

Aboriginal Contributions to the Canadian Cultural Unconscious

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There is a deep wound in the Canadian cultural unconscious. A gaping wound. A wound that gets touched daily. A wound that is some 400 years old. When it gets touched, reopened, the scab torn off, the archetypal reenactment of First Contact is replayed. Again and again and again. Sides get chosen. Lines get drawn. Flags fly. Warrior songs and battle cries rise. Bridges and railway tracks get blocked.

The First Contact story is our history, but history is not over and history is not past. It plays out again and again and again. In our news reels. In our prejudices and projections. In our policies. In our nightmares.

I have been asked to present on the topic of the Aboriginal contributions to the Canadian cultural unconscious. A daunting

topic. A topic many feel that one with skin as white as mine, with eyes as blue as mine, and with aboriginal blood quantum as low as mine, I should decline the invitation. I should take my compensatory archetypal role and let the reiterating drama unfold while I stand sidelined and silenced by ancestral guilt and caucasian shame. As it always has been. As it always will be.

Call me courageous, call me foolish, call me whatever you wish, but call me you have. And I have answered the call. Like the famed warrior, Odysseus, I lash myself to the mast. I ask you to do the same. Today, here, now, let us take the beeswax from our ears, and in this beautiful place, on Traditional Stoney Nakoda Land, at this inaugural gathering, at the First Symposium for Canadian Jungian Analysts, let us listen to the sirens' soundtrack of the Canadian cultural unconscious. Let us hear the archetypal story without becoming possessed by its discordant energies.

Jungian analyst Michael Conforti speaks of archetypal patterning in the field. Jungian analyst Tess Castleman speaks of

the tribal unconscious. Mohawk Teacher and Traditional Healer Diane Longboat speaks of a vision where all peoples find their way back to indigenosity and sit once again in peace at the Creator's sacred fire.

I have been blessed to call each of these pioneers my teachers. I do not speak for them, but I speak here and now because of them. What I have distilled from some ten years of intensive academic, psychological, and spiritual study in their classrooms and before their sacred fires is this: the Canadian cultural unconscious will carry the unhealed wound and repeat the tragic story that is our legacy until we take the beeswax from our ears, lash ourselves to the mast of the unanswered and the unredeemed, and sail into the siren infested waters.

Come sail away.

Ten years ago I was asked by a Swiss training analyst and former supervisor, Peter Ammann, if I could gather together indigenous healers and teachers from this continent to join in

dialogue with Jungian analysts at the International Association of Jungian Analysts Congress in Montreal in 2010. Note to self.

Say NO next time you are asked to do something beyond your reach, beyond your experience, beyond your competence. I

rarely heed these notes to self. Evidenced by my standing here today. In my defence, I was intrigued by the historical location.

Montreal. New France. Ancestral territory, personal and cultural.

Like the First Nations attitude greeting the Europeans that is our historical and cultural inheritance, I innocently said, Yes! I

welcomed the opportunity. I trusted that such a dialogue was needed. I trusted that such a dialogue was possible. What I

discovered was that both are true and both are impossible.

Granted, we achieved some shared understandings on that

August weekend a decade ago. We listened to stories and songs and teachings and cases and theories and ideas and dreams.

Behind the scene we shared dreams, and complexes, and

personality conflicts, and at vulnerable and tender times, we

glimpsed the deep pain that is just below the surface. It was a difficult and tenuous treaty of understanding forged over those three days on the panel, but it started something. Something in me. Perhaps we could say the cultural unconscious that is my legacy as a Canadian Jungian analyst and distant descendant to the Algonkin, the French, the Scottish, and the Irish, got constellated. My cultural unconscious was constellated.

I have been sailing these stormy waters for a decade. At times the waves threaten to pull me under. At times the shores seem so distant and alien. At times the ship, untethered and keelless, spins in circles. At times the only beacon through the fog is a dream. I am reminded: “Never share an unanalyzed dream. Never share an unanalyzed dream publicly. Never share an unanalyzed dream publicly in front of a Jungian audience.”

Well, I guess now is Never!

We are in Newfoundland preparing for a sweat lodge on the other side of a deep gorge. We, of European descent, must

gather the stones, known traditionally as the Grandfathers that will be asked to offer up their spirits and their wisdom in the SouloftheMother Lodge. We make a decent pile of the stones and the Lodge leaders on the other side of the gorge ask that we toss the stones to them. One by one. I am fearful that this is disrespectful or dangerous to the Grandfathers and the consequence of dropping any of them too great. With coaxing from the Ceremonial leader, a strong Mohawk woman, I agree to toss my share of the stones. As each is tossed and caught, a bridge begins to materialize across the gorge. One by one, as the Grandfathers are released and received, the bridge gets stronger. Soon it has fully materialized and it is safe for us and for them to cross to and fro.

Where is this new-found-land where a bridge of mutuality may be built? How wide is the gorge? Who are the Grandfathers with wisdom to share? Who are the Elder women to lead us?

Look around. We are the seventh generation. We are the ones we have been waiting for. We are our ancestor's best hope. So, perhaps this too is our work. To be willing to wade respectfully into the wounds of the Canadian cultural unconscious and to seek the healing hidden in the collective cultural trauma, waiting in the folds of guilt, whispering in the silenced voices, and calling to us from the cultural complexes that both divide and connect us.

Granted, I have little authority to articulate what aboriginal contributions are or are not. Granted, there are those of you more experienced than I to analyze the unconscious, cultural or otherwise. All I have to lay before you are my experiences. My stories. Stories from the field. Stories from the Lodge and the analytical office. So, sit back and hear my story. As Grandfather Coyote says, "This story may be true. This story may be false. This story tells a lie to speak a truth."

It was the time of the Sugar Moon. The third moon of Creation. As the maple and birch sap begins to run, like Bear, we awaken from the slumber of a long cold winter. A winter where we have surely felt the 'ice-o-lation' of some 400 years. Looking around, marvelling at our survival, we give thanks to the Creator. For though our skin hangs loosely upon our bones, though our medicine pouches be in dire need of renewal, though our food stores be meager, though our dreams be yet unspoken, we have survived a long cold winter. And, knowing that the sap has begun to run and the seeds beneath the soil have begun to stir, we begin to wonder about our brothers and sisters across the gorge. The Elders remind us, it is the time for the 'Edge of the Forest Ceremony'.

In keeping with ancient Traditions, traditions planted in the soil of this continent long before the visionaries of distant shores decided the earth was round rather than flat, an Elder woman announces that it is time that our wonderings be answered with

action. So, we gather our dreams into our medicine bags and we journey to the Edge of the Forest. We travel to the edge of our known territory toward our neighbouring tribe. If the long cold winter has taught us anything it has taught us this, we do not go to missionize or colonize or analyze our neighbour, we go to meet them, at the edge of the forest. At the edge of our known territory.

When we arrive at our destination, at the edge which in 400 years or more has become a gorge, we sit softly upon the lap of our Mother. We open our medicine bags. We offer our dreams to the Creator.

If those we have come to meet wish to be met, if they too have survived the violent storms of this long deep freeze, if the sickness of First Contact has not annihilated them, they too will gather their dreams into their medicine bags and journey to the edge of the forest, to the edge of their known territory. And when they arrive at their destination, at the edge which in 400 years or more has become a gorge, they too will sit softly upon the lap of

our Mother. They will open their medicine bags. They will offer their dreams to the Creator.

This is when the Edge of the Forest Ceremony Proper begins. Two tribes, facing one another across a gorge of trauma, a cultural unconscious of reiterating pain and archetypal reenactment, brought together by the wispy threads of dreaming, longing for a future brighter than the bitter past, here, now, on the lap of our Mother, an Elder woman rises and speaks. The first words spoken are words of condolence.

My brother, my sister. It has been many moons since we have sat together in the lap of our Mother. I see by the cloud that veils your eyes that you have seen many battles. Some you have won. Many you have lost. Many you are still fighting. I see in your eyes the story of cultural genocide. My brother, my sister. I see by the lump in your throat that you have been silenced by the grief of too many losses. The loss of land, language, culture, stories, traditions, songs. I hear in your silence the story of

cultural genocide. My brother, my sister. I see by the heaviness that sits upon your heart that you have beheld generational tragedies. Poverty. Inadequate housing. Sickness. Suicide. Domestic violence. Addictions. Abuse. I feel in your heavy heart the story of cultural genocide.

My brother, my sister. I am able to see these things and hear these things and feel these things because they touch the edge of my inner forest, and show me what I could not see, or hear, or know exists in me without you. Your wounds show me that what was done to my People, taught me the cruelty to do what I have done to you. Your wounds remind me of the lost lament in my own ancestral story. A story my people failed to flee. A story we failed to rewrite. A story we failed to transform. My brother, my sister your wounds show me my own ancestral wounds.

As the Edge of the Forest Ceremony guides us, let us take up the finest white doe skin. Let us lay the wampum upon the

sacred place. Let us open our earlids to the medicine songs. Let us open our medicine bags and offer up our shared dreams. Let us ask the Creator to wipe the veils from our eyes so that we might see anew. Let us ask the Creator to wipe the constricting lump from our throats so that we might speak our truth. Let us ask the Creator to wipe the heavy burden from our hearts so that we might open to one another again. My brother, my sister, together let us remember ALL stories of ALL the ancestors.

And so it was, and so it is, the sap is beginning to run. The seeds are waking beneath the soil. Grandfathers are being tossed and caught, released and received, and a dream bridge is materializing across the First Contact gorge. This may be true. This may be false. This tells a lie to speak a truth.

The name give to me by my parents is Muriel Elaine McMahon. The name given to me by Spirit is Wolfsong. I am of Irish Catholic, French, Scottish, and Algonkin Kipawa ancestry. On this continent, my ancestral bones are buried in the soil of

Glace Bay Nova Scotia, along the shores of the Grand River in Brantford Ontario, and amidst the rocks and waves of the Ottawa River watershed where I make my home today in Golden Lake, Ontario. I have always lived along a river. The Grand River, the St. Lawrence River, the Speed River, and now the Bonnechere River. To the French fur traders the river I live along today is called the Bonne chere. To the Irish loggers who cleared the land, the river is called the Bone Shear. To those who live along her strong and meandering snake-like body, she is called the river of abundance and time. One learns a lot about one self when the day is sourced by a river song. One learns a lot about one's People when the day is sourced by a river song. One learns a lot about one's history and herstory when the day is sourced by a river song.

About fifteen years ago in the deep bosom of Algonquin Provincial Park, I received a dream. It was late fall. The trees were singing their full throated Death songs. We had spent the

day exploring the little know site of aboriginal vision pits and rock carvings under the stony face of The Guardian in Rock Lake. I had stumbled upon a obscure citation about the indigenous pits in a more obscure guide book to Algonquin Park, serendipitously found under a stack of magazines in a used bookstore along Highway 60. I was a student at the time at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich just coming to the threshold of my Propädeutikum exams. On my extensive To Do List I had an outstanding paper for my ethnology exam. Following the meagre instructions, and trusting my intuition and my husband's tracking prowess, we located the site. We stood in awe. We cultivated a quality of presence - to be so present so as to be seen. Respectfully we offered tobacco and snapped a few pictures. That night I dreamed that I was to birth a hand drum and sing a river song.

Over the next few months I ferreted out an obsolete paper about a brief archaeological dig of the vision pits site from the

Ontario Museum of Archaeology. Source by this scholarship and my own experience with the pits, I wrote my paper and took my exam. My examiner was Peter Ammann, the same analyst who some years later would ask me to convene a panel of aboriginal teachers and healers to join in a dialogue at the 2010 IAAP Congress in Montreal. He was delighted by my paper, by the living ethnology of this land, by the richness of Canadian cultural unconscious that I was guided to experience, explore, and articulate.

Years later, once the distractions of training to become an analyst had quieted, I honoured my Algonquin dream and birthed a hand drum. I stretched the deer hide and sanded the cedar frame throughout the shortest day of the year. My drum fetus hung in the Grandmother Cedar tree waiting for birth throughout the longest night. When I cut her from Grandmother Cedar at dawn and cradled her inside to the warmth of the sacred fire, I was aggrieved to discover her skin was floppy and the ties that

held her against the fame were drooping. Instantly creative delight and potential gave way to guilt. Who was I to think I could birth a native hand drum? How arrogant. How typical of my dominant race. How culturally inappropriate. I took what felt like centuries' old collective grief and guilt back to bed and pulled the heavy covers over my head. Instinctively, I lay the stillborn drum against my naked belly and after many tears, fell into a deep wounded sleep. I don't remember what I dreamed, but when I awoke a few hours later, I peeled the drum from my warm belly and discovered that her skin was taunt and her traces tight.

When I sounded her for the first time, she announced that her name was Snowdrop. She sang her birth song into the new born light of winter Solstice along the Speed river. The Speed River flows into the Grand River, the Grand River into Lake Erie, tumbles over Niagara Falls, flows into lake Ontario, and finally finds the St. Lawrence River, gateway to the wine dark sea that my European ancestors first navigated.

When I first started dreaming from the Canadian cultural unconscious, I was a child. As I said earlier, I grew up along the shores of the Grand River. The original homeland of the Netural tribe and the eventual treaty homeland of the Six Nations. Exiled from the traditional territory that is now upstate New York for their loyalty to the Crown during the American Revolution, the Crown gifted the Six Nations reservation land along the shores of the Grand River. A parcel of land, six miles on either side of the river, from source to mouth, “for as long as the river flows and for as long as the green grass grows”. Growing up next to this territory, a former residential school ground was my childhood playground, and the Chapel of the Mohawks was my secret sacred place. So, it seemed natural that I would dream of gathering medicines in unfamiliar meadows, or canoeing on spring cold rivers, or dancing around scented sacred fires, or listening to medicine stories at the knees of wizened old ones. Even my first analysis translated these dream images as my nascent self, my original instructions,

my native soulscape. Only in a reverie of creative writing that began on a dark night of the soul and ended some six weeks later did I come to understand that these stories were ancestral stories. These were my ghosts. Redeemed from the cultural unconscious, I called the collection The Ancient Ones. I accepted that the objective psyche was real and that we are sometimes dreamed by the bones of the land we inhabit.

Jung said of the American psyche, 'scratch the surface and you find the red Indian'. I scratched the surface of my Canadian psyche and I found forgotten ancestors, both aboriginal and European. I found my stillborn ancestral auntie. In The Ancient Ones she was named Snowdrop. The first bloom of Spring. The flower that pushes through frozen ground. The first sign that in the winterland announces that Nature has awoken from a deep sleep and is rising up, yet again. This ancestor, this ghost, this spiritus loci sings with me each morning in the dream drum that bears her name.

Esteemed analyst James Hollis, writes in his book, “Hauntings: Dispelling the Ghosts Who Run Our Lives” that the dead in us are not dead, they are not gone. In James Hillman’s and Sonu Shamdasami’s book, “The Lament of the Dead”, we are challenged to begin speaking to our dead rather than about our dead. In “The Red Book”, Jung tells the reader: “Then turn to the dead listen to their lament and accept them with love. Be not their blind spokesman / there are prophets who in the end have stoned themselves. But we seek salvation and hence we need to reverse what has become and to accept the dead, who have fluttered through the air and lived like bats under our roofs since time immemorial. The new will be built on the old and the meaning of what has become will become manifold. Your poverty in what has become, you will thus deliver into the wealth of the future ~Carl Jung; Red Book

As you learned earlier, when the Edge of the Forest Ceremony commences, the first words spoken are words of

condolence. This, my dear colleagues, is the password into the Canadian cultural unconscious. **Condolence.** Beyond the threshold of consciousness we meet our dead. Those born on this land and those whom for generations upon generations have fled or have been exiled from their own ancestral homes. Red and yellow and black and white, so the medicine wheel teaches. Four colours, four directions, four nations of people. We are told, the Red People stand in the eastern door, the Yellow People stand in the southern door, the Black People stand in the western door, and the White People stand in the northern door. If this be the original design of creation as so many of the stories and the songs of this continent teach, the mosaic that strains to become Canada stands a pretty good chance of sorting the chaos into a new creation. A vision of shared understanding. A medicine wheel of peace.

Make no mistake, we walk on the bones of our ancestors.
All our ancestors. Once a loved one has been planted in the soil,

we carry them in the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the water we drink. This is true indigenosity. Connection to the land. Connection to the source of our being. The Land. Strong and Free?

Our Land IS native land. *'Oh, Canada, Our home on native land'*, or so the rewrite of the anthem sings. As such, the dead we meet at the edge of the forest, at the threshold to the Canadian cultural unconscious are both the victims and the perpetrators of a reiterating home and exile narrative. The dead are our brothers and our sisters. They are the neighbouring tribe. Do we have the courage to "revere what has become and accept the dead"? Can we carry the grief rather than the guilt of this shared story? Dare we wipe the veils from our own eyes, loosen our own constricted throats, and weep the tears of the ancestors into our own river songs? Will a new song rise up from a 400 year old winter like a beacon in the very longest of nights?

I met an American Indian woman training to become a Jungian analyst at a conference a few years ago. She told me she struggled in her training and her analysis against the interpretation of her tribal dreaming as evidence of her collective cultural complex. I'm not sure exactly what the interpretation meant other than that, to her, it felt dismissive of her lived cultural history and living cultural identity. The analytical interpretation was disempowering. American analyst Tess Castleman writes of the 'tribal unconscious' in her book, Threads, Knots, Tapestries. She explores dreams and synchronicities to reveal a layer of dreaming that is neither entirely subjective nor entirely objective. Neither entirely personal nor entirely collective. Neither entirely image nor entirely archetype. Tess has dreamed with me in the Lodge of SouloftheMother near Six Nations along the shores of the Grand River. Led by Mohawk Elder Diane Longboat, we have together explored dreams and dreaming in that Lodge. Beginning in Montreal at the Congress, continuing in Toronto at some

Unconscious No More events, and climaxing in Zurich in 2013 around a sacred fire that was, to pacify the Swiss, a rose bush in the garden at the C. G. Jung Institute. In these shared tribal dreams analysts and Indians explored, questioned, discussed and reflected upon the dreams that are dreaming us.

Lately I have been working in supervision with Michael Conforti and I am enrolled as a student at his Assisi Institute. I am learning to discern the complex of the dream from the complex of the dreamer. I am learning to lash myself to the mast, take the beeswax from my ears and listen to the howl of the siren's song. I am learning to feel the tug of archetypal reenactment without acting out. Repetition compulsion. Reiterating stories. I am learning to translate the field. Here is my current translation of what is emerging for Canadian Jungian Analysts:

We Canadian Jungians, for better or for worse, are a tribe. Whether we trained here or abroad, we are standing today at a

crossroads of claiming our unique identity. How are we and our work shaped by the vast geography and troubled history of the land we occupy? What are we heir to? Who haunts the threshold of our understanding of what it means to be a Canadian? What are the aboriginal contributions to the Canadian cultural identity? This siren song is our current poverty in what is become, and our future wealth.

Perhaps this is my naiveté, perhaps this is my undying optimism, perhaps this is part of my Canadian sensibilities, but I invite you all to labour toward the day when we open our eyes, throats, and hearts and acknowledge the aboriginal contributions to who we are **and** who we are not. When we meet all our dead at the edge of the forest. When we listen to their lament and accept them with love. This is my dream, my dream bridge.

Across the gorge, across the ocean, across the vastness that is become Canada. Thank you. Meegwetch.

Libby Roderick, Bones, from How Could Anyone, 2005
Drew Dellinger, Ancestors and Angels, from Love Letters to the Milky Way
Muriel McMahon, Riversong.