

ADAPTATION OF INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING IN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE: NARRATIVE AND POETIC ASPECTS

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Abstract. The article focuses on adapting the mindset found in Indigenous Australian literature, which has been significantly under-represented recently. It explores how Indigenous thinking can contribute non-Westernised thoughts towards global crises and complex human issues, including climate change, national genocide, authoritarian regimes, wars, diseases, and poverty. The foundational principle for interpreting Indigenous literature is the First Nations concept of Care for Country (the Lore), which embodies a unique philosophical and ecological understanding developed over centuries. In this context, Country is regarded as an interconnected whole involving the environment (land, water, sky) and social relationships (human and non-human). This perspective promotes an ecological worldview where the land is sacred and governed by law, shaping the relationships between people, society, and Country. The article puts special emphasis on interpreting Indigenous concepts like Country, Mother Nature, Lore, Law, Connection, Story, Love, and Sharing, viewing them through the lens of Indigenous spirituality. The research aims to highlight the unique use of Indigenous pronouns, time perception, and nature imagery, which are crucial for understanding this tradition. Linguistic features of Indigenous Australian languages also reflect their unique worldview. For example, using pronouns such as us-two, us-only, us-all, you-two, we-all, you-all emphasizes the interconnection between the individual and the community. Ultimately, it is demonstrated that adapted Indigenous Australian storytelling can illuminate past injustices, provide healing through truth-telling in the present, and guide a meaningful path forward for multicultural contemporary Australian society.

Key Words. Indigenous storytelling, Indigenous Australian literature, narrative structure, poetic means.

“Being Aboriginal is not the color of your skin but your connection and responsibility to Country and all the things in nature; it is about your connection to trees, fish, birds, rivers,

rocks, and stars. It isn't about how you look. It isn't even about your bloodlines. It is about soothing unseen, deep inside you."
Uncle Paul Gordon

Indigenous Australian spirituality, which is over 60,000 years old and preserves the knowledge of over 1800 generations, is unique in its power to heal the contemporary world. Adapting Aboriginal cultural and philosophical insights, rules, and obligations into everyday life will inevitably: 1) generate personal growth by finding one's true purpose in life; 2) make one's community/country/world better for future generations by taking care of Country. Among the key theories for interpreting Indigenous Australian literature is the Aboriginal principle of *Care for Country*, a unique philosophical and ecological practice of spiritual connection with nature and one's birthplace that has been espoused and practised by Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islander peoples for many centuries. Elders such as Quandamooka woman Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Gai-mariagal and Wiradjuri man Dennis Foley, and Yankunytjatjara man Bob Randall often discuss this topic in a spiritual context. They refer to Country as both their owner and a maternal figure, highlighting its significance as a core component of cultural identity. It is the opposite of Western views of land ownership: they are not owners of the land¹, as "the land owns us" (Rendal 2009); they are custodians. It is important to notice that the term "traditional custodian" is often used interchangeably with the term "traditional owner" in the context of native title of Australia,² including in acknowledgments of Country. However, the role of a custodian involves a responsibility to care for Country within the ongoing tradition, which reflects a worldview that differs from Western concepts of land ownership and property rights. In contrast, the term "owner" serves as a reminder to Aboriginal people that their land was never formally ceded to anyone, highlighting the history of Australia's denial of ownership and Aboriginal people's sovereignty over their lands. This is why today the term "Traditional Custodian" is preferred and used in a capitalized form.

The present study focuses on the First Nations principle of "Care for Country" to explain key Indigenous cultural concepts such as Mother Nature, Lore, Law, Connection,

¹ The concept of First Nations Australian traditional custodianship stems from the strong and enduring connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the lands and seas they inhabit, collectively referred to as Country.

² Native title refers to the rights recognized by Australian law that are held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups or individuals over land. These rights stem from their ongoing maintenance of traditional laws and customs. Aboriginal title rights were first acknowledged in Australian common law through the landmark case *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* in 1992. Subsequently, this doctrine was implemented and modified by the Native Title Act of 1993.

Story, Love, and Sharing, all viewed through the prism of Indigenous spirituality. The research presented here aims to elucidate the narrative structures employed in Aboriginal storytelling. Emphasis will be placed on the use of Indigenous pronoun systems, unique conceptualisations of time, and nature imagery that serve as pivotal elements in understanding these narratives. Furthermore, this study will provide a typology of Aboriginal stories, including Dreamtime/Ngurrampaa stories, creative narratives, and traditional tales for children and adults.

By exploring how these storytelling traditions are adapted and incorporated into Indigenous Australian literature, we can understand their potential for healing historical wounds, uncovering hidden truths, and charting a path forward for a multicultural society. This article posits that integrating Indigenous perspectives into modern storytelling enriches Australian literature and offers valuable insights for addressing global crises and fostering a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world.

According to Indigenous Australian spirituality Country is treated as a complex whole, a collective, encompassing environment (land, water, sky, rocks) and social relations (human and more-than-human). Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose defined Country as a “nourishing terrain” (Rose 1996: 7). She claims, “Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with” (Rose 1996: 10). In other words, Country is a living being that is an inevitable part of everything around us (human beings, objects, nature, actions), as everything has spirit and is connected (physically, mentally, spiritually). As Paul Callaghan writes: “Country for an Aboriginal person is the place your ancestors were born, where they walked the land, where they went back to the land and where they now walk the land as spirits” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 23). Furthermore, Aboriginal people believe that “they share their being with their Country and all that is within it” (Rose 2004). Moreover, understanding Indigenous Australian spirituality hinges on the concept of Dreamtime. The rituals performed by Aboriginal people allow them to return to the “womb of all time,” known as Dreamtime. This experience reconnects the spirit to nature, ancestors, and their personal goals and place within the broader universe. As such, “Dreamtime is a return to real existence for the Aboriginal people” (Crisp 2017).

It is essential to underline that

Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common but also a proper noun. People talk about a country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to the country, sing to the country, visit the country, worry about the country, feel sorry for the country, and long for the country. Country is not a generalized or

undifferentiated type of place, as one might indicate with terms like “spending a day in the country” or “going up the country”. Instead, Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today, and tomorrow, as well as a consciousness and a will toward life. Because of this richness, the country is home, providing peace and nourishment for body, mind, spirit, and heart ease. (Rose 1996: 10)

To interpret this key Indigenous concept, this essay will explain the basic notions of Aboriginal thinking and provide invaluable Aboriginal cultural insights and some reflection points as part of Aboriginal thinking revealed in Indigenous Australian stories.

Indigenous stories through the prism of Indigenous spirituality

In Indigenous Australian spirituality, all aspects of Aboriginal life have been guided by the Lore, a particular codex of moral behaviour that presupposes collective and individual responsibility to love and care for Country of all who live on this land (regardless of where they might have been born) through a spiritual connection with the place where one lives and Country, which comprises one’s spirit, relatives, one’s spiritual family, and Spirit Ancestors.

This also means to be present and fully engaged with the present moment, to step aside from the hectic Western world for a while, to embrace the silence and allow oneself just to be, to connect with one’s true/inner/authentic self, to let go the anxiety, to think how special one is and finally to recharge. Paul Callaghan describes this approach thusly: “This world of hyperstimulation is somewhat different from the traditional Aboriginal world, where we relax softly into the subtle sounds of nature and allow the quiet to open eyes and ears to an infinite classroom of learning that surrounds us” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 135). Building a good connection with oneself is essential to achieving one’s life purpose (in Aboriginal English, ‘Dreaming’). This connection also means building healthy relationships with each other, which are vitally important in the world of wars, terrorism, global economic crisis, climate change, epidemics, violence, poverty, and different phobias.

It is worth mentioning here the Aboriginal concept of the existential circle: “After we pass away in physical form, the spirit returns to the Spirit Pool, and our body goes back to the Mother, where our flesh and fluid returns to the physical environment. As the cycle repeats over time, we become part of all things. We are timeless” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 51). Indigenous Australians’ understanding of the existential circle emphasise the cyclical nature of life and death. When a person dies, their spirit returns to the Spirit Pool, and their physical

body returns to the Earth, contributing to the environment. Finally, the remains of a human body are integrated into the water cycle, nourishing plants and animals, and this ongoing cycle connects all living beings, suggesting a timeless relationship with the universe.

In particular, scholars (Korf 2017; Morris 1994) suggest that the Murrinh-Patha possess a unique oneness of thought, belief, and expression, which is quite different from Christianity. They perceive all aspects of their lives, thoughts, and culture as continually influenced by their Dreaming. Within this, for Aboriginal people, there is no distinction between the spiritual, ideal, or mental aspects of life and the material; similarly, there is no separation between the sacred and the profane. Instead, all life is viewed as ‘sacred,’ all actions carry ‘moral’ implications, and life’s meaning is derived from this eternal, ever-present Dreaming.

“Life in time is simply a passing phase – a gap in eternity” (Crisp 2017). It has a beginning, and it has an end. “The experience of Dreamtime, whether through ritual or from dreams, flowed through into the life in time in practical ways” (Crisp 2017). Furthermore, for Aboriginal people, deceased relatives remain an integral part of ongoing life. It is believed that they communicate their presence through dreams. Sometimes, these dreams can provide healing for those who are in pain. Hence, death is viewed as a part of the life cycle, where one emerges from Dreamtime through birth and eventually returns to the timeless realm, only to emerge again. Moreover, due to special spiritual rituals, many also believe people can leave their bodies during sleep and temporarily enter Dreamtime.

In death, as in life, Indigenous Australian spirituality gives pre-eminence to the land and Country, and sees the deceased as linked indissolubly, by a web of subtle connections, to that greater whole: “For Aboriginal people, when a person dies, some form of the person (spirit) and also their bones go back to the Country they were born in. So when a person dies, their Country suffers, trees die and become scarred because it is believed that they came into being because of the deceased person” (Rose 2004). Moreover, naming a person after their death is often taboo, as it is thought that it could disturb their spirit; photos of the deceased are often not allowed for the same reason, which causes serious trouble for police investigations in contemporary Australian society.

This existential eternity aligns with the Indigenous Australian concept of time, contrasting sharply with the European understanding, where past, present, and future are viewed as distinct, disconnected periods. This difference is significant in modern Australian society, contributing to the profound misunderstandings surrounding Australian colonial history. From the perspective of non-Aboriginal people, the absence of a connection between

past and present suggests that the present generation bears no responsibility for historical mistakes. In contrast, the Aboriginal view perceives time as a continuous flow that interlinks past and future within the present moment. This perspective implies that contemporary white Australians share responsibility for the painful legacies of colonisation and genocide of more than 500 Aboriginal nations. As Walker writes: “The interconnectedness of people through their ancestors and descendants is vitally important; we are as bound to our ancestors as they are to theirs. What our ancestors did to their ancestors is played out today. What our generation does will be played out in the lives of our descendants. Everything that happens ‘in time’ has eternal implications and is elaborately interconnected” (Walker 2016).

Adopting unique Indigenous Australian thinking, deeply rooted in family and spiritual connections, into a contemporary Australian multicultural society can provide peaceful solutions to today’s complex political issues. As Paul Callaghan claims, “Diversity of opinion is, in itself, a marvellous opportunity for mutual exploration, conversation, learning, and growth,” and further articulates that “there doesn’t have to be one opinion, one truth or one way of doing things” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 11). Moreover, this framework allows for diversity and difference to be understood, acknowledged, and embraced, promoting a more inclusive and harmonious society. By integrating these insights into contemporary governance and policy-making, we can foster dialogue and collaboration that respects Indigenous wisdom while addressing the challenges of our time.

The Aboriginal worldview, where everyone and everything shares the same origin and has a spirit, leads to the belief that all are treated equally. “There was no ‘lesser’ creature on earth. Everything has the right to exist and was connected to everything else” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 32). Besides, everything and everybody has a story of creation. Moreover, everyone is conceived and born with a purpose, and each person has a unique journey or path. As such, according to Aboriginal culture, everyone lives their own life story, which should be good, positive, and aimed at achieving personal goals – referred to as one’s “Dreaming Path.” By making choices that align with our life purpose, we navigate our journey, creating lives that are purposeful, inspired, authentic, and meaningful.

In Aboriginal spirituality, a loving approach to life is viewed as essential for fostering a mindset of thankfulness. As Callaghan and Gordon note, one should “not allow the grey cloak of despair to cover the color that surrounds us in abundance” (2024: 102). This perspective encourages individuals to accept the love present in their lives and to share it with others through good actions, extending goodwill and kindness to both acquaintances and strangers.

Unlike Christian beliefs, which suggest that man is born in sin, Indigenous Australian spirituality posits that the world, its creatures, and people emerge from the love of the Sky Father and Mother Nature. Here is the Dreamtime story of the creation of the world:

Once, the earth was covered entirely by water, but under the water was our Mother, Gunni. The rainbow serpent, Wawaii, started to move inside Gunni's belly deep underwater, she stirred from her slumber, and the land rose from the sea. Wawaii facilitated the transformation, bringing fresh water from the ocean to nourish the land while removing the salt, and burying it deep in the soil. When Biamii, our Sky Father, gazed down and saw the splendor of our beloved Mother emerging from the depths, he descended from the sky to join her. Their love blossomed, and soon the first children were born—great ancestral animals that roamed the Country, shaping mountains, valleys, and all the diverse landscapes that we see today. (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 12).

It is important to underline that in most Indigenous Australian Dreamtime stories, the creation of all things is intertwined with Mother, the Sky Father, and Wawaii, the Rainbow Serpent³. From this particular Dreamtime story, we can discern that the core concepts of Lore – love, unity, and equality – emerge as foundational principles of Aboriginal spirituality. These values fostered a sense of connectivity, harmony, and balance within the social fabric of Aboriginal society, highlighting the intricate relationships among all beings and their environment.

Aboriginal people learned from their stories that a society must not be human-centred but rather land-centred. Otherwise, they forget their source and purpose ... humans are prone to exploitative behaviour if not constantly reminded they are interconnected with the rest of creation, that they as individuals are only temporal in time, and that past and future generations must be included in their perception of their purpose in life. (Morris 1995; omission in the original)

³ The Rainbow Serpent is a massive snake that typically resides in the deepest waterholes across Australia's rivers. It is believed that it has originated from a larger entity that appears as a dark line in the Milky Way. In our objective world, it manifests as a rainbow as it moves through water and rain, creating landscapes, naming places, and singing of their significance. It can consume or even drown people, providing the wise with powers of rainmaking and healing while bringing afflictions like sores, weakness, illness, and even death to others (Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1996: 19-26).

Moreover, caring for our environment is as crucial today as it was centuries ago. Events such as the post-9/11 terrorist attacks, the dramatic experiences of COVID-19, climate change, Australia's Black Summer of 2019/2020, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and floods in Europe in the summer of 2024 have all demonstrated how fragile our world and our planet are.

Furthermore, in such stories, there is no distinction between spirituality and everyday life; everything is interconnected, and every action in our daily lives is linked to the Lore. Hence, the Earth shares the same emotions as humans do. Throughout her existence, the Earth's emotions, illnesses, and love have shaped our world today. That is why in Australian Aboriginal languages, there is no word for "hate," nor are there any stories that revolve around hatred. The reason for this linguistic phenomenon is that in discussions concerning individual matters, Elders have the authority to make decisions, and once made, they do not revisit that issue. People do not accumulate negative energy as, according to the Lore, they must enter the sacred ceremony grounds with a clear spirit and goodwill. Furthermore, they did not possess weapons, and tribal groups did not engage in fighting or feel the need to construct castles or fences for protection, as they did not steal from one another.

However, alongside the Lore, there was a unique system of rules and some punishment procedures used in case the Lore was broken (cutting down trees, causing water/air pollution, traumatising land, digging out natural resources, exploring the sea). It is essential to understand that the Lore does not belong to people but to the land and Mother Nature, as there was no activity above the Lore. Actions based on rights but avoiding responsibility break the Lore and will have serious consequences. "In Aboriginal society, the connectivity of L-A-W (rules) to L-O-R-E (knowledge) has always been critical. L-O-R-E is a reflection of tens of thousands of years of traditional stories, the knowledge they provide and the morals, and the responsibilities that are embedded in that knowledge" (Callaghan and Gordon 2004: 31). In comparison, law in non-Aboriginal societies is often marked by injustice, inequality, class division, and political/racial/gender cultural domination.

To understand the Lore, Aboriginal people share oral stories, which became a crucial means of communication and knowledge between different generations. In the Aboriginal language, they are called "Ngurrampaa". Translated into English, it is "Dreamtime/Dreaming stories," which comprises ancient oral narratives that describe/explain the Lore. It is vital to notice that to Aboriginal people, these stories are not myths, legends, or fables; they are real

(as Tora to the Jewish, the Bible to Christians, and the Koran to Muslims).⁴ This can be seen, for example, in a story that Paul Callaghan acknowledges about his Aboriginal origin: “I am a Ngemba man from north-western New South Wales, born of Gurulguilu Country, meaning I belong to the stones. In our story, stones are born, stones have babies, stones grow, stones have spirit and die like all things do. My people are stone people” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 30). It is important to mention that one of the most sacred places for Aboriginal people is Uluru-Kata Tjuta or Ayers Rock, a monolith rock more than 550 million years old and famous for incredible color change throughout the day, having enormous energetic influence. It marks the centre of the Country.

From an early age, Aboriginal children listen to stories that help them understand their environment. Through many exciting stories, they learn how to behave in the bush, particularly in the darkness, by the fire (a story about a man Yurri that can take naughty kids away), or the types and correct amount of food they can eat (a story about a greedy lizard who became fat because of overeating).

Moreover, the educational value of such stories lies in the fact that the more one learns about a place, the easier it is to live there and the deeper one’s love for that place becomes. Knowing where to find bush medicine, bush tucker, or shelter makes thriving and connecting with the land significantly easier. It is essential to know where one was born – how to find water, food, shelter, and natural resources – because this knowledge fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility. Furthermore, stories for children are focused on key concepts of the Lore, such as love, relationships, sharing, unity, gratitude, humility, truth, responsibility, and learning (a story about an echidna who was a thief, told lies, and broke the Lore).

Some stories for youngsters teach them how to make friends, respect others’ differences, and achieve their goals in life, as in a story about a kangaroo, Wambuyn, and a humble platypus, Yapii, who was afraid to leave his creek. In a simple, laconic way, the narrator (father Kangaroo Waparr) explains from his own experience the nature of fear and how important it is to have control over it.

“Fear can show itself in many ways”, Waparr said. “Over my life, I have been frightened lots of times. When I was young, I was frightened of the dark. When I

⁴ Australian Indigenous religion deserves respect and should not be referred to as ‘mythology.’ It represents the sacred spirituality expressed through the stories performed by Aboriginal Australians within their various language groups across Country during ceremonies. Aboriginal spirituality encompasses the Dreamtime (or Dreaming), songlines, and Aboriginal storytelling.

became an adult, I was frightened of failing to fulfil my responsibilities. When I became a father, I was frightened of not being a very good dad. And even now, sometimes, I am frightened of letting people down. Being frightened is natural. Sometimes being frightened can save our lives. But most time, being frightened is our mind playing tricks on us. The secret is not to give in to fear when you know the fear isn't real. When we face fear, we are showing our courage.” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 160-163)

The story involves two characters: a father kangaroo named Wambuyn and a timid platypus named Yapii, focusing on overcoming fear. Waparr, the father kangaroo, shares his experiences with fear throughout his life, highlighting that it is a natural emotion that can serve as a protective mechanism. He emphasizes that while fear can often be a trick of the mind, courage comes from facing those fears and not letting them control us. The narrative teaches young readers valuable lessons about friendship, respect for differences, and achieving personal goals.

Three days later, the animals held a very big corroboree for a very special guest. The guest was the strangest-looking animal. He had fur like a kangaroo, a beak like a black duck, and a flat tail that looked out of place. Although he was a bit shy to start with, his newfound family made him feel at home. He learned songs, he learned dance and he learned many stories. He had the best night of his life. (Callaghan and Gordon 2024, 160-163)

The moral lesson of this story is the importance of acceptance and belonging. It shows that even if someone looks different or feels out of place, they can find community and happiness when others embrace them for who they are. The big corroboree symbolizes how coming together in celebration can help foster connections and create a sense of family, highlighting that diversity can lead to richer experiences and memories. This story is especially important for members of multicultural Australian society.

Another story illustrates the key to the Indigenous Australian spirituality relations with the past and the ability to heal from it, which comprises a unique connection of Aboriginal people to their Country, their special pace of living, taking and sharing. The story is about mother Emu and her chicks, who were taught how to choose the right pace in life and set small goals to achieve the bigger ones.

We have already taken enough tucker (food) from here. If we go back, it won't be the same as yesterday. And maybe that clever dingo will be waiting there to catch us. No, children. If we keep going back to the same place, we will be stuck in the past. We have to live in the now but also remember to bring the knowledge and the good memories of the past with us. (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 192-193)

The message of the story is that while it is important to cherish and learn from our past experiences, we must not become trapped by them. Embracing the present and moving forward allows us to grow and adapt while carrying valuable memories that can enhance our journey without hindering our progress. "Let's plan to take little steps towards the mountains. And each day, as we gather our tucker, we will get a little closer to them. If we rush quickly to the mountains, we won't notice the beautiful things there are to see on the way" (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 192-193).

The moral lesson of the story is about the importance of patience and mindfulness in our journey through life. It teaches us that taking small, deliberate steps allows us to appreciate the beauty and experiences along the way rather than rushing toward our goals and missing out on the wonders surrounding us. Every moment is an opportunity for discovery, and by savouring the journey, we enrich our lives and our understanding of the multicultural world.

There are also special stories that focus on how to behave in a community (a story about a couple, Weda and Bullen Bullen, that steal and were never satisfied with what they have; they turned into bowerbirds that still steal shiny things from people and are still not content), to respect Elders and community members (a story about a wise grandfather eagle and his impertinent and shameless grandsons, a magpie, and a crow), how to achieve a healthy leadership that embraces individual strengths, power and responsibility before Country, community and environment.

It was a time of deep sadness. All the animals did their best to support each other after Grandfather Eagle passed to the spirit world, but it felt like a big hole had been left that couldn't be filled. Animals came from far away to pay their respects to Grandfather Eagle. He has much wisdom and has used his knowledge to help many over the years. He has lived a very good story. After Sorry Business finished and

Grandfather Eagle's spirit was on its way, a meeting of the clan was called, and the animals gathered to choose someone to replace him.

"Why should it be an Elder?" Frilled-Neck Lizard said, breaking the silence in a very bossy voice. "I'm a bit sick and tired of the Old People giving me orders. It's about time a young person like me had a say. It's about time we had new ideas. The Lore has done a good job for us. But we need change."

"Enough, you have disrespected the Elders, and you have questioned the Lore," the Elders said. The lizard became very angry; he went away over a sand dune. If you meet him, he's still angry; he puffs up his frills to show that he's the boss, and he's still angry. (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 268-271)

The plot of this story revolves around unique Aboriginal leadership, characterized by experience, strong leadership qualities, and deep respect for Elders and the land. It conveys the idea that power should be shared humbly and that the quality of relationships with others, the environment, and the Country measure true success. As Paul Gordon encapsulates: "As a child, we are given many stories, many Ngunnarrampaa stories. From the stories come morals, from the morals come the rules of the land and the rules of society. From the rules come the L-A-W law" (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 30).

Indigenous Australian storytelling, or "yarning" (Yunkaporta 2023: 3), usually occurs outdoors, surrounded by familiar landscapes, in the bush by the fire, or at the seashore. Yarning is an oral tradition that resembles a conversation without passive-aggressive elements. It serves as a thought experiment and a ritualized crowdsourced narrative, where everyone's contributions are honoured, respected, and included, regardless of how contradictory these points may seem. Hence, a crucial Indigenous Australian activity is telling and sharing positive stories (Ngunnarrampaa stories, real-life stories, creative stories), focusing on things in common rather than differences, and accepting each other's stories without judgment or prejudice. By adapting them into everyday life, we can build a better world of tolerance, respect, and, as a result, harmony, united against tyranny, lies, violence, terrorism, diseases, and drug addiction.

Furthermore, the positive power of the Lore is something we can all embrace. In crafting this brave new world of shared purpose, connection, and collaboration, it is vital to accept the stories of others, even when they contradict our own beliefs. Moreover, by generating new relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in today's

Australia, blending these two multicultural worlds based on mutual understanding and respect will benefit both, setting a new positive story in Australian history.

Traditional stories for adults explain the Lore⁵. However, there are also some stories about moral obligations⁶. There are some stories connected with a particular place, such as stories of Gurulgilu Country. Dreamtime stories are “multifaceted in terms of their messaging, multi-layered in terms of their audience and multi-purpose in terms of their application” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 15); they serve as roadmaps for personal values and goals, individual/collective responsibility for community.

As we can see from the quotation above Aboriginal stories have multilayered plot structures. The sentences are simple and short. The narration (first or third person) can be easily transformed from simple sense (about a greedy echidna/thikarbilla that got his spikes from waria bush as a punishment) to more complicated spiritual ones (when an old man who broke the Lore being unfaithful to his grandsons, not fulfilling his obligation towards the Lore): “When the boys came back, the butterflies said, ‘Boys. Look at what your grandfather has become. He is a thikarbilla. He has been speared, and he’s got spikes all over his back because he has broken the Lore’” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 84-86).

The ending always contains the necessary moral lesson, a key message, and the purpose of the narration: “And that is what happens to people who break the Lore. They get speared” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 84-86).

Among the other narrative features of Aboriginal storytelling is a specific usage of pronouns that unites separate fragments of the story into a coherent plot and shows the connection of the narrator with different characters, the members of the community (us-two, us-only, us-all, you-two, we-all, you-all). As Tyson Yunkaporta puts it in his book *Right Story, Wrong Story*, where he provides a translation from the Aboriginal language of a story about building a canoe, which is a symbolic representation of the Indigenous Australian community:

Nearby there is a particular tree that only flowers once or twice in a century, and it is in full bloom right now. You’ve never seen this before, but the old people with you remember it. Under that tree, a crocodile is nesting, so we all avoid that part of the

⁵ For instance, stories about the creation of the world by Father Biamii, Mother, Gunni, and the rainbow serpent Wawaii, the sky Father, who came to earth in a human form to teach Aboriginal people how to survive in this Country, songs, dances, handicrafts, hunting, fishing, making canoe, etc., a story about Mount Yengo, which is a stepping place for God.

⁶ E.g., a story about a greedy old man who did not complete his responsibilities and duties, broke the Lore and was turned into an echidna (thikarbilla in Aboriginal).

river today, and a dozen of your nephews and nieces are splashing in the shadows on a different riverbank where the old people say it is safe this morning (but not tomorrow morning). (Yunkaporta 2023)

Mary Graham is a Kombu-merry and Wakka Wakka woman, who developed the philosophical concept of a unique Aboriginal “custodial ethic” (Graham 2023: 37). Graham elaborates on two key principles that together form the custodial ethic. The first principle is the ethical obligation to maintain a respectful and nurturing relationship with the Land, Place, and community. The second principle focuses on governance, emphasizing the importance of autonomy and identity within a Place. These two principles can work together to create a society not driven by ego, enabling a distinctive way of thinking characterized by four fundamental assumptions: 1. We are not alone in the world. 2. Our needs extend beyond mere physical survival. 3. We engage in deep, reflective thinking with a long-term strategic perspective. 4. We reject a self-centred survivalist mindset, which often promotes competition. Besides, it is worth mentioning that the land is a sacred entity; it is the great mother of all humanity. That is why the two most important relationships in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second being always contingent upon the first. Aboriginal people are not against money, economics, or private ownership, but they ask that there be a recognition that ownership is a social act and a spiritual act.

It is interesting to notice that time does not exist as a horizontal line but in a vertical relationship to the present. Because of such an exceptional understanding of time as an eternity, which combines past and future with a particular focus on the present, Aboriginal people are often described as “present tense people” (Walker 2016).

Rebecca Walker points out that “while Westerners focus on chronological time almost as a resource, “Aboriginals ... treat it more from a descriptive point of view and give at least equal weight to time as an eternal quality” (Walker 2016). This eternal time can be explained by Aboriginal cosmology, which is based on their storytelling within ‘Dreaming’. She continues, “Unlike the dualistic Greek thinking which separates temporality from the eternal, in the Aboriginal worldview, ‘It is not ... simply the case that the individual is a fixed point in a temporal flux or continuum, for one’s self is, was and will be in the Dreaming’” (Walker 2016; omission in the original).

Due to the educational impact of Aboriginal stories before the British invasion in 1788, Aboriginal people lived well-balanced physical, mental, and spiritual lives. By the age of twelve, a young man had all the necessary skills to survive alone in the bush. Surprisingly, daily duties (hunting, cooking, survival-related activities) “took no more than two hours a day” (Bain 2005, 61). The rest of the time was dedicated to maintaining good relationships with the community members, participating in ceremonies, engaging in the learning process, and caring for the community and Country. That was a lifelong learning process in the community of sharing rather than rejection, where children were allowed to make mistakes, and all the community members received ever-present support from extended family members, especially Elders.

In Aboriginal society, Elders are highly respected, middle-aged people who, having demonstrated their understanding of the Lore, use their knowledge for the community’s well-being: sharing stories, songs, dances, teaching, providing conflict solutions, leadership, governance, and practicing spiritual rituals. Elders are ready to help, but they do not persuade anybody to take their point of view. Before they die, they pass on their stories, including the values of love, sharing, respect, and humility, to the next generation. Elders have a special connection to both worlds (spiritual and physical), and they are particularly insightful, strategic, and far-seeing in making crucial decisions that are always for the good of Country (Walker 2016).

Being part of Country, Indigenous storytelling is critical in contemporary multicultural Australia. Paul Callaghan observes, “People often tell me how sad our culture is gone. Our culture is not gone at all. We are still here ... and the stories themselves are part of the land ... are in the land. They will be still in the land long after I am gone. Every person who lives on this land is responsible for listening to, understanding, and caring for it by the Lore” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 28; omission in the original). Finding one’s true cultural and family roots and personal family stories is deeply embedded in the Lore. As Elders have said, “If you don’t know where you come from, you will never know where you are going. You can’t just exist from today” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 149).

Adapting Indigenous perspectives to the modern world is essential for building a new and courageous world that embraces truth and fosters trust, unity, respect, and mutual understanding. Paul Callaghan emphasizes that his many years spent with cultural Elders have instilled in him a strong belief in the relevance, significance, and transferability of traditional Aboriginal cultural knowledge to contemporary society. He argues that “bridging the gap between these two worlds” (Callaghan and Gordon 2024: 40) will benefit everyone and is

crucial for healing our planet, allowing future generations to experience Mother Earth's diversity and richness.

Conclusion

The spirituality and storytelling traditions of Indigenous Australians represent a profound and complex system of beliefs and practices that have evolved over millennia. At the heart of this spirituality lies a unique understanding of Country, which extends beyond a mere geographical concept. For Indigenous Australians, Country is a living organism with consciousness and will, encompassing the physical environment – land, water, sky, rocks – and all human and non-human social relationships. This perception fosters a deep sense of responsibility and connection to the surrounding world, which is fundamental to their worldview.

This worldview is characterised by a holistic approach, according to which everything in the universe is interconnected. People, nature, objects, and actions are not viewed as separate elements but as parts of a unified whole, connected not only in the physical but also in the spiritual dimension. This approach promotes the formation of a deep ecological consciousness and responsible attitude towards the environment, which is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary environmental challenges.

A central element of Indigenous Australian spirituality is “the Lore” – a comprehensive system of moral norms and spiritual practices. Understanding that the Lore is not simply a set of rules humans create is essential. On the contrary, it is believed to belong to the land itself, emphasising the priority of nature over human interests. The Lore regulates all aspects of life, from interaction with nature to social relations and spiritual practices, forming the basis for harmonious coexistence with the surrounding world.

The critical method of transmitting knowledge and preserving the Lore is the tradition of storytelling. Stories, known as Ngurrampaa or Dreamtime/Dreaming, are multifunctional: they teach moral values, pass on practical survival skills, explain the Lore, and preserve cultural heritage. These narratives often occur naturally, underscoring the inextricable link between stories, people, and the land.

Understanding time in Indigenous Australian culture differs significantly from the Western linear approach. Time is perceived as a flow that unites past, present and future, into a single whole. This influences the understanding of history, responsibility, and the connection between generations, forming a unique view of a person's place in time and space.

Elders hold a special place in the social structure of Indigenous Australians. They are crucial in preserving and transmitting knowledge, providing leadership, and maintaining spiritual connections. Their wisdom, based on a deep understanding of the Lore and years of experience, is integral to the cultural continuum. Respect for elders is not just a social norm but a fundamental aspect of the worldview that ensures the connection between generations and the preservation of traditional knowledge. Harmony and balance are vital concepts in Indigenous Australian spirituality. Emphasis is placed on love, unity, and equality in relationships between people and nature. This approach promotes the creation of sustainable and balanced communities, which is especially important in modern social and environmental challenges.

Indigenous Australian peoples' spiritual practices and thinking have significant potential for addressing contemporary global problems. There is growing recognition that combining Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews can bring mutual benefits, especially in the ecological crisis and the search for sustainable development models. These practices can contribute to developing environmental consciousness and harmonious coexistence with nature.

It is important to emphasise that despite historical challenges, the culture of Indigenous Australian peoples remains alive and ongoing. It is rooted in the land and continues through people's connection to Country. This underscores the importance of preserving and actively reviving and integrating traditional knowledge and practices into the modern context. The educational aspect of conventional Indigenous Australian culture also deserves attention. Their approach to learning was holistic and practical, including physical survival skills, spiritual practices, and social norms. This integrated approach to education can offer alternative learning models for the modern world that consider intellectual but also emotional and spiritual personal development.

Linguistic features of Indigenous Australian languages also reflect their unique worldview. For example, using pronouns such as us-two, us-only, us-all, you-two, we-all, you-all emphasizes the interconnection between the individual and the community.

In conclusion, the spirituality and storytelling traditions of Indigenous Australians represent a rich and complex system of knowledge and practices that have significant potential for addressing contemporary global issues. Understanding and integrating this knowledge into the modern context can create a more balanced and sustainable society that lives in harmony with nature and honour the wisdom of past generations.

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