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## EXPLORING AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL SPIRITUALITY AND STORYTELLING: AN EGALITARIAN INTERPRETATION

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**Oksana Babelyuk. *Exploring Australian Aboriginal Spirituality and Storytelling: an Egalitarian Interpretation.*** The paper explores the egalitarian interpretations of Australian Aboriginal spirituality and storytelling, emphasising the profound connection between Indigenous beliefs and social equality. Drawing upon various cultural storytelling and practices, it highlights how Aboriginal spirituality is fundamentally linked to Country, the land, community, and ancestral wisdom, promoting a worldview that values every individual's role within a collective existence. The research examines how traditional Dreamtime practices, such as sharing and communal responsibility, reflect an inherent egalitarian ethos, challenging the hierarchical structures often seen in other spiritual contexts. Furthermore, the paper addresses contemporary issues faced by Indigenous communities, arguing that embracing these egalitarian principles can foster healing and resilience. By analysing historical and modern perspectives, this study underscores the importance of respecting and preserving Aboriginal spiritual traditions to promote social justice and equality. Ultimately, it advocates for a deeper understanding of Aboriginal spirituality as a religious belief system and a framework for social cohesion and equity, urging policymakers, educators, and the broader society to recognise the rich, egalitarian insights that Australian Aboriginal spirituality offers. Through this exploration, the paper aims to encourage dialogue that respects Indigenous knowledge and supports equitable relationships between all cultures in contemporary multicultural society.

**Keywords:** Australian Aboriginal spirituality, storytelling, egalitarian principles.

The egalitarian interpretation of Australian Aboriginal spirituality and storytelling, known as “Dreamtime,” demonstrates how this spirituality is intricately woven into the fabric of social equality within Indigenous communities. It establishes the foundational belief that Aboriginal spirituality is not merely a set of practices or rituals; instead, it represents a holistic worldview that emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals, the land (referred to as Country), and the community.

One significant aspect discussed in the paper is the concept of Country, understood through the First Nations principle of Care for Country, also known as Lore. This notion transcends mere geography; it embodies a living entity with deep cultural, spiritual, and physical significance for Australian Aboriginal people, who see themselves not as owners but as Traditional Custodians of Country.

The anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose defines Country as a “nourishing terrain” (Rose, 1996, p. 7). She states: “Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with” (Callaghan, Gordon, 2024, p. 23). In other words, Country is a living being that is inherently part of everything around us (human beings, objects, nature, actions), each of which has spirit and is interconnected (physically, mentally, spiritually). As Paul Callaghan articulates: “Country for an Aboriginal person is the place your ancestors were born, where they now walk the land, where they have returned to the land, and where they now walk the land as spirits” (Callaghan, Gordon, 2024, p. 23).

Furthermore, viewing the relationship between individuals and Country through the lens of egalitarianism helps us understand cultural identity and belonging in Aboriginal spirituality. It emphasises that caring for the Country and the land is not just an ecological responsibility but also a spiritual obligation. This connection allows Aboriginal people to honour their ancestors, Elders, and cultural heritage.

Exploring various storytelling traditions that convey essential lessons about equality, respect, and communal responsibility, we can assume that storytelling has long been a vital oral communication tool in many Indigenous cultures. According to Serrat, storytelling is “the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life

lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights” (Serrat, 2017, p. 839). The main benefits of storytelling include its ability to convey emotional and factual content, serve as a means of knowledge sharing, and possess a narrative structure that enhances learning.

The creation stories are the earliest narratives of any Indigenous culture. As Kodo states, “Each Indigenous nation and tribe from the North American continent have its own characteristic creation stories with its own set of symbolism, animal figures, and characters. These stories have been told and retold countless times since time immemorial; however, each retelling of a story is different as it adapts to the persona of the storyteller, who may alter and expand the story to suit and satisfy its current audience” (Kodo, 2024, p. 2).

In Australian Aboriginal spirituality, every being has a creation story, which means everyone lives out their life narrative. According to the Lore, this story should be positive and successful in achieving personal goals, often called one’s “Dreaming Path.” In contrast to Christian beliefs that suggest humans are born in sin, Aboriginal spirituality emphasises that the world, its creatures, and people exist due to the love of the Sky Father and Mother Nature. As a result, the core concepts of the Lore are *love, unity, and equality*, aligning with principles of egalitarianism. These ideas foster *connectivity, harmony, and balance* within social life in the Aboriginal community.

Moreover, Aboriginal storytelling represents an uninhibited and natural form of communication that connects people and ideas, fosters coherence and meaning, allows diverse perspectives to emerge, inspires imagination, motivates action, and encourages change (Serrat, 2017, p. 840). To understand the Lore, Aboriginal people share various stories, which have become a crucial means of communication and knowledge-sharing between different generations.

In the Aboriginal language, this is called “Ngurrampaa”. “In Aboriginal English, it is referred to as “Dreamtime/Dreaming,” meaning ancient stories that describe or explain the Lore. It is vital to note that, for Aboriginal people, these stories are not myths, legends, or fables; they are real (as Tora is to Jews, the Bible is to Christians, and the Koran is to

Muslims) (Babelyuk, 2024, p. 6). “As a child, we are given many stories, many Ngurrampaa 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, Gordon, 2024, p. 30).

These narratives often serve as vehicles for imparting moral values, illustrating the importance of maintaining harmony within the community and with the environment. Through shared stories, Aboriginal spirituality inspires a recognition of each person’s role as part of a larger whole, promoting a vision of social equity where everyone’s contributions are valued.

Aboriginal storytelling usually occurs outdoors, surrounded by familiar landscapes, in the bush by the fire, or at the seashore. 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, Gordon, 2024, p. 15); they serve as roadmaps for personal values and goals, individual/collective responsibility for community, Country following the Lore.

Ancestral wisdom plays a crucial role in this egalitarian framework as well. Reverence for ancestors is integral to Aboriginal culture, with teachings passed down through generations emphasising mutual respect, cooperation, and a balanced relationship with the Country. This wisdom encourages practices prioritising collective well-being over individual gain, fostering an ethos where social inclusion is paramount. The paper articulates how Aboriginal spirituality is a powerful vehicle for advocating social equality.

By valuing the connections between individuals, their community, and the land, it presents a worldview that champions collective existence, where every member plays a vital role in sustaining cultural practices and the health and harmony of the broader society. Through these insights, the paper calls for a deeper appreciation of Aboriginal spiritual perspectives as essential to understanding and addressing contemporary issues of equality and justice in Australia.

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