

ABORIGINAL DIGNITY ROOTED IN SUBVERTED YET SUBVERSIVE BELIEFS

EXCERPT

On the occasion 40th anniversary of the 1967 Australian referendum in which an overwhelming majority of Australians recognized the human rights of Indigenous Australians, this papers calls for a retrospective recognition that the aboriginal dignity does not *a priori* depends on a referendum of the dominant “white society.” Aboriginal dignity is *a primordial given* and *an experiential factity* based on the ritualistic celebration (in the school of life) of aboriginal festivities and passages of life. This paper argues, albeit from an ethnographic point of view, that the rituals and shamanic experiences are constituents of *existential DNA fabric* of aboriginal human dignity. In Part I of this paper, the two narratives bespeak of the authors’ personal experiences of shamanic rituals, summarily described as the “subversive space” which continues to subvert the hegemonism of any systemic erasure of aboriginal cultures and religiosity. The latter can be outlawed but not outlived for the shamanic world are about transcendental realities known as the sacred world of spirits. The narratives of shamanic *power-over* the military might further postulates that shamanic power not only constitutes aboriginal dignity but preserves and promotes the dignity of one’s neighbours. The differences are *discriminatory walls* that segregate and yet the differences are causes for celebration based on the commonality of having experienced the shamanic world of the spirits. In Part II of this paper, the author enumerates viable strategies for both the members of the dominant society and the aboriginal communities, with special focus on women and the young, in the hope that the evolving society involves collaborative efforts wherein total human flourishing is attainable so that aboriginal peoples and ALL become equal citizens and equal disciples amidst their differences that must be celebrated by ALL.

INTRODUCTION

The shift in the regional and global perception of the aboriginal dignity and rights is perceptible before and after the UN Year and Decade of Indigenous Peoples in 1993 and 1994-2004 respectively. This paradigmatic shift is made possible by the local and regional efforts of the aboriginal subaltern movements around the world. The Australian aboriginal movements no less, have contributed their share to the ripple effects of the regional and global flow of heightened consciousness of aboriginal dignity.

The occasion of the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Australian referendum in which an overwhelming majority of Australians recognized the human rights of Indigenous Australians enjoins us to retrospectively recognize that Australian aboriginal peoples celebrate their dignity as the people of the land even before the arrival of the British subjects. This landmark occasion needs to motivate us to join in the concerted efforts to reverse all policies that are determined to subvert the indigenous cultures and religiosity. On the other hand, this celebration has to

energize us to lend a helping hand to sustain all life-giving cultural and religious practices that enhance full human flourishing of the aboriginal communities. Though the collective memory of the dominant society has chosen to dis-member rather than re-member the fact that aboriginal peoples became Australian citizens in 1947, it is the prerogative of this forum to discursively assert and ceremonially affirm and joyously celebrate the golden Jubilee of their recognition as Australian citizens.

This paper calls attention to the inherent fact that the aboriginal dignity is inseparable from aboriginal beliefs and rituals, especially their age-old institution known as shamans with its religio-cultural practices commonly denoted as indigenous shamanism. This paper attempts to contend that the everyday struggle for the full legal recognition of the aboriginal dignity is firmly grounded in aboriginal cultural and religious beliefs and practices. In the first section, I will establish that the cultural and religious practices manifest a certain subversive memory that defies the developmental logic of the authorities. I will attempt to foreground such subversive memory through three narratives. The first account relates to the current struggle of the Semai in Malaysia which will offer a window of understanding of the intimate relation before ritualistic celebration and everyday struggle. In the second narration, I will highlight *shamanism realism* as a non-negotiable *condition non qua* for crosscultural understanding of the focal role of indigenous shamanism. In part two, I will enumerate some viable strategies for participants from both the dominant and aboriginal societies in order to promote full human flourishing in a subversive space that celebrates our differences in an ever-evolving modern society.

PART I SUBVERSIVE MEMORY OF INDIGENOUS SHAMANISM

The systemic closure and erasure of indigenous cultural and religious beliefs and practices is common knowledge in any colonized society. According to Mark J. Plotkin, an American ethnobotanist, “the denigration of shamanism is by no means restricted to one area of the world.”¹ He cited few incidences to illustrate his point.

In Zimbawa shamanism was outlawed by the Witchcraft Regulations of 1895 and the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899. Guilty parties were subject to thirty-six lashes and/or seven years in prison. Throughout North America, American Indians, who have melted Christianity with their native beliefs, still struggle to be allowed to consume peyote, a traditional part of their religious rituals. In Indonesia island of Siberut, west of Sumatra, the Protestant church issued a declaration against the healers of that land. It states that the church considers the activities of the Kerei (medicine men) as heathen and blasphemous, and is determined to abolish the Kerei activities as fraud at the expense of the people. And in the Columbian Amazon, Protestant and Catholic clergymen set fire to holy longhouses and ornaments and exposed sacred musical

¹ Mark J. Plotkin, *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice : An Ethnobotanist Searches for New Medicines in the Amazon Rainforest* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 205.

*instruments to the women and children of the tribe – a practice expressly forbidden by the tenets of the Indians' religion.*²

Given the historical evidences of hegemonic practices of colonial subversion, I postulate that indigenous cultures manifest a certain subversive memory as evidenced in the following narratives.

(A) SEMAI STRUGGLE: A SUBALTERN NARRATIVE

An aboriginal community known as Semai located Perak, a state in the central part of Peninsular Malaysia, is in the midst of a conflict with the authorities, including the State and Federal Governments over their land that will be annexed for purpose of establishing a botanical park. The case, according to Tijah, the community spokeswoman, will eventually end up in the court and a long-drawn legal battle will ensue. She is convinced that judicial activism is the last resort for this aboriginal community. Yet this struggle is not just a matter of negotiation involving multi-party stakeholders but it is also a symbolic struggle involving communal prayer.

At 11.00pm on Thursday, March 22, 2007, the communal prayer known as "sewang" took place. Tijah and I went over to Pak Ipan's house at about 10.45pm. Upon arrival, we were told that Pak Ipan was invited over to one of the participants' house to shamanize (known in Semai as "jumpi") because he was suffering from a "neck-pain." (Malay: sakit leher). But as we decided to go back to the house, we met 3 young women and we doubled back to Pak Ipan's house. Tijah went inside to the space at the back where the kitchen was, to prepare for the sewang. I stayed in the main hall (front-space) to watch a Cantonese Police Story. Then Tijah called me in and I went into the kitchen to have a drink (tea and some biscuits) with the gathering, some of whom are youths of the village. As we chatted, Pak Ipan felt that it was time to begin the ritual. So he requested that all of us faced the front of him as he sat at the back next to the leafy brushes (known in Semai as Canau), incense pot and the jar of flowers. Then the wife held the container with the "canau" over the incense and then incensed the jar of flowers around the base. With the Pak Ipan began the ritual. According to Tijah, the long and short of it is: (a) as disclosed by her before the prayer for a spirit of tolerance on the part of the personnels representing the authorities (District Office, Public Works Department (JKR), Land Department (Jabatan Tanah), the Aboriginal Affairs Department (JHEOA)...etc); (b) during the prayer: Pak Ipan called on the spirits of the trees, rocks, rivers, birds, animals, the ancestors ... the entire environment to come to the aid of the negotiation and that the spirits will ameliorate the minds and hearts of those who are in charge so that they will be receptive at the negotiation. He prayed that the negative energy and harmful knowledge (ilmu Gob). To conclude the "Sewang," the woman assistant, Kenmerija carried the canau (the action of carrying is known in Semai as repa) to the main entrance of the house to cast away whatever is evil and destructive, to the point that they may even recoil on the heads of the wicked. Then the "sewang" ended, and the Pak Ipan instructed and

² Ibid., 205-206.

explained about the relation of the prayer to the negotiation process on Saturday and what they needed to bring with them to the negotiation session.

As the symbolic always impinges on the cultural struggle, and interested in the effect of the *sewang* on the negotiation which took place two days later, I enquired Tijah who responded that the stakeholders at the negotiation she spoke with great confidence and the representatives of the authorities had their heads down, ashamed and guilty. Only the District Officer spoke in a manner she perceived to be open and friendly. She was grateful for the prayers offered in the village and she realized that her agency is never purely human but religious, symbolic of the world of the Divine and the spirits.

This current subaltern narrative from the Semai aboriginal community informs us that the dignity of the aboriginal community is indelibly rooted at the symbolic level in which rituals such as *sewang* is just a vital expression of inalienable dignity of the aboriginal peoples. This symbolic dimension is rightly *a subversive space* in which human efforts, when infused with the shamanic power of the spirits, subverts the very powers that attempts to subvert them. So the subverted victims become the subverting agents in the very space when the symbolic and the everyday are fused into a *unitary seamless whole*.

(B) A PERSONAL SHAMANIC ENCOUNTER

The aboriginal dignity, to my limited experience of the shamanic world of the spirits, is traceably grounded in an everyday experience of the spirit-worlds as the symbolic world is readily “accessible” in the physical world of daily human affairs. Any *intercultural criss-crossing* between the human-physical world and the world of spirits requires a mindful emptying of preconceptions and prejudices, including one’s binary mindset (read Euro-American scientific rationality) based on “my beliefs are true and superior versus theirs as false and inferior.” To a great extent, this dialogue calls for a willful suspension of one’s religious beliefs even values so that such emptying resembles an empty vessel that is able to “receive and cherish” what one has being gratuitously offered by the spirits.

Premised upon this, I intend to share a personal encounter with Garing, an existential symbol of shamanic criss-crossing wherein the shamanic power he exercised protects life and subverts the hegemony of a neighbouring nation. My own intercultural criss-crossing of the “threshold” into the shamanic world took place in the village of Bantul, located at the border between Sabah (what was formerly known as North Borneo) and Kalimantan, Indonesia.³ After two periods of living in the village, *Garing* mentioned to me the decision from the spirit-world, that I would be “initiated” through a bathing ritual known to the Muruts as as “*na rio*.” I would be ritually inducted to become a member of his family.

³ In order to foreground the voice of the shaman, the text is narrated as a dialogue, to emphasize the point *Garing* is person of self-possession, composure and impeccable dignity among in the Murutland amongst his people in the southwestern part of Sabah, East Malaysia.

The spirits have instructed Garing to orientate me on July 19, 2001 based on three conditions that I have to agree to before the initiation: (a) I have to become his son and visit him in the kampung regularly; (b) I have to be at his disposal when he comes to Kota Kinabalu when I am in town; (c) I have to be there for his burial whenever possible. But the first initiation had to be postponed, as the spirit Garing, due to the impending rain. We returned the following day and I was initiated. Garing asked me to squat in a pond of the running stream.

The initiation ceremony continued on July 20, 2001. When we arrived at the sacred spot upstream, Garing went further upriver to communicate with the water-spirits. With the instruction from the spirits, he broke the eggs and spilled the content into the stream. Then he asked me to bath. At the pool, he and I dipped and bathed.

Soon Garing called me to come near to him. He asked me to bring the pen and book. I thought that he was to sit behind me. But he moved to sit on a rock. He beckoned me to come closer to him so that he could whisper to me.

I wrote down all that he dictated to me.

Garing cautioned me: "Do not use it for purposes not intended by the water-spirits or else I would have lost the power accorded by the water-spirits"

Jojo: "What is his name?"

Garing: "I will give you the name tonight."

Then Garing mentioned to me the questions that they posed to him.

Garing: "Is he your son?" Then he swore to the "water-spirits" that I am his son.

Jojo: "Thank you!"

Garing: "Next time, when you are here, we would spent the night outside the cave on a moonlit night, and, we would be able to see them, really white in appearance."

The moments right after the initiation left me in a state of *subliminal liminality* from within which I sensed a certain newness in my perception of reality. I realized that the world of nature is more than what meets the eyes. The beauty of the forest apparent to the naked eyes betrays the profound mystical wonders of the sacred mysteries *oozing forth* from the entire ecological world around me. The techno-world, with all its invented brilliance, pales in significance compared to the incomprehensible splendour captured in the rapture of having "seen, heard, touched" the sacred mysteries running through the veins of this abysmal and organic universe.

At the same time, I am more than convinced that the everyday experiences of the shamanic world constitute an important basis of the aboriginal dignity of

Garing and those reputable fellow shamans. As I spent time with him, I became acutely aware of a noticeable sense of self-possession, confidence and ease arising from his long years of shamanic practices during the process of accompaniment and initiation.

Few days after the initiation, I became keenly aware of my own biases that bring differences into sharper focus between me and the aboriginal peoples. The difference is stark-naked: the spirits/spirit-world is not what many urbanites of the dominant religions imagine them to be. Many readily dismiss it as some hocus-pocus stuff or sheer figment of the imagination of the “illiterate primitives” who lack the education and the knowledge to explain/rationalize the supernatural worlds.

Needless to say, such prejudiced preconceptions make the differences all the more pronounced in the secularized world as members of the dominant society continue to ignore and erase the transcendental/supernatural reality, including the multiple worlds, not to mention the spirit-world. Such an closure has denied the believers any access to this whole realm of the supernatural reality as affirmed in indigenous shamanism. This closure further reduces the human ability to listen and decipher the voices of the spirits, let alone be guided by them so as to bring about greater wholeness to human lives and the well-being of the community.

Amidst the contrastive differences, I must admit that in the deplorable material poverty of the rural indigenous communities, there is more “wealth” than the dominant society, cultures and religions want to concede and credit the indigenous peoples for their shamanic beliefs. When I contrast this newly found “treasures” with the modern techno-centric lifestyle, the latter truly fizzles out in its apparent significance because of its apparent “hollowness,” not to mention the “emptiness” it leaves in the hearts of many.

Indeed, the shamanic world is different yet that difference unites the aboriginal peoples who subscribe to it and unites me with them. Now our differences on the common ground of the experiences of the shamanic world and I am invited to stand with them in the *subversive space* of indigenous shamanism. In this subversive space, the scientific rationality behind the current logic of globalization that reduces the “many worlds into one” world of neo-liberal capitalism is subverted by a “space” that promotes the many worlds in the one universe. It is in this light of systemic suppression and marginalization that I termed indigenous shamanism and the practices of the shamans as a *subaltern spirituality of suspect*. (Fung 2005:233)

(C) SHAMANIC POWER AS SUBVERSIVE

However, Garing’s composure is more perceivable through a really astounding narrative during the period known as *confrontasi* (a Malay word that signified the conflict) in which Garing was a border scout for the 2nd K.E.O. Gurkhas division of the British Army exercised his shamanic power.

One day, while on surveillance at the Sabah-Kalimantan border, the Gurkhas realized that there were Indonesian soldiers nearby. He was given orders to climb to the top of a Tarap tree and take secret photos of the enemy soldiers. He willingly agreed to do this as he could scale trees more easily than the others. However, the leafy branches of the Tarap tree blocked his view. He was then told to try and cut off some of the branches so that he could have a better view and shot. As he was cutting the first branch, it broke and made a loud noise falling to the ground. He decided it would be safer to get out of the tree. However, the sound of the falling branch had attracted the attention of the Indonesian soldiers. They spotted Garing trying to climb out of the tree and they shot at him. Somehow, the bullets hit the branches, breaking them, instead of hitting him. They shot off several branches of the tree. Mortars were fired on him as well. The Gurkhas ran off, thinking that he was killed. But later, he emerged amidst them. Unscathed. When he was sent back for another reconnaissance mission, they were again fired upon too. He instructed his fellow soldiers to cling onto him for protection. They escaped from the enemy without incurring any casualty. Only then it became apparent to the Gurkhas that Garing had power to protect as many as six of them at one time from any harm of bullets and mortars.

Garing's bravery earned him the royal medal of Her Majesty, the Queen of England and the Duke of Edinburgh. It was willy nilly a symbolic (albeit European) affirmation, of the local shamanic power that subverts the hegemonic might of the military of Indonesia, armed with weaponry of the powerful nations.

The subversive memory of the aboriginal communities of the Semai and the Muruts enables us to state conclusively that shamans and indigenous shamanism are symbolic of a *power-over* relation that baffles the mighty of the dominant society. This power is exercised in the actual asymmetric world where the unequal relation provides legitimacy to the systemic erasure of indigenous cultures and religiosity.

Landon believes the shaman are the "possessor of power, and it is power that enables him to mediate between the extrahuman and human. This concept of power is intimately linked to the idea of energy forces, the manifestation of these forces in the soul, and the growth and development of humans" as "manifested as light or aura . . . in songs" for "the shaman's power interacts with the global energy system" (Ibid. 14). Shamans draw upon "this energy through the ecstatic experience, through dreams or through trances induced by drugs" (Ibid.: 20). In view of this, I contend that shamans and shamanism are existential embodiment and symbolic expression of subversive power yet unbeknownst to many in the dominant society (See Fung 2000).

For any crosscultural encounters to be beneficial, Overton advocates the needs for *shamanic realism*. He defines it as "the realistic presentation of an esoteric worldview which is not the result of the imagination of the author, but principally of a system of beliefs of ethnographic origins. Shamanic realism, therefore, transcends, as does shamanism itself, the barriers of history and geography, and therefore of the Latin American continent and of the Spanish language or of its literary tradition" (Overton 1998: 25). He concludes that shamanic realism is the "result of the presence of a system of cultural beliefs

whose indelible influence on the author becomes patent in his or her artistic representation” (Ibid.: 53).

Only shamanic realism offers, during such crosscultural encounters, glimpses of the inalienable aboriginal dignity which is being constantly *remembered* in shamanic rituals which enable them to attain full human flourishing in their everyday struggle for fuller humanity.

PART II VIABLE STRATEGIES OF STRUGGLE

As the global and local world is simultaneously evolving, although at different rates and at different levels, it is nevertheless clear that viable strategies need to be enumerated for a forward-movement of crosscultural struggles for a fuller human flourishing of the dignity of the aboriginal peoples. I shall dwell on the strategies of struggle for members of the dominant society and the aboriginal communities, with a special focus on women and the upcoming generation.⁴

C.1. Members of the Dominant Society

- A. Believers of the dominant society have much to benefit from the academic research on the indigenous belief-systems and the cultural-religious practices of the shamans.⁵ Such seminars and symposia aimed at a critical reflection and understanding of the relation between the Christian faith and indigenous belief systems must involve a critical interface between theology and social sciences such as anthropology. In this way, believers undergo a paradigmatic change of perspectives with regard to fellow human beings (anthropology), the world (cosmology) and God (theology), including the end-goals of life in the world (teleology).
- B. The anthropology that accords full dignity to the aboriginal peoples will be the horizon that motivates members of the dominant society to struggle for the promotion of the democratic space wherein aboriginal people’s voices will be heard. When spoken, members of the dominant society need to ensure that they are translated into policies that promote the full human flourishing of aboriginal peoples. In other words, aboriginal peoples must be respected as persons who are equal citizens of the nation and equal disciples of the local churches.

⁴ The strategies below were formulated in the course of the aforementioned symposium and in the dialogue session in a tribal village. The one-day symposium has different sessions. In the first two session, two indigenous researchers on shamans known as *bobolian*, Rita Lasimbang and Benedict Topin shared with the 153 participants the findings of their extensive research, and a live-interview of a woman *bobolian*, Inai Kusia, conducted by Garus Ahtoi in the hearing of the participants. The above-mentioned dialogue was held in a tribal village called *Sinukalungan*, after the group of us witnessed the thanksgiving ritual known as *magavau*.

⁵ Shaman is a term differently depending on the regional contexts and localities. For instance, in the Malaysian state of Perak, shamans among the Senoi group of aboriginal people (Orang Asli) are known respectively in Malay as *pawang* and *halaq*.

- C. The anthropology of human flourishing must motivate members and believers to examine and recognize the morality (intention and values) of the shamans who *work the system of indigenous beliefs* to determine whether they are gifts from God and therefore agents of God's Spirit or the evil spirit. Respect the inherent pool of indigenous wisdom embedded in their oral traditions and sacred narratives, for on the basis of such knowledges do they gain a deep understanding of the criteria, principles and norms that regulate aboriginal cultural-religious beliefs and practices.
- D. Discourses in the academia and texts in educational systems must be rightly presented to *re-present* the rich cultural heritages of the aboriginal community so as to promote greater sensitivity and respect for the dignity of the aboriginal peoples.
- E. Respectfully acknowledge that the shamans are in an authoritative position to explain (a) the kind of power with which they heal and exorcise for they can differentiate between white and black magic (known in Malaysia as "*ilmu putih*" "*ilmu hitam*" respectively); (b) the intended purposes of the use of such power. Reputable shamans are able to recognize and emphasize the selfless service of the community as a value and the selfish greed to enrich themselves as a disvalue to the community.
- F. Death-dealing powers inherent in indigenous shamanism must be discouraged and denounced as a disservice to society after a process of critical examination with the assistance of multidisciplinary expertises, comprising local reputable indigenous shamans and wise community leaders.
- G. Reputable shamans steeped in shamanic expertises must be regarded as partners in the concerted local and global efforts to develop more wholistic approaches to ecology, the bodily health and wellbeing of individuals and the local communities.
- H. Periodically participate in the rituals of life and seasonal festivities when invited by the aboriginal peoples. Such participation sensitized members of the dominant society to aboriginal cultural ethos, values and worldviews so as to be to appreciate their worlds *in their terms* and become committed promoters of the sacred heritage the aboriginal peoples.
- I. Solidarity with aboriginal women enjoins women in the dominant society to learn, value, defend and promote the *subversive spaces* that belong rightfully to aboriginal women so that they continue to exercise their roles in the promotion of aboriginal cultures and society.
- J. For the young women and men, organize learning circles that encourage localized learning through sustained but periodic long-term exposure-immersion lived-in programmes in the aboriginal communities this passage to the aboriginal world and then upon the subsequent returns, will enriched the young so that the young in turn re-educate the young in the dominant society.
- K. Organize work camp for the young women and men, always in collaboration with the local aboriginal communities, so that the young women and men work together on common projects that will deepen mutual friendship and build a world of equal citizens and equal disciples in the church.

- L. Express solidarity with the aboriginal peoples by *standing with them* in their subversive space of shamanism wherein the *power-over* the mighty comes from the world of spirits and the Sacred.

C.2. Members of the Aboriginal Community

Given my limited experiences as an outsider, I wish to humbly propose the followings as ideas for the kind consideration of the aboriginal peoples. The aim is to further *ground and re-root* the aboriginal identity and personhood, essential building-blocks of aboriginal dignity:

- M. Participate faithfully in the *school of life* where rituals of the passages of life are celebrated to commemorate the origin of the world and aboriginal peoples and shamanic healings carried out and prayers offered by shamans to accompany the aboriginal struggles. [What is of the spirits is sacred and runs deep in one's blood.]
- N. Learn from the lips and hearts of the wise aboriginal women and men leaders and the reputable shamanesses and shamans of the community to reinforce the aboriginal identity and dignity. [What is heard reverberates in the deep recesses of one's soul]
- O. Organize and encourage the young to be involved in the activities of the *school of life* for it is a different space for unlearning what is learnt in the dominant society and re-learnt the age-old wisdom stored up in the womb of the aboriginal communities.
- P. For the aboriginal women, stand tall and proud of the spaces uniquely belonging to aboriginal women and continue the struggle to be egalitarian society of equals citizens and equal disciples.
- Q. For the young aboriginal women and men, give time to be alone with the wise, be they the respected elders and the renowned shamans, earn your places in their hearts that they may impart the wisdom to the young women and men and initiate the young into the world that they constantly criss-cross back and forth in order to learn to appreciate and behold the sacred mysteries of life that lies the formulae for a harmonious nature in our ecological system.
- R. The very young need be challenged to commit themselves to be apprenticed as shamaness and shamans so that the communities have access the subversive powers of the spirits in aboriginal everyday struggles.
- S. Stand together, young and old, in the subversive space of shamanic world of the Sacred and the spirits in order to neutralize the subverting forces of erasure.

These strategies enumerated are by no means exhaustive and need to be reformulated with the change of times as they are context-specific, therefore value-laden as they time and space-bound.

CONCLUSION

The heightened local, regional and global flow of consciousness that promotes aboriginal dignity is based on the increasing appreciation of the capacity within aboriginal communities and their cultural and religious traditions to assert their *subversive spaces* in the exercise of their collective memory. Aboriginal dignity is firmly grounded in aboriginal cultures and religiosity and more particularly in aboriginal shamanism. The differences occasioned by the gaps in rationality and logics divide us. Yet the common experiences of the shamanic world of spirits enable the differences to be celebrated so as to foster the sense of a unifying solidarity among ALL. The growing sense of solidarity must be the condition of the possibility of the collaborative efforts of both members of the aboriginal community and the dominant society in the process of evolving any society. Conscientious and consistent efforts must be brought to bear on the authorities and their policies through the strategic involvement of multiple stakeholders, especially organic and academic intellectuals, grassroots organizations, religious organizations, social movements and committed citizens in the civil society. The process of social transformation must ensure that in an evolving society, there is “democratic space and *subversive space* to coexist to bring about the full human flourishing where aboriginal peoples themselves know they stand equal with the members of dominant society.

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