie Loop road, there is a desert oak tree, whose branches form a distinct crucifix. These are examples of how Indigenous people have thought of ways of imbuing moral equality in the Tjukurrpu landscape for other religious beliefs. When senior Aboriginal lawmen from Central Australia were visiting Israel to look at horticulture in 2002, it was also for them a spiritual journey to the Holy Land. Anangu, or any other Indigenous Australian spiritual beliefs connected to this land, derives from a body of knowledge and moral imperative, and has a similar source of spirituality, as those contained in the bible.

There is a way of understanding Aboriginal law and its worldview, which can be found described in the report, *Understanding Aboriginal Injury and Injury Prevention in Central Australia*.<sup>7</sup> It explains the Indigenous view of how different belief systems can flow together. In the Garma Festival, an event celebrated each year by the Yolngu peoples of North East Arnhem Land, the idea is to promote Yolngu and non-Indigenous knowledge flowing side by side. This idea is not the promotion of one over the other, or the assertion that one is better than

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<sup>7</sup> Hulcombe J 2006. *Recognition as Injury Prevention*, Volume 1, Understanding Aboriginal Injury and Injury Prevention in Central Australia. Report to be published by

the other, but that of equality, each with potential for new ideas flowing between, but contained in its own side. Garma is a Yolngu idea that considers the confluence of two streams of knowledge represented by salt water and freshwater.

The same idea occurs in other parts of the country, and in the Western Desert of Central Australia, as streams of knowledge entering from sun or shade into ceremony. Ms Alison Anderson Numpitjinpa (MLA) has spoken of such understanding and the mutual benefit that accrues when each element is regarded as a complementary component of a whole. This is a process that requires constant negotiation, where the common environment holds the potential for 'new life, creativity and knowledge to occur, with such outcomes belonging and accruing to each stream.' Such a phenomena can only occur when there is a balance that assures the integrity of each flow.

3. WE CREATE FEARLESSNESS TO FIGHT FEAR: In 2000, I undertook a literature review on the Injury of Aboriginal people for the collaborative research project on injury in Central Australia.<sup>8</sup> I found that wherever you looked through the huge stockpile of academic research collecting dust in the academic institutions of Australia with their recommendations ignored, you would have to

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the NHMRC collaborative research project undertaken by Tangentyere Council, Flinders University and Centre for Remote Health.

<sup>8</sup> Wright A 2001. *The Injury of Indigenous People – Literature Review* (draft). A NHMRC funded collaborative Community Initiatives Injury Prevention Project – Central Australia, by Flinders University, Centre for Remote Health and Tangentyere Council.

be stupid not to see that Aboriginal people are suffering injury from a profound sense of betrayal by the governments of this country. This betrayal has developed a fearfulness of White Australia that has been handed down the generations, and it is a fear that has become a deeply entrenched amalgam with hurt, anger and mistrust. It might also be described as fear expressed in many different forms, from self harm to harm of others, that can be seen through a scale running across the country from north to south, east to west, and every day, as it tips from one end of the scale to the other, while spinning uncontrollably, unpredictably and in full fright with the weight of seriousness pressing on top of psychological trauma.

It is Indigenous fear that responds to the institutions that continue to believe that they govern us. A resounding voice in this report is from the late Mr Cook of Intjartnama Rehabilitation Community, who worked tirelessly to help the very troubled in his community. He said: *'... People don't always do what they are told, they do what's on their minds.'* The main report of this research project found that: *'This injury runs deep and is profound,'* and that the characteristic of Aboriginal injury in Central Australia was an attack upon the self-definition of the Aboriginal person, and the people as a whole.

I think one of the great lessons I have learnt from many of the important, senior Aboriginal thinkers that I have worked with, is that fear comes with our dreams, and if you can learn how to conquer your fear, you will learn how to become a

fearless dreamer and an instrument of possibility. I would like to think that the most significant work I have been asked to contribute to by various Indigenous groups, particularly in Central Australia, has been to help to build dreams for the future that were fashioned by ourselves. I can still hear the voices of some of our more astute Indigenous managers, after being berated by their bosses, the senior Aboriginal law people who were dreaming the future, to accomplish an extraordinary idea: *What? Another dream. Lets give it to a dreamer.*

I asked a friend who spent many years working with Indigenous people in Central Australia to advise me on fear. He said he once remembered a Pintupi woman describing a part of a traditional song, 'a kind of dismemberment lament,' where she pointed towards a sand hill as a hypothetical location because the actual site must have been somewhere else, and said/sang that over there, 'liver and kidney are crying out ...' Aboriginal philosophy is holistic and is tied to the land; A similar principle is found in the holistic point of view in Chinese Medical philosophy that internal diseases are caused by the mental state of mind, where the kidney, liver and spleen are connected to fear, fright, anger, anxiety and brooding.

Dreams that should have been easily accomplished have never been successful in accomplishing the Indigenous Self Defined Dream for our future. These were brave dreams, but required others more entrenched in the status quo's way of incremental change, to listen, to help build the ideas that many remote

communities thought would work for the future. At the time when these dreams were being discussed in various forums clinging to the power of the status quo, I knew in my heart, that even though these dreams were realistically simple to achieve, we were working on ideas that were too brave for the prevailing mindset of containment. It has taken me a long time to overcome the frustration we were left with, to understand more fully why Aboriginal dreams are still not embraced by Australia.

One of the dreams I worked on concerned ideas of how to build Indigenous self-determination on our terms. I did this through considerable research while developing and coordinating two major Indigenous Constitutional Conventions in the Northern Territory. The first Convention in 1993, was in Tennant Creek on Warumungu land, and was attended by around one thousand people who travelled from across the NT to talk about their future. The event lasted three days, and was called *Today We Talk About Tomorrow*, but it was more a one-off exercise that became lost in the crisis of the Indigenous everyday world. Our next constitutional convention in 1998, was held at the place where land rights began in the NT, at Wattie Creek. It was called the Kalkaringi Convention, and again, 1,000 Aboriginal people came from across Central Australia to camp in the heat and dust for several days to talk about the future. They responded to our messages and advertisements about the convention that portrayed two Indigenous hands of the caller – beating boomerangs.

Basically, the Convention discussed and rejected the flawed ideas of the NT government to create the state of the Northern Territory. The Aboriginal people conducted their assembly in 8 local languages, and through dance, and abstract dot paintings of their country. They said that they had always governed themselves, and signed the outcomes of their deliberations on what is called the Kalkaringi Statement. This dream, led by a very brave man, a senior Aboriginal law-man, visionary, philosopher and educator from the nation of the Pintupi, established the Combined Aboriginal Nations of Central Australia. He was the kind of person who felt compassionately for all people. He was doing this work when he was suffering from kidney failure, and was forced to live away from his country to be attached to a dialysis machine several times a week at the Alice Springs Hospital. He did not want to live away from his homelands, and his family suffered greatly while living in Alice Springs in a suburb where they had very little in the way of support systems to help them to survive. He took great risks to use whatever opportunity arose to go back to Kintore, even though it was often difficult to organise his return to Alice Springs in time for his dialysis treatment without which, his health would greatly deteriorate. However, this did not stop him from his work for the Combined Aboriginal Nations of Central Australia, or from conceptualising and accomplishing idea after idea for the betterment of his people. His memorial plaque at Kintore, states that he could turn distrust into mutual understanding, and carries his words: 'We Go Into the Future As One Tribe and One Family.' I find the same thoughts occurred to Samir Kassir, the visionary Lebanese journalist and historian, before he was

assassinated. In the collection of essays *Being Arab* – concerning the Arab malaise, published after his death in a book recommended by PEN, he reminds the Arab world not to create separateness within and without, and says, ‘*Arab culture has begun to relearn how to integrate plurality into its unity of place and time, and stop thinking of difference as a source of division.*’<sup>9</sup>

One such monumental task Mr Zimran set upon at this time was to organise Western Desert artists to place their work in an auction at Sotheby that raised \$1 million to set up a dialysis unit in their community. He also went down to the Aboriginal Hostel Topsy Smith every week in the street where I lived, to encourage gospel singing of his own songs with other dialysis patients living away from their communities. He told me he had to do this to help cheer them up. He once led gospel singing convoys in the Western Desert as a way of bringing people together and because he also saw a place for other religions in the traditional spiritual world. What he feared was not meeting his obligation to people, and to the misplaced spirits he heard in the Alice Springs Hospital. He said that his spirit should be in its rightful place. I also remember he once asked why Australia was fighting in Iraq. He said we are all people. We are all the same people.

Before Mr Zimran passed away, he and senior Aboriginal law holders described the form of Aboriginal government that they believed was correct within a

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<sup>9</sup> Kassir S 2006. *Being Arab*. Verso, London. Page 88-9.

structure that already existed, but needed to be recognised by Australia. It was not an outrageous idea. It threatened no one except the status quo of entrenched domination in policy, research, and the administration of Aboriginal people by others. However, to Indigenous people on the ground who are enduring some of the worse conditions and relationships with the rest of Australia, equal to any other trouble spot on the planet, the recognition of their law made sense. It meant that they could move; plan and work towards a future, with agreed and adequate resources from Australian governments, in an agreement that recognised culpability and responsibility for the crisis we see on the media. It meant that Aboriginal law could find its path in Australia, with Indigenous people being able to talk about how it could be carried into the future. This group also led a campaign that gathered together diverse groups in the NT that would have been disaffected under the flawed arrangements for NT Statehood, and together, ensured that the 'fate accompli' expected through a statehood referendum in the NT was defeated. The chain effect from this result, not only demonstrated how two laws could work side by side, but saw the defeat of 28 years of entrenched conservative government in the NT.

What happened to the dream established by the Combined Aboriginal Nations of Central Australia? It went nowhere. It became a dangerous idea that threatened the organised 'status quo', working with fear of retribution from the Australian government against criticism and the assertion of rights. It became a question of

whether anyone who lived outside of Aboriginal law in communities in Central Australia wanted this law to survive.

So why is there a continuing fear of Indigenous people and more specifically, Aboriginal law? Is it the fear of the unknown, of what is not understood, of what is not in memory, and therefore, must lie beyond possibility, and cannot exist? Milan Kundera's writer's book , *Curtain*, touches on this problem in its discussion of the possibilities for a novelist to reach into the soul of things, to free ideas from fear. The Czech writer knows what it is for a man to live through the death of his nation. He describes the fear of a crushing force that stopped his people from being what they had been, but at the same time he was astonished to realise that he did not know how and why they had become who they were, because he could not look into the soul of the people to experience the decisions they had previously made. He noted that there were situations where nothing can make up for the absence of a great novel.<sup>10</sup> This absence of not understanding what we are becoming is also our problem too, from neither understanding our own Indigenous epic literature, or how to build new stories that evoke the spirits underlying our deepest emotions.

4. WHOSE FEAR IS HEARD: In the world, many writers are being threatened, tortured, persecuted, imprisoned or killed from speaking about their country's fears. For these reasons, millions of people are not heard loudly enough, or at all,

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<sup>10</sup> Kundera M 2005. *The Curtain*. Harper Collins, New York. Pages 155-7.

while their representation throughout the world of literature is being censored or obliterated.

A valuable lesson about literature can be found in the Nobel Lecture presented in Stockholm by Orhan Pamuk, the 2006 Nobel Laureate for Literature. Pamuk said, what literature needs most today, is to tell and investigate humanity's basic fears:

The fear of being left outside, and the fear of counting for nothing, and the feelings of worthlessness that come with such fears: the collective humiliations, vulnerabilities, slights, grievances, sensitivities, and imagined insults, and the nationalist boasts and inflations that are their next of kind.<sup>11</sup>

Australia desperately needs readers who not only read, but also, are selectively seeking this information about our basic fears, and want to read well. We will need better access to world literature as well as our own meaningful literature, to be able to walk through the window of opportunity that writers are creating the world over to look into the minds and worlds of others. We must try harder to understand how to share this earth with others, who are demanding a new dialogue to create a greater equality that redefines the status quo. The environment is on the side of the weakest people in seeking new understanding,

and it will not be long before this dialogue insists on the willingness of all people to assert difference and equality as the terms for World harmony. I think the future will need writers closely tied to the countless millions on earth who have always lived with far less and have experienced far more fear than the great majority of Australians. The Indigenous lawmen and women who intimately understand the ancient literature of this land, should be working with the scientists and politicians to provide an understanding of how to help this country to survive.

Do writers have the experience and background for the imaginative investigation of the basic fears of humanity? I ask the question about reading, but also whether Australian writers can produce the type of literature that Pamuk believes is required by the world. What Australian values will prevail in either the production or publishing of literature? I am not sure whether Australian values muddied by unresolved issues with Indigenous people, will have the authenticity required to allow us to look into the depths of despair in the world. Will Australian publishers publish literature about fear in the world, if it does not make economic sense, because fearful ideas will not find a readership in our small reading population? Perhaps, the logic of change will require closer and quicker movement towards our understanding of despair, as is now starting to emerge, through the new literature concerning domestically held fears Australian have about themselves.

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<sup>11</sup> Pamuk O 2006. The Nobel Prize in Literature 2006 – Nobel Lecture – My Father’s

In 1945, the anthropologist A. P. Elkin, in his studies *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, suspected that there might be congruencies between the practices of Indigenous healers (ngangkari), and western psychiatric practitioners. Ted Strehlow tried to demonstrate the connection between oral and written cultural forms in the songs of Central Australia and the sagas of Old Europe. Elkin recommended a forum within which matters of concern to European and Indigenous therapeutic practitioners could be discussed and compared, and a working partnership consolidated. This never happened.

Dr Craig San Roque, a practicing psychologist who has worked for several years in Central Australia, suggests that it would be useful to know how Aboriginal thoughts are built. He questions how Australia thinks from its background of cultural matrices that includes Caucasian/Mediterranean/European/Middle Eastern and Asian mythologies. He believes that there ought to be an extensive locally based study to set out the parallel process between Indigenous Australian, and the above mentioned Indigenous mythologies which are central to contemporary cultural matrices in Australia. I also think Australian writers should share this work, by bringing to life in their writing, the different ways in which thoughts and actions can be shaped from our multiple backgrounds.

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Suitcase.

5. HOW DO WRITERS TRANSCEND FEAR? Orhan Pamuk reminds us that independent writers of the world listen only to the voice of their own conscience to produce literature. Pamuk's faith in humanity is the belief that we live in a world that has no centre.

It is significant that Pamuk speaks of the belief that our writings will be read and understood because people all over the world resemble each other. This is the idea that I would like to concentrate on in examining how well we in Australia, understand each other, and what capacity we have for understanding fear in ourselves, and fear in others – whether in fact, what Pamuk says is true, that we resemble each other.

Why should I raise this question of difference if it is true that the world has many fears in common? The six and a half billion people who inhabit our planet cannot be all that different to each other in what makes us all fearful. We all have fears about how we live or die, or what will become of us in sickness and in health, or what someone else is capable of doing to us, and for those of us who have children, we can no longer predict whether the world will be a good place for them to live in the future. While we contend with more reason to be fearful, do we look away from difference and only look out for our own? Tendencies for over-governance with protective measures from outside is nothing new for Indigenous people, but now Australians are also noticing that they too are

becoming over-governed and protected from fear of harm when compared to other countries.

The world is becoming a different place and there will be no room for trying to overprotect for fear of harm. Michael Benes, a senior lecturer in criminal justice, has studied this phenomenon and states, 'our children would benefit from being taught more about ethics and morals than being instilled with fear for doing the wrong thing.'<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, if children grow up in a situation of being over-governed, they will lose their sense of personal responsibility.

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<sup>12</sup> Barrett P 2007. *Melbourne Rules, OK*. The Age – Melbourne Magazine, Issue #30, April 07.