Indigenous Australian Cultures

The Dreaming

To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people, The Dreaming relates to the past, present and future. There is no beginning and no end within the Indigenous culture. The Dreaming consists of stories and pastimes that explain how all things were created and what their purpose was on this Earth.

The Warlpiri people of the Tanami Desert tell us that within the Dreaming is a person’s Conception Dreaming, known as yiwiringgi. This is defined in the Warlpiri dictionary as an individual’s “life-force or spirit which is localised in some natural formation and which may determine the spiritual nature of a person from conception and the relation of that person to the life-force”. In simple terms, the yiwiringgi principle conveys an individual’s close relation to the land on which the mother conceived the child. This example of The Dreaming within the Warlpiri people helps to explain the principle role and function of The Dreaming within Indigenous culture. This being to answer universal questions concerning the origin, meaning, purpose and destiny of life. Thus creating a sense of self and belonging within the land to ATSI people.

The Dreaming relating to cultural diversity provides an examination of similarities and differences between Indigenous cultures. For instance; T.G.H. Strethlow recorded and mapped descendants of the Rain Ancestor in Central Australia: Wangkangurru at Parapara in the Simpson Desert; Eastern Arrernte at Aljoa on the Hale River; and Southern Arrernte at libora on the Lower Finke River. Therefore conveying a close kinship connection through a common Ancestral being and having ownership of sacred sites linked by a Dreaming Track.
Kinship

ATSI people determine kinship as access to resources and connections to the landscape. Kinship connections form the basis for most Indigenous relationships between language groups, Ancestors, the land and one another.

The kinship within Indigenous culture is so strong and adhered to that in Aboriginal communities it is next to impossible for a young child to become orphaned, with the deaths of the biological parents not being an issue when the child is taken under guardianship by the kinship group they belong to.

Kinship builds the concepts of ownership, sharing and the law on which governs the lives of each ATSI person within their group. Without kinship, there is no order or purpose for the ATSI community groups, nor any structure. For example: kinship provides the information to where each person belongs, to whom they are connected too, and what their obligations are to the land and ancestors are. Therefore conveying the paramount contribution that kinship plays in Indigenous culture. The diversity among Aboriginal communities and language groups is also immense, highlighting that kinships are different all over the landscape and throughout all individuals of the Aboriginal community.

Birth location and the Dreaming Ancestors associated with that location, determine the kinship and therefore the concept connection to this land. With this connection comes the economic organisation that takes place on that land and ancestral sites. For example; hunting and gathering. Thus conveying the link between Dreaming, Kinship and Economic Organisation (and in that order of process).
Economic Organisation

Before British colonists arrived, the Australian landscape had already been humanised and to Aboriginal Australians it was full of cultural and social meaning. Indigenous Australian had physically altered the Australian landscape for their economic and survival organisation through millennia of hunting and gathering practices. This perception of the landscape was according to patterns developed through long occupation and dedication. The thorough planning of hunting and gathering techniques that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people brought into their lifestyles and living from the beginning of their existence, was to ensure that they had minimal impact upon the land they lived off and with. They would do this through dispersing themselves thinly and by constantly moving according to season. Although they were nomadic, Aboriginal people actively assisted in the long-term production of food. For Example: the Yugumbir people of south eastern Queensland collected edible marine cobra worms from waterlogged timber before throwing the wood back into the sea for next season’s worms to grow and multiply in.

Economic organisation can be linked to the kinship relationships that exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the land and animals. This being the preservation and respect that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to uphold thought their thousands of years of coexistence with the land. If this is not upheld, the laws of kinship are not be adhered to and in consequence there can be severe punishment from the Dreaming through drought, starvation, natural disasters etc.
References


