

**Stories from the
Margins:
Indigenous
Connections to
the Land**

**Tuesday 29th June 2021 – Panel A: Human and More-Than-Human
Relations: Indigenous Perspectives**

- **Chiara Tellarini – The Dreaming:
Stories as intermediaries between people and land in Aboriginal
Australia**




«Knowledge - local, detailed, tested through time - is the basis for being in country» (Rose 1996: 13).




The Dreaming: Stories as intermediaries between people and land in Aboriginal Australia

- Stories are common, but not universal (they cannot be universalized);
- They signify balance and social responsibility;
- By telling them, connection with land is constantly recreated (Dreaming is eternal).
- Rainbow Serpent story.
- Differences with the colonizers' relations to land.




**«A central meaning of The Dreaming is that of a sacred, heroic time long ago when man and nature came to be as they are»
(Stanner 1979: 23).**

- **Dreaming: those mythical stories that tell about the creation of all beings according to Aboriginal Australian history and mythology.**
- **In its oral, sung and written performances, it's a perfect reflection of Aboriginal peoples' connection to land.**




These stories are common but not universal: «And knowledge, in all Aboriginal systems of information, is specific to the place and to the people» (Rose 1996: 32).

- Stories, knowledge and therefore actions, cannot be universalized.
- The Dreaming refers to the common spirit of creation, the common stories that combine together specific clans, communities or groups: there are then many Dreamings, all of them related to the histories of specific families, clans, communities, totem groups, and animal and plant species.
- «A full understanding of the Aboriginal view of life and the world requires a careful study of the whole body of doctrine about The Dream Time (altjira, bugari), **which is the common but not universal** way of referring to the time of the founding drama» (Stanner 1979: 114).
- Each group is characterized by their own Dream Time.

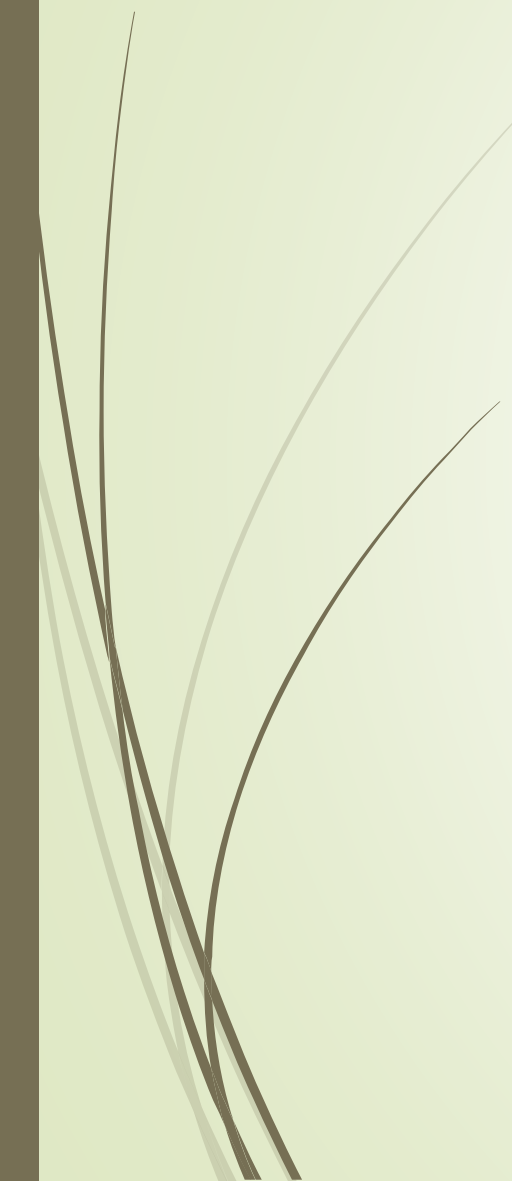


Social responsibility: «The totemic relationship invariably requires that people take responsibilities for their relationship with another species, and learn that their own well-being is inextricably linked with the well-being of their totemic species» (Rose 1996: 28).

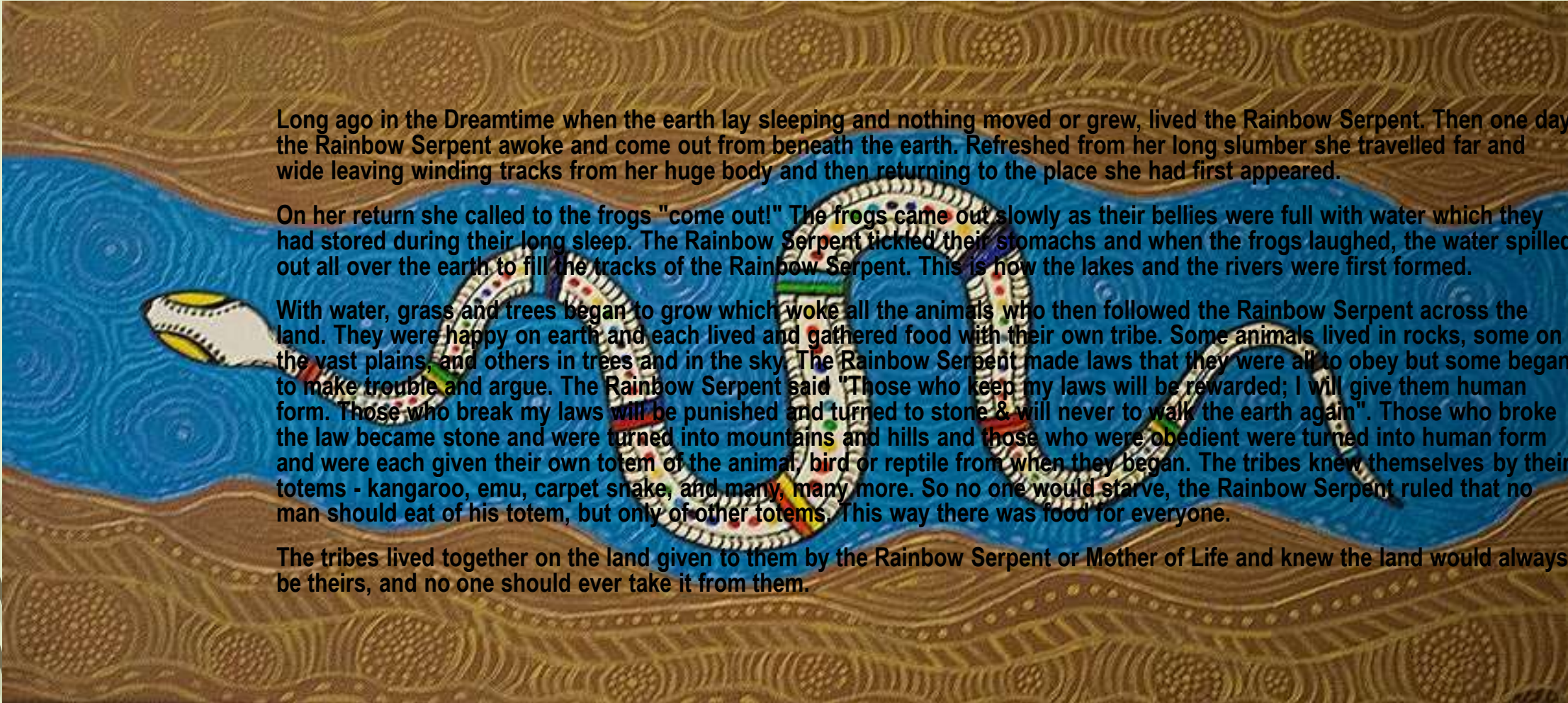
- As there are many «Dreamings» then, there are also many totems, since each individual has one, as well as each group. Therefore, many Dreamings and many totems imply also different knowledge systems, for which stories, beliefs and activities related to them are to be considered mainly local and linked to a specific locality.
- A totem signifies also the responsibility held by the individual and by a group for taking care of different elements of the land.
- People coming from a different area and being responsible for different elements, are allowed and even expected to «always ask», when on someone else's country, or when they engage with an element which is not their totem, and for which they have no knowledge about.
- So: knowledge is specific, detailed and related to particular elements and parts of the Country, and this knowledge is transmitted through the stories, through the Dreaming, which is also particular of specific places.



By telling these stories, connection with land is constantly recreated

- That is why the Dreaming is eternal, because it is constantly performed and recreated.
 - Importance of «walking on the land» while telling these Creation stories.
 - Story of the Rainbow Serpent: example of a Creation story and of the traditions that constantly recreate connection with land.
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Story of the Rainbow Serpent



Long ago in the Dreamtime when the earth lay sleeping and nothing moved or grew, lived the Rainbow Serpent. Then one day the Rainbow Serpent awoke and came out from beneath the earth. Refreshed from her long slumber she travelled far and wide leaving winding tracks from her huge body and then returning to the place she had first appeared.

On her return she called to the frogs "come out!" The frogs came out slowly as their bellies were full with water which they had stored during their long sleep. The Rainbow Serpent tickled their stomachs and when the frogs laughed, the water spilled out all over the earth to fill the tracks of the Rainbow Serpent. This is how the lakes and the rivers were first formed.


With water, grass and trees began to grow which woke all the animals who then followed the Rainbow Serpent across the land. They were happy on earth and each lived and gathered food with their own tribe. Some animals lived in rocks, some on the vast plains, and others in trees and in the sky. The Rainbow Serpent made laws that they were all to obey but some began to make trouble and argue. The Rainbow Serpent said "Those who keep my laws will be rewarded; I will give them human form. Those who break my laws will be punished and turned to stone & will never to walk the earth again". Those who broke the law became stone and were turned into mountains and hills and those who were obedient were turned into human form and were each given their own totem of the animal, bird or reptile from when they began. The tribes knew themselves by their totems - kangaroo, emu, carpet snake, and many, many more. So no one would starve, the Rainbow Serpent ruled that no man should eat of his totem, but only of other totems. This way there was food for everyone.

The tribes lived together on the land given to them by the Rainbow Serpent or Mother of Life and knew the land would always be theirs, and no one should ever take it from them.



Contrast with colonizers' concepts of the land

«European cultures of conquest and Aboriginal cultures of balance»
(Rose 1996: 11).

- Different concepts regarding the land being imposed on Aboriginal world views – still nowadays.
 - Owners vs custodians.
 - That is why when colonizers came and they imposed concepts such as land ownership and private property, it did not make sense to Aboriginal people. Because no signs of clear ownership were spotted by colonizers on the Australian landscape, they used this against Aboriginal people.
 - Also importation of conservation ideas related to the land: preservation of nature, especially from the end of the XIX century, was meant as a total separation of the natural environment from the human sphere.
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