

common attributes being a prohibition on killing and eating the species, though exception and variations on the theme apply in different groups and in specific circumstances. Just as people are one with their totem and individuals are in the first instance identified by their country of origin, so country may be accorded totemic names and be referred to in kinship terms. The relationship between humans, Dreamings, totems and country is integrated and highly complex. It is against this background that one can better appreciate the devastating effect of dispossession and enforced removal from the land on the survival of oral histories and Dreaming stories, and hence on the moral fabric of indigenous Australian societies.

It follows that one cannot explore indigenous Australian spirituality or make sense of any one aspect of Aboriginal cultures, be it kinship, gender relations or systems of authority and the Law, without reference to the wider interactional, notably spiritual, context(s) within which such activity is taking place. The Dreaming represents that timeless, indefinable essence which underlies, informs, encompasses and gives meaning to all aspects of indigenous Australian life. It also follows that no one who has not gone through the rigors and the learning of the Law can really apprehend the fullness of this concept, and even then, one would only be conversant with the ancient wisdom of one particular group. These limitations must be taken very seriously and realistically by anyone purporting to discuss Aboriginal spirituality. Even so, non-Aboriginal Australians have become much more sensitized to and aware of this concept and associated ideas over the past two decades as attention has focused on land rights, native title and reconciliation.

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