

Notes from some First Peoples' Contributions to National Congress of Women Conversations

(by Honey Nelson, WCC member)

In the face of glaring fire and sweeping floods, WCC's vision is for *restoration of a beloved planet on behalf of all Earth life and future generations*. We embrace deep learning and conjoining with First Peoples of Australia: those who know ancestral love, belonging and understanding of this living land.

We have some First Nations members, and invitees who have hosted online Conversations during our widening programs. Two who cannot be here today are Drs. Anne Poelina and Mary Graham; and with great interest and respect we have summarised some parts of their papers on First Peoples' world view and spiritual understanding.

These are beautiful accounts of traditional knowledge and spiritual/physical philosophy, you are much invited to read them here in full :

Anne Poeliina et al:

https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=7inJWrcAAAAJ&citation_for_view=7inJWrcAAAAJ:Zph67rFs4hoC

Mary Graham:

<http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2008/11/01/some-thoughts-about-the-philosophical-underpinnings-of-aboriginal-worldviews/>

Here are some descriptions drawn from these accounts of First Law and Traditional Knowledge (cosmology and insight), and why we need so much to listen and learn from them:

* First People have millennia of contemplative study of human behaviour, and the cultivation of *shared thought and action for the benefit of community, and for human and all Earth Life*. They have observed that each human spirit inherently carries moral and ethical principles for proper conduct. They have purposefully evolved their cultural teachings beyond egocentricity, greed, hierarchy, possessiveness, and spiritual indifference - *these are 'primitive' or immature ways* whose hegemonies and consumerism have brought about today's planetary crises of combat, self-gratification, iniquity, and climate heating. Instead, they cultivated a more advanced, mature and difficult path - cooperation, the sharing of resources, personal restraint, insight into the unity of spiritual and physical life. These *'proper ways' of maturity* exclude hierarchies of rule, policy and governance, which control social behaviour through fear and force rather than care and respect.

* *First Law, or Natural Law*, arises from the Earth itself: the mother who gives rise to and provides for all life, and to whom we owe a loving reciprocal duty of care. We are grateful custodians, not owners of the sacred Earth. All human-made laws must abide by this First Law; and thus entail values such as equity, empathy, responsibility, care, justice, and sustenance of balance and rightful living.

Humans share a deep personal interconnection with all Earth life; understanding that damage to one part rebounds with harm to all. Indeed, Earthly features such as rivers, gorges, rocks and mountains are recognised as having spirit-being, and rights to their own life and undisturbed safety. Thus when invasive industries gouge and leach and pollute such places, then the custodial peoples are crushed in the heart by these injuries to their protected spiritual estates.

* The network of relationships, physical and spiritual, are all imprinted within the landscape of Earth and cosmos in the *Dreaming tracks*: marking the passages of the Creation Beings who arose from the Earth on their great land-shaping journeys, their activities, interactions and ceremonies. They carry the lore and law of creation, both its good and its dangerous forces: related in the many moral

teaching and warning parables of their journeys. The places where they eventually went to ground to sleep again, are now sacred sites.

These creation stories are very understandable to settler cultures, comparable to well-known traditional religious parables, mythic teachings, and commandments. A profound addition from First Peoples to settler traditions is to know that *the sacred lies also within the very Mother Earth herself*, the female-goddess-spirit (if you like) to balance the male-god-spirit - 'he' to whom men have given sole rule in euro-religions for the last few thousand years. This knowledge of the feminine sacred can be a consoling and empowering revelation to modern women.

(Thus in political and religious life we settler women have been silenced for centuries! But now is the time to find each other, find our wonderful First Peoples right here, and for our voices to come forth once more!)

* *Traditional Knowledge* is all that is known about the *world around us*, and how to apply that knowledge in relation to those beings that share the world. Traditional Knowledge sees no distinction between the health of the planet and that of the human community.

Eons of applied Traditional Knowledge practices 'farmed' a continental landscape with careful trimming and thinning of forests against uncontrolled bushfire, the clearing and protection of waterholes and other essential water sources for life in a vast dry landscape, the balanced harvesting and sustaining of resources, knowledge and protection of species through fine observation and totemic kinship relationships.

These are very pragmatic reasons for immediate and serious conference with First Peoples' experts, to invite their teaching about how to actively manage the Australian landscape in order to minimise the disastrous effects of wildfire and flood. And to undertake the goodness and benefits of their societal equity, generosity, self-abnegation, sharing of responsibility and resources.

* *Relationalism and survivalism*: These are how Mary Graham describes our different historic cultural paths. Dominant world cultures see individual identity as singular, separate from others, and connected with spirit only by choice - life thus becoming a frustrating search for meaning. *Ownership becomes 'security'* in an environment perceived as resistant or threatening; thus goods and land must be conquered and possessed, in order to survive.

In Aboriginal life-philosophy, identity is *relational, communal and familial* rather than individual. *Responsibility is to each other and to all life*, rather than just to self, through recognition of shared life-spirit throughout the family of the loved and sacred Earth Mother.

* *These are just small imperfect extracts from cultures of long contemplation and insight. Do read the full articles from Mary and Anne, who speak from their great traditions.*

In this time of climate crisis, we have never needed to learn so much, in such a short time, to accomplish such a great task of rectification. We are thankful for the insights of First Peoples, from millennial study of the human mind and spirit, in the tough environment of Australia - such as we face today in extreme fire and flood.

Colonial invasion mercilessly pillaged a continent of nations living in careful balance with each other. Invading colonists showed no curiosity or respect for the venerable cultures they scorned. There is immediate need for formal gathering with First Peoples, to grieve together for sufferings and deprivations, to undertake redress and healing, and plan an evolved path forward.

Together, ancient and modern, we can help protect our environments, species and future life from the extreme effects of human-made climate heating.

Australia actually has an opportunity to show the world a higher path, in this crisis of human responsibility for climate and environmental devastations, which leave future generations and all life in a planet of extreme climatic stresses, conflict, mass extinctions, and exhaustion. We can

come together, and act together on behalf of defenceless and beloved life, First Peoples and settlers, women and men.
