Indigenous australians

Introduction

Indigenous Australians are scattered across the nation. As of 2006, there are around 517, 000 indigenous Australians living in the country out of a total population of around 21 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Because of the variety of climate, vegetation and availability of resources in various parts of Australia, indigenous Australians usually move about in bands for protection and mobility. According to the Encyclopedia Brittanica (1980, p. 428) this pattern of nomadic existence basically did not change until the arrival of European settlers beginning in 1788. The subsequent interaction and eventual conflict between the two cultures caused major changes in the indigenous Australians' culture. Their social organisations were eroded primarily due to population shifts and the attempt to assimilate them into Western society. The latter include the controversial adoption methods when thousands of indigenous Australian children were taken away from their families to be educated in Western style schools during the 19th century. Aborigines were also forced to flee constant European influx into their homelands, marked by clashes during the " pacification campaign" of the 1880s.

(Encyclopedia Brittanica 1980, p. 429) Beginning in 1965, the Australian government eventually changed this policy to integration in a multi-ethnic commonwealth. This was in response to protests by human rights activists and the indigenous Australians themselves complaining against centuries-long discrimination by European settlers. From the 1970s onwards, the Australian government had given Aborigines more self determination rights in governing their affairs especially those among living in indigenous

communities. However, despite the granting of more rights to indigenous Aborigines, many experts pointed that social problems such as unemployment, alcoholism and suicide rates still remain a primary concern among the indigenous Australians. This is connected to the fact that many indigenous Australians have migrated to cities especially since the 1970s to look for job opportunities Taylor (2006, p3).

General concept of kinship

Indigenous Australians, either from both inland and coastal areas have three main features characterizing their social organizations and culture: food gathering tribes are small and mostly depend on gathering-hunting activities, b) members must cooperate with each other for survival and c.) religion plays an important role in the lives of indigenous Australians (Encyclopedia Brittanica 1980, p. 424). It is generally agreed upon by anthropologists that at the macro-level, the social structure of indigenous Australians, before the coming of Europeans, was based on the following in descending order: tribe, moieties, semi-moieties, sections, sub-sections, and clans. Anthropological studies have concluded that indigenous Australians use this distinction of tribes into sub-groups as a means to govern marriage and social interaction.

At the micro-level, indigenous Aborigines classify themselves into local descent groups and hordes which each indigenous Australian identified himself with at the local level. Descent groups are formed by a grouping of individuals claiming patrilineal descent from a common ancestor and practicing exogamous marriages, Hordes, on the other hand, are formed by

individuals who gather together for a specific " business" purpose (Encyclopedia Britannica 1980, 428).

Kinship has been defined in various ways by anthropologists. Goudelier, (1998 as cited in Dousett 2001) termed kinship is a " huge field of social and mental realities stretching between two poles." In between, Goudelier added, kinship covers abstract and concrete concepts: the abstract aspect covers the various rules and regulations covering interpersonal relationships. As for the concrete aspect, kinship covers the titles used in referring to persons connected to kinship relationships. Meanwhile, Stone (1997 as cited in Dousett 2001) describes kinship as the " recognition of relationships" between persons according to descent or marriage. Tonkinson (1991 as cited in Dousett 2001) finds kinship as a wide network of relationships, no two of which are related to each other. Dousett (2002) termed kinship as the " set of norms, rules, institutions and cognitive recognitions" used in referring to inborn or future social relationships of a person and is addressed through a specific " biological idiom"

Unlike in the Western concept, kinship among indigenous Australians extends beyond an individual's connection with blood relatives. Tonkinson (1991 cited in Dousett (2001) added that kinship is important in small societies such as those of the indigenous Australians because it defines interpersonal behavior among individuals, compliance of which is essential for a group's survival. Kinship networks also play a role in resource sharing among indigenous Australians. There is an inherent tradition among them that each individual have to share their resources with each other especially in times of need. Schwab and Liddle (1997) pointed out that this is quantified

by limitations on when an individual may share or may refuse to share depending on the sharer's capacity to give. But both the sharer and the receiver must keep in mind the social implications of their actions on their clan's kinship ties, Schwab and Liddle added (1997). Dousett (2002) also mentioned that Aboriginal concept of kinship is different from the Western concept. While the " Euro-American" concept of kinship is based on direct lineage of an individual to other persons within his community, by contrast indigenous Australian's consider kinship also covers relationships based on business transactions. In addition, indigenous Australian kinship serves also as a social control because it also defines how an individual plays a role in society in relation with other members even those who are not of his same lineage. In fact, familial terms (" father," " mother") can also refer to other older members of the descent group, or clan which an individual may belong. However, kinship terms serves not only as titles for respect but also serves as " behavioral signals' which mark what an individual can or cannot do with regard to personal relationships and expectations of sexual access. This means kinship terms are a vital part in determining the marriage and socialization of individual young members In addition these terms also signify which person can be considered as a spouse or affine (a relative by marriage).

Doulett cites Henry Lewis Morgan, an American lawyer-anthropologist, explanation on how indigenous Australian societies' kinship systems work. Morgan (1877, 1871 in Doulett 2000) had earlier described in the 19th century that indigenous Australian kinship systems are classificatory. This is because Australian Aborigines consider all persons within a community as

related to each other in various ways. Morgan also said that the Australian Aborigines' kinship system reflects the initial stages of evolution changes in human society. From the banding together of two or more individuals, this eventually grew into a tribal organization where intermarriage was common, toward the eventual development of a city state. In this evolutionary phase, the Aboriginal kinship system was in the second stage.

Socialization, social control:
Anthropologists have mentioned that kinship restriction and rules are already visible even during childhood socialization. Aborigine parents train children to socialize with fellow age-group members, and at the same time train them already in the ways of the tribe (e. g. food gathering and hunting.) Young girls went with their mothers to collect food, while young boys were compelled to learn hunting by their own. However, there are certain restrictions in how the children interact with other persons. For instance, brothers and sisters would play separately from each other, while " mothers-in-law" and " sons in law" would not play together. (the latter would apply when a young man groomed to marry a female is compelled to live in the camp of his pair's family.) (Encyclopedia Brittanica 1980, p. 426).

In terms of authority, leadership is based on the scope of an elder's kinship network. Hence, for more complex matters, such as arbitration in disputes, elders of a clan gather together to discuss and reach a consensus over these issues. (Encyclopedia Brittanica 1980, p. 427).

However, kinship systems do not restrict social mobility when it comes to social classes or strata. While there is a hierarchy where young Aborigines

have to pass as they learn various skills, indigenous Australian society as a whole allows individuals to excel in religious and economic affairs primarily through their own efforts and skills. (Encyclopedia Brittanica 1980, p. 427).

Kinship and marriage

Marriage among indigenous Australians cements the role of kinship as more than just linking personal relationships between and among members of a moietie, clan or tribe. It serves also as a kind of social negotiation between one unit with another on virtually all social matters ranging from arranging future marriages between the clans' members and transaction of barter trades. Marriage between two individuals also reaffirms ties between groups which already have preordained tasks and obligations even before the marriage is consummated formally. Indigenous Australians have also used marriage to compel the other clan to provide spouses for future marriages. This may explain why the practice in some moiety to compel its members to marry a member from another particular moiety.

Houseman (2007) had said in his study that " Marriage is a product of social constructs." To elaborate further, marriage is also linking other individuals together by virtue of linking the bride and the groom in a socially sanctified wedding ritual. These individuals, because they are related either to the bride and groom, are by implication, now related also through affinity. This linkage is based on what anthropologists have enunciated as the intertwining of kinship ties and marriage ties.

With regard to this remark on marriage, Houseman explored in his study how indigenous Australians construct and maintain marriage networks as a form

of promoting social stability among themselves. In his study, Houseman theorized that indigenous Australians practice marriage as a confluence of various social and personal factors and that marriages are interlinked through a circular pattern from core marriages to outer marriages. He also distinguishes some marriage determinants, which include: " deliminated marriage network," " core of deliminated marriage network," " matrimonial community," and " connobium."

Houseman (2007) defines deliminated marriage network as a web of relationships extracted from a larger grouping and is formed by the confluence of tribe-and clan-based perspectives on marriage. This means that from a particular community or clan, there is a specific network from which all persons related to the couple to be married are connected in some way. On the other hand, " core of deliminated marriage networks' comprises of genealogical circuits of the " reconnected marriage," meaning these are lineages among individuals which have been re-linked with the marriage of two individual Aborigines. The determinant " matrimonial community' pertains to the set of non- intermarrying individuals who are related to each other through core marriages. Springing from this concept is the connobium which refers to the connection of non-intermarrying individuals to each other through multiple core marriages.

However, Aboriginal moieties and clans do not intermarry just because they have to maintain close ties with each other Houseman (2007). Evidence suggested by previous research suggest that moieties and clans intermarry with other tribal sub-units because that these groups can be relied upon in maintaining the land, guarding it from intrusion by other groups, are able to

share knowledge about the land, and that they can perform certain rituals according to specific occasions.

Kinship after colonization; contemporary times

The onslaught of modern ideas due to colonization and Westernization has wrought major changes in indigenous Australians' culture. Experts noted that the destruction or even at least alteration of kinship networks has left many individual Aborigines grappling with culture shock Those who may not have been able to adjust well to the realities of modern Australian life have resorted to alcoholism, and suicide as desperate attempts to escape their problems, studies have shown. Studies by Daly and Smith (1997) and Hunter and Gray(1999) cited figures showing that indigenous Australians suffer higher rates of poverty and at the lower end of the income gap with non-Aboriginal Australians even as recent as the 1990s.

One factor which affected the kinship systems of Australian indigenous peoples is the fact that many if not most of them already been intermixed with European blood. In addition they may have been heavily influenced by the Western culture that they encounter in the cities. As mentioned early in this essay, beginning in the 19th century many Aborigines have either moved from their homelands in search of jobs or were forced to flee European incursion into their lands. In fact until the 1990s, many Australian cities saw continued influx of indigenous Australians even as these cities also reported net migration losses.(Taylor, 2006 p. 63) Hence many of the indigenous Australians were either the products of interracial marriage or had intermarried into European families (as in the case of African-Americans in the United States during the slave trade-era.). In addition as the

indigenous Australians moved in the cities they had to deal with a different culture system where the emphasis is on individual excellence. But since they are away from their ancestral lands, they also lacked support systems, both in terms of providing material and emotional assistance, whenever they encounter problems in finding jobs, places to live. etc. Another more profound determinant in the alteration of Aborigine social systems is the compelled enrollment of Aborigine children to schools (especially the ones who were adopted by White families). Because the curriculum of these schools are centered on European culture, many Aborigine children tend to be assimilated by intensely studying European-style subjects and the English language. As a result, they have to uproot themselves from the traditional way of life and culture that they had experienced in their tribes.

A Portrait of Life and Self Destruction

Layton (2007) revealed many aspects on modern-day problems at the end of the 20th century in his review of the book Aboriginal Suicide is Different: A Portrait of Life and Self Destruction. While reviewing the 2005 book by Colin Tatz, Layton discussed some factors behind Aborigines' suicides even though medical research concluded that there were no considerable patterns of mental illnesses among them distinctive from Australia's general population. Layton added that overall rates for unemployment, drug abuse, and alcoholism were similar for both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal populations, so this would not factor likely as the root cause behind the suicide rates among Aborigines. He said that this may be explained by the fact that during the 1980s, the social organization of many Aboriginal tribes and clans had been destroyed by the intrusion of modern culture and also by government

policies of allowing Aborigines to depend on state sponsored welfare. Layton, quoting Tatz as suggesting that Aborigines be given more literacy training, " personal empowerment," highlighting positive roles of Aborigines in community development etc .

Meanwhile Wooten (2002, p. 78) believed that the reason behind continued poverty among Aborigines is that the policy of self-determination, enunciated in the 1980s, has only worsened the dependency of many indigenous Australians on the federal and state governments. He recommends that the government instead concentrate on training Aborigines in adjusting to the realities and problems of modern living. To explain his point, Wooten used the metaphor of prison camp to highlight Australia's situation on Aborigines According to the anthropology professor, while the prisoners were supposed to have been freed since they federal government grant self determination to them in the 1980s, the policy may have proved to be a motivation for many " prisoners (ie Aborigines) to remain inside the " prison." What he suggests is that he government train the Aborigines to eventually get out of the " prison." In addition, he commented that organizations founded by the government and private sector to help alleviate the widespread poverty among Aborigines should a.) be judged according to their performance and not because no indigenous Australians were reportedly sitting inside; while b) their shortcomings in supporting the indigenous Australians should not be overseen

With renewed attempts among many Aborigines to reclaim their heritage, aside from seeking damages due to the " assimilation" policy," there also arises the need for Aborigines to once again study their clan or tribes'

kinship systems. Doulet (2002) also mentioned that there is a need for indigenous Australians to know more about the kinship systems of their particular tribe or clan (whatever may be the case), especially if they want to regain ancestral land which were seized by European settlers during the 19th century. This is because modern legal jurisprudence demands that claimants must know about the size and legal details of the property in dispute for them to be able to back up their claims stronger.

Based from the findings of these three anthropology experts, this writer opines that a) European colonisation and the subsequent implementation of the " assimilation" policy did considerably damage the indigenous Australians kinship systems Because each tribe's kinship system had a relatively small scope covering only certain number of moieties, groups, clans, these were not able to withstand changes wrought by the arrival of the Europeans: population losses, expulsion from ancestral lands, introduction of new kinds of work, Europeanization. As we have seen, the indigenous Australians' kinship system relies mainly on personalistic ties between clans, as shown in the use of marriage to bind two separate groups.

On the other hand, it is to the credit of the Australian government that major policy changes have been made with regard to indigenous Australians. From the 1965 decree allowing Aborigines to choose if they want to be assimilated to the 1980s order giving self determination among them until the present day system of training them for capacity development through government funded organizations, the federal and state governments have been trying to make up for two centuries of racial discrimination. This writer agrees, however, that the Aborigines themselves must also help themselves in

integrating into Australian society. They may actively participate in the abovementioned training programs in order to develop their skills. Or they eventually join the organisations running those programs so that they can have a greater voice in decision-making processes which concern their welfare. But it is important also that the Aborigines, especially the educated ones, should revisit the kinship networks of their clans to see if they can still be readjusted in line with contemporary developments. This is because while the indigenous Australians are, theoretically, integrated into a multi-ethnic society, still they have a unique culture which they cannot discard in the name of cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion

This essay has shown the various factors influencing indigenous Australians' kinship systems, how the latter affect the social and economic aspects of daily living and how these has changed in the past centuries This essay has also pointed out that both the federal government and the indigenous Australians play important roles in mitigating damages caused by colonisation on indigenous Australian kinship networks.

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