

Tjanara links Aboriginal custom with reconciliation task ahead

The new face of Aboriginal Australia, intent on mending the hurt of the past, is confident, assertive and just as likely to be female.

Just such a face belongs to highly educated in the white world but no less a part of her indigenous world.

Tjanara Goreng-Goreng, a former officer of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and now director of the Norimba Aboriginal unit of the NSW Attorney-General's Department, held a seminar on Aboriginal reconciliation spellbound yesterday as she told of her journey back to her own Aboriginality.

"I had been 12 years at Catholic schools, but towards the end I found myself looking forward to going back to my own country," she said.

That return meant leaving teachers' college to travel to Cape York where she underwent the traditional instruction in Women's Business.

There, an old man told her that it was more important than ever because soon, the white man would want to



Picture: STEVE GOSCH

Tjanara Goreng-Goreng:
Bridging two cultures.

know about Aboriginal culture, and he told her to be patient.

"I suppose I had grown up learning that money was important — to be a doctor or lawyer; but then I learnt that Aboriginal lore was what mattered.

"To have a sense of who your spiritual self is the

most important thing of all — and I hope you [non-Aborigines] will pass that on, too."

With an honours degree in politics, a stint as a university lecturer and the foundation director of the Aboriginal Education Unit at Charles Sturt University, Ms Goreng-Goreng has had more than a passing acquaintance with the non-Aboriginal world.

"Aboriginal culture didn't simply follow the Industrial Revolution: It recognised always that spiritual culture was far more important," she said.

After having belatedly been admitted to the rites of Aboriginal Women's Business, Ms Goreng-Goreng embarked on a supplementary career as a traditional Aboriginal healer, dancer and song maker, and now facilitates gatherings in Aboriginal sacred business. She now has the permission of her elders to conduct Women's Business gatherings for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women.

— NORMAN ABJOESEN

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