

The Australian Aborigines

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This is the sixth of a series of articles based on Professor Elkin's book and printed here with the permission of the author and the publisher. These articles are being featured in NEW DAWN for the benefit of those Aborigines who feel they would like to know more about their background. As these articles are a good deal shorter than the chapters from which they were taken, it is suggested that those seeking more detail should read the book itself.

PART VI

The Family and Other Relations

We have seen how the tribal territory is, in a general sense, the Aborigine's home. What is true of the tribal land is much more true of the country of a *local group*. Those who belong to this local group and own the land are usually a group related in the male line, together with their wives who come from other local countries. Each local group has its name taken from some tree or animal, or from some totemic and historical source. But what really makes this local country "home" is the fact that the spirits of all who belong to it pre-existed in spirit homes at known spots within it. All believed that the spirits returned to those places after death. In this way a person is tied to his "country" for it is the home of his spirit. The members of a local group and also members of the tribe are also bound together by the fact that they share great ancestors and culture heroes who travelled through their tribal territory and by spiritual means left human spirits at various places.

Kinship

Europeans usually limit their recognition of family relationships to grandparents, uncles, aunts, parents, brothers and sisters, cousins, nephews

and nieces, grandchildren and "in-laws". The Aborigines reckon their relationships much more widely, even beyond the borders of any one tribe. Everyone is regarded as a relation and two people must know what their relationship is, so that they will know how to behave towards one another. This is considered very important in Aboriginal society. How do Aborigines classify their relations? Do they have hundreds of different names for them such as "third cousins", "great uncle", etc.? No, instead they enlarge their family until it includes the whole tribe.

Thus, as an Aborigine, I regard my father's brother as my father (not as my uncle) and therefore his children as my brothers and sisters and not as cousins. Likewise, I regard my mother's sister as my mother (not as my aunt) and therefore her children are my brothers and sisters, not my cousins. So too, if I am a man, my brother's children are in a sense my children; they regard me as their father and if their father dies, I become in practice their father and look after them as my own. In the same way, a woman's

A Photographic Rideabout Around Nowra

