



Miralarringu – 'It Becomes Visible'

**Remarks at the Launch of the Aboriginal Males Healing
Centre 'Our Vision' Document**

**The Honourable Justice Peter Quinlan
Chief Justice of Western Australia**

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It gives me great pleasure to speak here tonight at the launch of the Aboriginal Males Healing Centre's Our Vision document, *Miralarringu*.

Thank you Ben Cuimara for your generous welcome. I pay my respects to the elders of the land on which we meet the Whadjuk people and to all the people of the Noongar nation, past, present and emerging and acknowledge their continued stewardship of this land. And may also I acknowledge Devon Cuimara, the many board members and especially elders of the AMHC, and their particular responsibility for Martu and Nyiyarpili lore and culture, which plays such an important role in the vision of the Centre.

As you all know, *Miralarringu* is Martu Wankgka meaning 'it becomes visible'.

It is a very appropriate title for a document intended to spell out the vision of a Centre and a program such as the AMHC: Its vision that all Aboriginal women and children live safe and healthy lives free of family violence. I will turn to that vision of the future a little later.

But before that, I wanted to explore the deeper meanings of that word *Miralarringu* and its translation 'it becomes visible'.

Notice what it doesn't say. It doesn't say 'it *is* visible'.

It **becomes** visible.

Something that was not visible before, is visible now, or is becoming visible. Some kind of veil has been lifted.

This is important because, the vision that we speak of is not just as vision of the future but a vision of the present. Being able to see something now which we couldn't see before, in our communities, or cultures and in ourselves.

Some of you may know the work of the French cultural anthropologist, Rene Girard, who died only a few years ago.

Girard had theory of human cultural origins that saw violence as inextricably linked to human culture; *all* human culture. His book, *Violence and the Sacred*, arguably his most famous, set out a theory of human culture as being bound up with human violence.

One of Girard's particular insights, in that context, was that for violence to continue in a culture it has to be invisible. For this reason, so he suggested, much of our history, myth and ritual is designed to make us blind to the violence in the culture that forms us.

Of course, its very easy to see the violence in some other culture or other person. We as humans are very good at finding the violence in other people, an ability that can leave us feeling triumphant and superior to those others.

The one violence that we can't see is our own; in our communities, or cultures and in ourselves. Most people don't think of themselves as being violent, even when we are. As Girard once said:

To escape responsibility for violence we imagine it is enough to pledge to never be the first to do violence. But no one ever sees himself as casting the first stone. Even the most violent persons believe that they are always reacting to a violence committed in the first instance by someone else.

So violence is a cycle and it embeds itself in our history and culture without us even recognising it; or perhaps more accurately, **because** we don't recognise it.

So the first sense in which *Miralarringu* is important is that the violence itself becomes visible. This is especially so with family violence which is often hidden from our view; or shrouded in silence and shame.

As Devon Cuimara put it:

My desire to establish the Aboriginal Male's Healing Centre comes from seeing violence in my own family and in the Aboriginal community in general. It goes back to my father and my grandfather. There were generations when police wouldn't worry about a complaint from a woman. It was something that was seen and not heard, like we were as children.

What Devon is referring to here, of course, is intergenerational trauma and, as he says, "it goes back to my father and my grandfather". He sees the violence, which is the first step.

Of course, however, the violence goes back further. It goes back to colonization, dispossession and forced removal of children. There is violence embedded in that history too. How well do we see that violence, if at all?

And when it comes to men's violence, it is essential that men see it and see it for what it is. Men's violence is a men's issue.

The vision of the Aboriginal Male's Healing Centre takes that a step further and recognises that aboriginal men's violence must be addressed as an aboriginal men's issue. Not because aboriginal men are peculiarly prone to violence or because family violence is peculiar to Aboriginal families and communities. Those suggestions, as the document itself says, are absurd.

On the contrary, the recognition that aboriginal men's violence must be addressed as an aboriginal men's issue is important because a connection with, and participation, in Aboriginal culture must be a key component of addressing violence within Aboriginal families and communities and in finding solutions to those problems.

That is where the vision of the Aboriginal Male's Healing Centre comes in. It is the vision of a residential healing program that incorporates Western clinical care and rehabilitation underpinned by Aboriginal lore and culture lore as the key healing element.

It is an ambitious but achievable vision that has already begun to take shape.

The proposed site for the healing centre has been identified on Nyiyarpili land near Newman and transferred to the Centre by the Shire of East Pilbara

Its location on a significant dreaming path – Kangaroo Dreaming – highlights the significant role of traditional lore and culture in addressing Aboriginal men who use violence and for achieving the Centre's vision that all Aboriginal women and children live safe and healthy lives free of family violence.

I look forward now to listening to the articulation of that vision from Devon himself.

Thank you for your time.