



**Desert Creek House**  
*Yves de Morsier*

802 Desert Creek Road - Numbugga  
BEGA - NSW 2550 - AUSTRALIA

Phone: ++61 (0)2 6492 8498

E-mail: [desertcreek@skymesh.com.au](mailto:desertcreek@skymesh.com.au)

Website: [www.desertcreekhouse.com.au](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au)

## Two Insights, one Focus, one Proposal

### The Land – Reconciliation - New ways of life - Aboriginal heritage

I did recently two striking readings that brought me two new insights (indigenous rights and power of reconciliation). These two insights, when put together and connected with my present focus in my own research (role of our values and beliefs), gave me the idea of a proposal concerning our relationship to the Australian land, related to an Aboriginal perspective as far as I am in a position to talk about it.

### 1) First insight: indigenous land rights in North America

**My first reading** was in Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*<sup>1</sup>, a book about the environmental issue. In a chapter about indigenous rights, N. Klein describes how, in the US and Canada, the British invaders had recognised the rights of indigenous people to stay on their land and to continue to live off the products of the land as they had traditionally done in the past (in this precise case mainly hunting, fishing and gathering). This form of imposed legal frame meant that the new coming white people were authorised to live on the land but they could not, by any of their activities, prevent indigenous people from living as they were used to. These are indeed powerful rights which are referred to in present court cases to defend indigenous land rights and to call for measures that should prevent (or at least refrain) especially mining but also any other kind of polluting activities from destroying the land (i.e. mainly natural land). Of course this right, that exists in North America but not in Australia (to be verified!), is sometimes recognised on the legal level but seems to be rarely (?) applied because of the extreme imbalance of power between often marginalised indigenous communities and powerful mining companies enjoying the support of state institutions. Other references: ILO 169 Indigenous and Tribal peoples Convention 1989 and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Native Title Act of Australia 1993.

Naomi Klein, in the following chapter of the same book, describes too how indigenous people in the US or Canada are more attracted to become promoters in the development of renewable energies instead of remaining slave workers in the mining boom. Of course the former is much more suitable with their philosophy and spirituality. They are indeed in the best position to become our leaders and teachers on the way to recovery of an authentic relationship with nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Naomi Klein: *This Changes Everything*, Penguin Books 2014. Chapter 11: *You and what army? Indigenous rights and the power of keeping our word*, p367.

Thanks to this powerful description by Naomi Klein, **my first insight** was the following: the right to protect the livelihood of the land for the people who live on it (principally indigenous but also white) seems to be a powerful weapon against any form of destruction of the land by corporations, by state services or by any actor interfering on it, if it can be applied at a wider scale, especially when it refers to the rights that were in vigour in the past, before invasion.

## 2) Second insight: reconciliation process in South Africa

**My second reading** was of some extracts of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC - 1998)<sup>2</sup> concerning the process of reconciliation engaged in South Africa by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu when apartheid was abolished and the new democratically elected power attempted to restore peace in a situation that was at the edge of civil war. The first volume of the report describes the historical context, the reasons why it has been chosen to follow this kind of procedure, the choice of the method, the suitability of this approach for the necessity to do justice. I was fascinated to discover how this method of reconciliation allowed all (or at least most) people involved (victims and perpetrators) to reach a much higher level of truth and justice. It was shown how the usual procedure of court cases has the tendency to defend the perpetrators and to avoid revealing what can remain hidden, while at the opposite the spontaneous exposure of crimes and direct dialogue between perpetrators and victims, under the protection and control of the commission, help rather to create a climate of trust and possible forgiveness. It is simply another world, another mentality that takes clearly shape when one reads the report.

Thanks to the TRC (and especially Desmond Tutu who as president has been one of its most influential members), **my second insight** was the following: in difficult issues related with deep conflicts from the past that are still challenging present important personal or corporate interests or feelings, a setting that goes beyond accusation, and tries at the same time more essentially to draw the lines for a new creative and just future, is a necessary and fruitful condition to confront the past and its violence. This more peaceful approach is not as much threatening as an act of accusation and it allows the procedure to develop slowly in following the needs and abilities of each party to express, gradually and step by step, what they need to. This is done in evaluating the evolving conditions of the dialogue and the quality of relationships that deepens between the parties which are then no more perceived as inevitable enemies but become rather interlocutors who collaborate in order to prepare peace: a peace accessible for all.

## 3) My present focus

In all the main issues of our present time in Australia (expression of the Aboriginal culture, climate change, refugees, share of resources, quality of work, education, etc.), we need to think in a fundamentally different mentality from the one that has generated the deep imbalances mentioned (as Einstein used to say) if we want to solve the urgent problems of destruction, violence and injustice we are confronted with. It means we need to learn to think outside of the usual box of readymade conventional wisdom. To this purpose, we need to become aware of how we behave and how we think in our everyday life: what are our (un)conscious values, patterns, motivations and preferences (our ingrained culture)? Before we reshape in depth our everyday life (urgent task!), we must first become very clear which kind of attachment to false attitudes (representations, fears, desires, beliefs, etc.) retains us and which qualities are priorities for our future. Our future is rooted in our capacity to live

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<sup>2</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Report (October 1998) : <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report>

within the truth (as wrote the late Czech president V. Havel<sup>3</sup>). Our search for new forms of living has to be led principally by our (intuitive or explicit) understanding of the meaning of life. The nature and meaning of life remain certainly very mysterious and will remain different for each of us, but nevertheless our search for a better future can't avoid to be fed by our search for this mysterious meaning, even if we can't express clearly what it is truly. Search for truth and search for justice cannot be disconnected. The former feeds the latter. It is fascinating to notice that our modern society has used technology to replace meaning: we become consumers of simple technical means that dispense us from searching for truthful ways.

**Focus:** In these recent years I have been focusing on these patterns and values we believe in and that lead our behaviours. I'm struck how often it is precisely the corrupt nature of these false beliefs (illusions) and their frequent effects of distortion that explain best the twists of our society. It is an evidence how much especially the main characteristics of our free market economy are pure inversions of what life is meant to be. As life is principal, it is sure we have to learn how to master these forces we let free in our market society and how to prevent them from killing this original energy of life that wishes to thrive and flow and generate deep links of harmony between people. My search so far has focused mainly on three topics: on community, on nature and on economy<sup>4</sup>; I'm starting to investigate in more depth the field of what should be a new anthropology (understanding of the meaning of life) to be found in a form of complementarity between feminine and masculine perceptions and attitudes.

All this cultural content I just described could be resumed under one word: ideology, if there were not such a bad feeling about it. Maybe this bad feeling expresses precisely how much we are led in fact by an ideology (patterns and beliefs) that is in deep conflict with the pure energy of life we cherish.

## 4) The proposal

In putting together my two insights (indigenous rights and power of reconciliation) with my present focus on "ideology", on leading values and the meaning of life, I came to the following proposal. This is only a first draft and it should be naturally discussed and reformulated in a way that would better express the position of the different parties involved.

Three main issues come here together:

- 1) the land (and all that is involved in it) with its deep and sacred potential for meaning and teaching, but also its evident fragility under the impact of destructive exploitation,
- 2) the role of Aboriginal people (past and present) with the deep desire (theirs and ours) to have them participate in transforming the existing Australian society to make it more conform to their own culture and expression,
- 3) the urgent necessity (climate change, inequity) to live more in harmony with one another and with nature.

When we will make together, Aboriginal and white people, the attempt to rediscover the true meaning of the land in our daily practice, we will probably experience the following qualities:

- 1) Aboriginal and western cultures are based on very different attitudes toward the world in which we live: the former attitude is based on sacredness while the latter attitude becomes more and more materialistic, despite it having many sacred dimensions at its origin that have been forgotten.

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<sup>3</sup> Vaclav Havel: The Power of the Powerless.

[http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=eseje&val=2\\_aj\\_eseje.html&typ=HTML](http://www.vaclavhavel.cz/showtrans.php?cat=eseje&val=2_aj_eseje.html&typ=HTML)

<sup>4</sup> These three books (that still need to be edited and corrected – English is not my mother tongue!) are available on our website: [www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/waysoflife/waysoflife.html](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/waysoflife/waysoflife.html)

The dialog of both cultures, and especially of people, can only enhance the best parts of our respective traditions.

- 2) The land is what unites us all. It is the most important value of this continent, by fact and also mainly by tradition. A process of (re)conciliation could bring us together, from Aboriginal or European or Asian background, in a spirit oriented towards our common future, with our main focus on the land. How should we relate to it?
- 3) The land issue is at the core of our relationship between white and black Australians: it was the object of the invasion and the main object of dissent how to relate to Country. Our white society has completely messed it up, while Aboriginal culture has always had a very healthy relationship with the land. For example this is the main element at stake now in the Adani project.
- 4) This is the opportunity to examine our values and where they have led us and where we want to go. What is the quality of life (the meaning of it) we wish to enhance for ourselves and our children?
- 5) This examination can't be done without referring to the past, the present and the future, but each reference to a special event can be introduced at the right time by each participant, considering the maturity of the moment to do so. There is therefore no threat of main confrontation but rather the freedom of addressing the truth at the right rhythm. Every topic can be touched when necessary, especially when through the process our skills of investigation become sharper and more adapted to the task in hand.
- 6) No government or no institution will be able to take the necessary drastic measures to resist climate change and protect the sacred dimension of the land, because such measures would have to be extremely constraining and would generate a lot of animosity against the government: it means no government is in a position to implement what they have signed in Paris. Only if people, like you and me, take the initiative to live more accordingly to the values and qualities we want to preserve and promote, institutions can then follow under the pressure of our own practice. That means that we have first to practise what we declare. The practice is itself indeed the principal tool to investigate the new situation (i.e. whether our proposals are feasible) and to test in a very practical way how much we have to adapt our strategies.
- 7) Such a research and practice will need to be exposed to public awareness as soon as it is relatively well consolidated. It can initiate a public debate about the quality of future we wish and how to achieve it. In practising locally we make our vision more visible because it takes material forms and can be seen. A "new" practice should challenge everybody and attract new interest: if we can show that it is possible to live better with less and in a more harmonious way, why should other people not be convinced? Our own way of life becomes indeed the true vector of our talk.

I confess that I have no special personal direct link with Aboriginal culture except the inspiration it brings me and my huge respect for Aboriginal heritage, as far as I know it. Aboriginal people would probably perceive this proposal differently. I'm happy to have it changed in a more suitable and significant way, especially if it is clear that it is not a new white attempt to "grab" Aboriginal wisdom!

I feel it is important to see that this process is rooted in our own life experience and that it is not one more new project of something we have to implement but more exactly an intention to create a protected space where life can thrive and show us where we want to go. It describes rather a spirit, an attitude and a method how to approach the theme of our relationship with the land, so central for our present and future in Australia. Soon the theme of the land will include also other dimensions of our everyday life, because the land is like a network of relationships that connects us one with another. In this way the land is also a potential for a very rich future if we are able to maintain this protected space that helps life to thrive.

I'll be happy to hear from you if you believe this approach can be fruitful and interests you. It is well possible that similar processes of which I am unaware are already running. Please inform me! If you wish to, I can provide you with any of the documents mentioned here above (computer files or paper prints).