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## 'Working for' and 'Working' among Western Arrernte in Central Australia<sup>1</sup>

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This article discusses some conflicts between kin- and market-based society as they are reflected in the lives of Western Arrernte in and around Ntaria (Hermannsburg). Both political economy and cultural analysis provide accounts of concomitant 'problems about work' and training initiatives in remote communities. Neither brings together, however, the issues of economic marginalisation and a history of cultural difference with its own transformations. This discussion takes its departure from the Arrernte's attempts to reconcile kinship service ('working for') and paid employment ('working') in everyday practice. It demonstrates that this attempt is part of broader change concerning the ways in which hunter-gatherer people in Australia have been compelled to adapt to a world of cash and commodities, and waged employment. In this discussion, the focus is on remote indigenous Australians today.

### INTRODUCTION: 'PROBLEMS ABOUT WORK'

A recent visit to the Western Arrernte outstation service centre (Tjuwanpa), found it a shadow of its former self. Both service and community projects were struggling and administrators conceded that unless an outstation was relatively close people resided most of the time in Ntaria/Hermannsburg. I yarned with the current manager whom I was meeting for the first time. He reiterated the rationale for outstations common in the period of land claims under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976: Outstations built on traditional country should also be sites of local economy in which people would work on small-scale projects. In this way, outstation residents would sustain themselves both as remote indigenous Australians, and as members of the nation state. Maintaining work for the dole, community projects and some small business was seen as a reasonable compromise between traditional and modern ways. Western Arrernte would live remote and more traditionally, and at the same time retain just a modest engagement with a market economy, supplemented by federal government transfers (see Austin-Broos 2001; Sanders 1993).

This had seemed a reasonable course through the 1980s and early 1990s. A decade later, the path had proved harder to realise than many imagined. Federal government responses now proclaim a course of mainstream education, less emphasis on transfers and renewed efforts to build small business in the outback. At the same time, there is tentative mention of rural to urban migration. In addition, resourcing outstations has become a major

issue. The Western Arrente's outstation movement was among the first and grew large on early funding regimes. However, as attitudes in government changed and regional demands escalated these outstation pioneers, in the eyes of Alice Springs administrators, became 'too spoilt,' 'too well serviced,' 'don't want to work,' 'can't work' . . . and 'all-like-that' (as one Western Arrente woman parodied the slights).<sup>2</sup>

The Tjuwanpa manager to whom I spoke adopted a milder approach. He observed that 'We need someone to come up 'ere and work with these young fellas . . . find out what they want to do, what sorta work they want. Maybe no-one's asked them what they want to do.' This manager was well-meaning. He seemed to sense that something more than bludging was involved. His remarks reminded me of Friedrich Albrecht, the Lutheran pastor who succeeded Carl Strehlow at Hermannsburg. Not a scholar but a practical man,<sup>3</sup> Albrecht had sought to turn Hermannsburg into a rural industrial village following the disastrous drought of 1928-1929. He saw clearly that a hunting and foraging life was finished for the Arrente and had himself played a part in disrupting 'nomadism.' He was therefore an early, committed, assimilationist (see Albrecht 2003).

Nonetheless, Albrecht had some cultural insight nurtured by decades spent with Western Arrente. His commitment to promoting work and apprenticeship showed some ambivalence, and was interspersed with cries of frustration. These are evident in his papers and in his biography. Henson observes that '[Albrecht's] efforts for economic progress were often undercut by recurring *problems about work*' (Henson 1992:111. My emphasis.). Albrecht saw two main issues. One was the difficult relation between work and the authority of ritual life. He cited the following instance:

Once at Hermannsburg, the head gardener could not dare to ask his fellow gardener to assist him in shifting a fairly heavy reticulation pipe for fear the other man could feel offended. As I was absent from the place, we lost [a large amount of vegetable produce]. (Albrecht 1961:4)

The second issue that Albrecht identified was a supposed economy of limited good in which the meanings of commodities and cash, and time-space of Aboriginal life, were markedly at variance with values of market society and its forms of governance. Albrecht gave an example:

I have a coloured man in view, father of 3 children and a wife (sic). Having a fair knowledge of the working of engines, and after months of unemployment, he lands a job on a station, with good wages and good conditions for himself and his family. He himself states [that] "I don't want anything better". Then, after about 8 weeks he feels he will go and visit friends some considerable distance away, he does, and his good job is gone too. It means little if anything to him that it may take him a long time before such an opportunity comes his way again. . . . [I]n their feelings, there is nothing to guide them differently. (Albrecht 1961:5)

The bemused or possibly vexed Tjuwanpa manager might have said a similar thing. In fact, there is a marked continuity between the manager's remarks and Albrecht's written comments in the 1960s in which he reflected on 30 years at Hermannsburg.

In various forms of literature on remote Indigenous Australia, 'problems about work' elicit two types of analysis. One underlines that most of central Australia is marginal to the national economy. The formulation often is that a labour market barely exists for unskilled and semi-skilled work in remote areas. Only boring, artificial tasks are on offer, or trade work poorly paid in which the employer is relying on Aboriginal ingenuity and experience but failing to reward skill not produced through formal training. There are at least two standard forms of response to this analysis. Both place an emphasis on better education and

training. One also underlines continuing government transfers and possibly expanded private/public initiatives in regional areas. The other, neo-liberal approach emphasises small business and migration for employment, either one-way or in the form of circular migration to fill labour contracts. The first political economy approach places the emphasis on sustaining communities by creating regional employment. The second is individualistic and eschews a communal focus. Both propose that the issues in remote Indigenous Australia have nothing in particular to do with culture.

By contrast, the second approach is cultural. This one concerns itself with meaning and value. It proposes that Aboriginal people nowadays 'hunt and gather' welfare as they once gathered up rations and used them to their own ends (see Rowse 1998). In the process, they invest both cash and commodities with contextual meanings that have more to do with servicing relatedness than with the functional tasks of market economy.<sup>4</sup> 'Work' in a market sense therefore lacks salience. In addition, Peterson (1998, 2005) notes that Aborigines value autonomy, even in their relatedness, and also have failed to become 'consumer dependent.' Therefore, even though they experience poverty, remote indigenous Australians can be quite reluctant to assume market society values. Save for Peterson, these accounts identify a cultural conflict but downplay its bleak effects. As a consequence, this cultural approach can end in complacency, suggesting that Aboriginal people simply choose the value of their acts and the power of that value.

A third view common among Western Arrernte is different from both of these. People describe members of past generations as being 'good workers' and often complain that outstations have 'no work for kids' by which they mean no work beyond the tasks involved in work for the dole programmes.<sup>5</sup> One man succinctly remarked that people came into the mission for rations, stayed there until outstations began, and then went back to country. However, on country there is 'no work now,' and none in Ntaria either. Arrernte who make these comments do not make them embracing 'work' as a tool of personal salvation as Albrecht might have (see Rowse 1998:85). Nor do they suggest that work as production is *the* elaboration of the subject, as Marx proposed in his critique of alienation. Rather, they simply observe that mission and outstation milieux are orders that involve work as an integral component. If such orders have no work they are problematical.

This comment is subtler than either the political economy or the cultural account. It neither accepts market society, nor embodies a simple rejection of its alien way. Nor does it merely involve an unproblematic meshing of 'intercultural' practices. Rather, it registers an uneasy dilemma among Western Arrernte. The dilemma reflects the fact that while people are no longer hunter gatherers, neither is the majority paid workers of the type that is valued by the state. Being thus encompassed by the state but not assimilated, the Arrernte have filled the space with forms of relatedness that focus on the circulation of welfare rather than waged and continuing employment. Dimensions of these practices are known as 'working for' and 'working' among Western Arrernte. The former refers to the service in kin relations by which small quantities of cash and things are distributed. The latter refers to formal regimes of training and continuous waged work (also see Austin-Broos 2003a). Sometimes Arrernte see these as conflicting practices. They describe them as 'fighting' each other.

In sum, a faltering outstation system and problems about work in remote milieux reflect the intersection of two factors: first, marginalisation by the state and its market society and second, a Western Arrernte response that draws on their own sociality and forms of value. 'Working for' relatives through service relations that deploy the modest resources of government transfers re-interprets market marginalisation but without creating a viable economy or concomitant system of prestige. 'Working' in paid jobs is therefore desirable but seldom attainable except in episodic form. As a consequence, the elaboration of relatedness displays a certain involution. Western Arrernte respond to market society in ways that are consistent with a past sociality but in ways that, re-contextualised, cannot either retrieve the past, or generate new and viable forms. Youth drift towards Alice Springs, via Ntaria,

but with few of the skills or values required to remake a life.

This dilemma reflects not just cultural difference, but a history of difference and its transformations in the context of prolonged marginalisation. The following discussion presents an account of this difference and, more briefly, some ways in which Arrente are seeking to deal with it. The next three sections discuss different dimensions of the diverse practice and value involved in market society and Arrente ways. A further section considers various hierarchies of value through which individual Arrente or families address this diversity. In my conclusion I draw attention to some further implications of this analysis.

#### ‘WORKING FOR’ AND ‘WORKING’: DIVERSE CONCEPTS

In the late 1980s and through the 1990s, various programs in trade and clerical training were run by Tjuwanpa qualified trade staff, both Indigenous (2) and non-Indigenous (4-5). They sought to impart skills leading to pre-apprenticeship certificates. Trainees at Tjuwanpa were usually in their late teens or early twenties and received a loading on the pay they received in work for the dole programs. Their educational background could involve some post-primary education either in Ntaria through adult education, or at Yirrara secondary college in Alice Springs. Trainees would travel to Tjuwanpa from their outstation, or stay during the week with relatives at Ntaria. Around the year 2000, the federal Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business required that funded training be linked to real job placement. Training activity decreased. More recently, comparable training has been offered by the Centre for Alternative Technology in Alice Springs. Billed as a ‘leadership’ program, it brings young adults from remote areas into Alice Springs intending that they will return and create a ‘trickle down’ effect.

The limitations in these initiatives are obvious and exacerbated by the fact that possibilities for continuing employment in and around Ntaria are limited. Yet ‘training’ as the route to ‘work’ is part of the Arrente’s normative scheme, a sense of what ‘ought to be’ in modern settlement life. Especially among male youth, training is thought of as part of maturation. Training is also seen as boredom’s antidote and many engage in it, especially in late adolescence: ‘Better than nothin.’ ‘My uncle said to come.’ ‘Maybe I bin work in Alice Springs.’ Graffiti scrawled on the side of the metal shop announce ‘Job for me!’ ‘Car shop!’ and, simply, ‘Mechanic!’ A few such trainees do insert themselves in the Alice Springs economy. Most, however, become engaged in a long and faltering process of episodic training and work that leads into middle age.<sup>6</sup>

This may suggest that training has a low priority for Western Arrente living on country. In one sense this is true but the sense is a complex one especially from the viewpoint of older women and men. These children of the mission’s last generation are currently in their 40s and 50s. They know that their parents had good literacy and commonly describe them by reference to their work. Construction is important, whether it was road work, houses, mini-dams, the Hermannsburg pipeline, or sinking wells or water bores, even etching a cattle route by using it constantly. These activities had impact on the landscape and allow people to mark and locate their antecedents’ lives.<sup>7</sup> People also note translation skills, mustering skills, and craft and artwork.<sup>8</sup> Having acquired such skills is recorded as a matter of pride. Yet, work opportunities have declined and the three to four generations now at Ntaria trace a passage from rations-for-service, to the cash economy, and then to marginalisation and immersion in welfare.

One outcome of this process is a discontinuity between generations that produces recrimination and dispute. Everyone gets fed up, abuses the substance of their choice and violence is common in domestic groups. Another outcome is a dense elaboration of the bilateral kin relations that once mediated food distribution and also gave access to country in a foraging economy. Linked with past practice, these relations now are much extended as networks of regular association. In the context of settlement, transport, and the proliferation

of things and cash that government transfers bring, circulation rather than production has become the Arrernte's *forte* (see Peterson 1991; Austin-Broos 2003a, 2004). Moreover, this circulation creates its own time-space as the density of settlements is balanced by the far-flung relations and the time spent travelling that motor transport allows (cf. Harvey 1989). Using a familiar technique, the Western Arrernte have innovated to cope with a world that confronts them both as value to be realised, and as objectified and hostile order. Well-being is seen to derive from this relatedness and 'work,' although a significant practice, is not the defining feature of a person.

For most non-Indigenous Australians, the situation is different. The meaning of training and work entails a sense of the subject that evokes a career narrative. People in significant part are their 'work', whether nurse, clerk, lawyer, teacher or, as a non-indigenous worker at Tjuwanpa once described himself, 'broken-arsed mechanic'. Occupations and their social milieux, the latter influenced by form of work, bear on people's sociality and their identities. The details of a career, that may involve more than one work role, objectify a subject. That subject is, in turn, the objectification of a career (see also Strathern 1988:176). In Marshall Sahlins terms, 'work' is part of the symbolic scheme that informs market society (see Sahlins 1976: vii-viii). The relation between this career narrative and kinship or 'family' casts family in a separate and subordinate role. In these terms family is a portable, affective domain to socialise and make at home people who do or will engage the market. Kinship is seen as separate from economy and families support careers. Gender and lifestyle movements, and the recent casualisation of many Australian jobs, contest these values. Still, they remain important as ideal and metaphor. If not a *doxa*, they are surely an orthodoxy of market society (see Bourdieu 1977:159-71).<sup>9</sup> When two strangers meet, they ask each other what each 'does,' rather than, in an Arrernte way, establish their relatedness.

In the context of Oceania, Godelier (1977), Strathern (1985), and Myers (1986) have remarked on the 'domination of kinship over economies' that is familiar to the anthropology of small-scale stateless societies (see Myers 1986:218). In his study of the Pintupi, who reside west of the Arrernte, Myers demonstrates how social relatedness, for a desert people, produces or realises resources by allowing access to land. As Myers himself suggests, sustaining relatedness is in itself something comparable to European work in the Pintupi order. Widespread relatedness is valued in itself but also provides access to resources (see Myers 1986:71-102, 218). Strathern puts it another way when she writes of what it can mean for kinship to 'constitute' economy. She argues that in service societies, labour 'cannot be detached' from 'specific relationships' (Strathern 1985:197).<sup>10</sup> Just as important in central Australia, this relatedness is a process of transaction with its paradigm in ritual life and in relations that obtain between the generations.

This is reflected in language. The Arrernte term *urkapeme* is the one that is usually used to translate the English 'work.' The word consists of two roots that reflect its past use as a term applied to the ritual work done by helpers in ceremony. *Urrkngne* means 'red clay' or 'mud' and *apeme* means 'to smear,' *apeleme*, 'to smear oneself.' In short, the term's original use involved the description of painting or smearing ochre and other materials on the body as decoration for performance. Work in this sense was something *kwertengerle* or managers did within a context of kin and ritual relations (see also Hamilton 1998). Interestingly, a word that is sometimes proposed as another equivalent of the English 'work' is *tyurreleweme*, (lit.) leg-to throw' or 'throwing the leg' which refers to the meat payment that a junior man might give to his senior. This is the paradigm of 'working for' a custodian, and certainly it is through this male-oriented metaphor that *urkapeme* has come to mean 'work.'

Activities that English would comfortably describe as 'work,' and were performed by women, have different but related connotations. To collect berries or seed, for instance, is *uthneme* which also means 'to bite.' On bush tucker hunts, women often play with the fact that collecting with the hand also means biting. One nips with both fingers and teeth and it



is not coincidental that collecting or producing is also to consume. Thus they once did, accompanied by their children. The word *mpareme* or 'make' is used for setting up a camp or bringing a group together, as well as 'making' artefacts. In fact one makes or creates a camp by spatialising social relations in a particular place. Men's work carried connotations of serving a senior whereas women's forms of work entail social dimensions of nurturing or looking after. In short, productive activity was once drawn back to a concrete and gendered logic with its own range of social and moral implications. Productive activity was embedded in relatedness, in different types of service.

In Arrernte English these service relations are described as 'working for' and 'looking after' kin. 'Working for' involves a response to demand but also foreshadows a demand in return. The services of a manager in relation to an owner are reciprocated on the other's country. A young person works for an older one and expects some caring or teaching in return. If an old person seems harsh, another will urge her to 'give 'im something,' be it food or some information (see also Myers 1986:111,113). This latter kind of caring, spontaneously given, is *ntarntareme* or 'looking after'. Interestingly, in the Lutheran liturgy, the word is used to describe what God does for the Arrernte. It also means 'to sit with,' as a mother does with a baby lying on her lap or leaning against her (see also Hamilton 1981:33-34). The term has connotations of encompassing and protection that act to mask the authority involved. 'Working for' and 'looking after' describe a relationship, the relatedness involved in inter-generational kin relations.

'Working for' and 'looking after' produce and reproduce the social group and the place of which they are a part. The wellsprings of this scheme are kinship and country so that the activities of sitting with, making camp, foraging, hunting and preparing for ceremonial describe various practices that reproduce values of social being in place. It is only in the English of market-based sociality that components of this practice also become 'work.' Just as important, when that work is a marginal and intermittent activity, the values of relatedness confront those of training and blur the forms of significance involved. This conflict generates 'problems about work,' as prevalent now as they were in Friedrich Albrecht's day.

Very often, a Tjuwanpa trainee will work for a while and then ask a *lhentere* (whitefella) for 'something,' possibly five or twenty dollars. In the context of workplace relations, the demand is interpreted as 'sponging' or 'humbug.' Away from their charges, both male and female trainers declare that they 'don't give money' and that trainees engage in 'black-mail.' The remarks have strong moral overtones. In the context of relatedness, this is a demand that 'working for' be acknowledged and that the 'boss' affirms the caring or 'looking after' that comes with authority (see also Myers 1986:221). Many Arrernte youth play the system both ways well aware of the divergent values involved. Nonetheless, the pattern points to a real cultural impasse. The *lhentere* are at least annoyed. Why should they give something to someone they are training? The *relhe* (or Arrernte) leave the scene with the comment that their 'work for' a *lhentere* was not appreciated. In sum, the consociate relations of the workplace, where the sharing of things and cash is circumscribed, are not the service relations of Western Arrernte relatedness. Training is thereby experienced as unsatisfactory on both sides.

One example of these tensions in the workplace is provided by two men, Rudy and Michael. Rudy was a Tjuwanpa mechanic and a Centralian.<sup>11</sup> Though he kept his domestic domain rigidly privatised from Aborigines he was reputed to work well with local people. He was popular among Western Arrernte who referred to him as 'that old man.' In his private domain he was a very heavy drinker but no-one turned him in. Michael came from an outstation west of Tjuwanpa. He was a mature, young Arrernte man on his mother's side. Through his father he had pastoral experience and worked on his own place mustering feral camels. He came in to Ntaria and sought work at Tjuwanpa because a relative had died and he was doing 'sorry' in Ntaria. He could not return west for some time. Rudy gave him

training work in the garage, not least because he liked Michael who, in turn, was reputed to have ritual knowledge. Rudy was sufficiently engaged with 'blackfella ways' to seek the prestige of association with Michael. He began to teach Michael the mechanic's craft. The two went to K-Mart in Alice Springs to buy Michael glasses for, like Rudy, he had 'bad eyes.' After a while, things grew tense as Michael first demanded cash from Rudy who could easily refuse kids but felt awkward with this man. Then Michael began to refuse to do certain tasks that Rudy himself took for granted. As a cultural fact, at no time could Rudy demand of Michael. He was ill at ease about their diverse claims to status and also sensed, intuitively it seemed, that demanding cash as a play with relatedness to establish mutuality opened up a social vista he could not engage with. Soon relations began to drift and then Michael came to work less and less. Soon he stayed away altogether but after a while he returned.

His reappearance was accompanied by a new innovation. He began to arrive at Rudy's gate with one or another female relative. Each time they carried a number of poor and quickly executed acrylic dot paintings. When Rudy refused to buy, I was approached as Rudy's neighbour and the next best bet in sight. Still no luck. Michael's view seemed to be that if whitefellas required some object mediation for demand, this compromise was worth a try. I was familiar with such normative exchanges around Ntaria. A little like street dwellers in Sydney who, under the aegis of a charity, sell their own magazine (and therefore 'don't beg'), people at Ntaria often mediate demands on whitefellas by offering a small water-colour painting for sale.<sup>12</sup> The values placed on these paintings can range from \$15 to \$50. Both these instances reflect the fact that the moral economy of the market decrees that a commodity sale is better than demand interpreted as sponging (see also Williams 1995).

Things did not work out for Michael and soon he left the garage. Later, he moved to Alice Springs and later still resumed relations with Rudy as a Western Arrernte service recipient when he began mustering again. This type of social drama was played out again and again during the years that I observed the resource centre. Similar dramas beset Aboriginal trainers from elsewhere. Indigenous trainers from among Western Arrernte were more successful in sustaining activities. This occurred in the two broad areas of road grading and metal work. Their impact was due in part to recruiting relatives and making their workplace a kin-specific site. I discuss this further below.

## YOUTH AND THE LIFE CYCLE: DIVERSE PATHS

There is another dimension to the conflict between 'working' and 'working for.' It pertains to the fact that whereas trade training generally requires a social and locational focus (specialisation), learning through relatedness involves diverse social paths (diversification).

Aboriginal social organisation is marked by lateral extension through kin, marriage, and regional and ritual ties that articulate a fairly egalitarian society. This contrasts with the social stratification, with its concomitant objectifications, that are characteristic of non-indigenous Australia. Whereas the latter look for work role competence and forms of specialisation, the Arrernte way is to build autonomy through networks of relatedness. For women this once involved the elaboration of matrification in the course of foraging (see Hamilton 1987). For men, the route to ritual knowledge was usually traced through diverse paths. Writing of traditional ritual life, circa 1890-1930, and using the example of one man, Rauwiraka, T.G.H. Strehlow (1997) notes the importance of conception totem, patrilineal totem, links with the class of men who are mother's brother, and even relations with non-relatives who share a section of the same dreaming track in an adjoining region. Strehlow's ethnography shows how, out of such diverse relations, a man might build a portfolio of knowledge in the course of a lifetime. And this required his presence at a variety of sites, as well as the ability to stage his own large-scale events. Rauwiraka travelled extensively in the area bounded by the Western Macdonnells (north) and the Palmer River (south) in the

course of his ritual career.

In short, rather than the pursuit of skill re-ordering the social field according to one or a few locales, skill is pursued through the opportunities that arise across time and space. Rumsey (2001), after Deleuze and Guattari, has called this form of organisation 'rhizomic.' When the Lutherans came to Western Arrente country, they demanded an exclusive adherence to Christian doctrine and, interestingly, an end to 'nomadism' (see Austin-Broos 1996b, 2003b). What they elicited was a diversification of knowledge sources so that men sought to acquire Lutheran knowledge and, through their cattle work, to stay in touch with significant sites across a region. Even men who became pastors sometimes maintained significant ritual knowledge (Austin-Broos 1996c).

Today this disposition is manifest in the Aboriginal 'runs' and 'beats' of settled Australia (see Sansom 1982). Young Arrente women and men move with groups of relatives comprised of some among their siblings, cousins and in-laws. Skills, and especially mechanics' skills, vital to the mobile life of Western Arrente, are generally acquired not in formal training but rather in a context of kin.<sup>13</sup> Though women no longer have foraging as a mainstay, some maintain casual work and far-flung networks, a renewed exploration of bilateral kinship that comes with travel and the demise of the mission. In fact, combinations of skill as much as networks can plot a path of engagements with relatives. A man in his late forties who, in occupational terms would be classified as unskilled, is a fencer, expert brumby-breaker, amateur mechanic, some time men's clinic worker and also, in recent years, an eager student of his mother's brother's knowledge. Both this man's deceased father and his father-in-law were Lutheran pastors. His uncle has been an accomplished stockman. Described in these terms, Western Arrente may sound like the 'jacks of all trades' common in depressed rural areas. Yet, this man acquired his nursing skills at a time when his usual outstation life had been disrupted. Residing for lengthy periods in Ntaria, he engaged more than usual with his brother-in-law who, with his wife, is an experienced service worker. Michael aimed at a similar outcome in his engagement with Rudy. These examples show that the diversification in Arrente skills is also in significant part an objectification over time of associations among kin and, now and then, an amenable *lhentere*. This is the 'autonomy' that Peterson (2005) writes about.

Two further factors heighten the effects of this orientation to diversification. Both of these are related to the Arrente's current marginalisation and its intersection with traditional ways. First, the process of maturation among Western Arrente youth is an extended one linked with ritual. After initiation, young men in particular are regarded as autonomous beings if not mature ones. In secular matters, they cannot be 'spoken to' especially by parents. As a consequence, initiation is often followed by an extended period of 'runnin' round.' 'Runnin' round' can be punctuated by 'training' but generally men and women only enter a 'settlin' down' period in their early 40s when the drive to accumulate resources quickens, and grandparental duties start to slow the pace.<sup>14</sup> Owing to lack of work, welfare, limited literacy and the attenuation of ritual, 'runnin' round' is prolonged. Unfortunately, the expectation involved in training is that this will occur between the ages of 18 and 30, a period for the Arrente now of relatively unbridled engagement with kin, travel, drinking, gambling, sport and sex. Even given a more restrained youth, the commitment to a specified role and place that training requires intervenes in the travel that Western Arrente use to realise their relatedness and their sense of autonomy. Expectations that a man or woman address training in their 40s, by which time they should be showing a command of autonomy, are anomalous for many Arrente.

The second issue involves the relation between demand sharing and consumption. The logic of 'work' requires individual consumption and, by extension, some accumulation. In non-indigenous society this includes a house, cars, domestic goods and schooling for children, used to objectify a couple and their careers. Non-Indigenous Australians 'provide' through this consumption whereas Western Arrente 'look after' kin through giving things



away though in doing so they also accumulate relatedness. This means that commodities are multivalent in a system of relatedness. There is some acquisition of durable goods, especially vehicles and houses. At the same time, one has things like cars and houses in order to service kin. Influence and prestige lie in using them to build up networks rather than merely to signal individual prestige (Myers 1988; cf. Strathern 1985; Merlan 1991). In fact where durable goods are concerned, rapid depreciation can be a sign of a well-used thing rather than an abused thing.<sup>15</sup> A car discarded or a shabby house can stand as testimony to an active world of relatedness rather than reflect mere carelessness. However, the tension in these values is revealed in the fact that, unlike differentiated ritual knowledge, cash and commodities do not retain the attribute of something able to be given away as it is also accumulated. The structuring of ritual knowledge largely secured it from depreciation, of permanent loss of the thing in the course of building relatedness.

Together, the impact of these factors is telling. They create the reluctant consumers that Peterson (2005) refers to in his discussion of remote Aboriginal development. Individuals must balance acquisition with the level of demand it elicits. As a consequence, a steady or increased income due to job specialisation provides only part of the motivation that it might for a non-indigenous Australian. This further undermines the attractiveness of 'training' and encourages the cultivation of relatedness with its concomitant diversification. Moreover, Arrernte favour broker roles in organisations because they are often close to the sites of resource transfers. 'Grants' through agencies are the route to resources, especially for those who are outstation leaders. Others, with less resources, press their relatedness.

Widespread relatedness thereby crowds out training in the context of economic marginalisation. People look to circulation rather than production and remark that 'working for' and 'working' sometimes 'fight' each other. This comes especially when plans are made to visit relatives. A mother told me that 'School fight with trip,' meaning that although she knew that her kids should be in school she preferred to have them along on a visit. Trainees commonly say 'That boss [is] too angry' or 'growling' when they explain why they are away from a workplace. This perception of incipient conflict then becomes the reason for pursuing another path. One observed that while working is good, it 'fights with town' (or Alice Springs).

The attenuation of a ritual system and the loss of a foraging life have undermined sources of esteem for both women and men, a circumstance exacerbated by the fact that entry into the cash economy following the mission's demise was marked extensively by the receipt of welfare and other types of government transfer. This circumstance has acted to sustain the status of relative, of being able to work for or look after kin. The degree to which one encompasses others with tact while not being encompassed is the key to this esteem, and now fuels a focus on circulation and resource transfers rather than training for employment that remains uncertain, and ambiguous in its value.

#### OBJECTIFYING SUBJECTS: DIVERSE HISTORIES BEGIN TO CONVERGE

An account that only cites sociality and consumption still falls short of the Arrernte's experience. More generally, these matters concern objectification, the ways in which subjects realise value in the world (see Strathern 1988:176). Too little attention has been given in the Australian literature to the magnitude of change involved in a hunter gatherer people becoming not only sedentary but also absorbed in a market economy. Daniel Miller's discussion of material culture provides one way to grasp the dimensions of this change. Miller, referencing Munn, has pointed to a crucial transition for the Arrernte and other indigenous Australians - from objectification in country to objectification in portable things through the world of circulating cash and goods (see Miller 1993 and Munn 1973; see also Myers 1987).

Western Arrernte and others of the Centre hunted and foraged, living on and knowing

country in a variety of ways. Country and its species - valued accordingly - were the forms of material culture deployed in objectifications of the self. Like other indigenous groups, the Arrernte were known in terms of places and the species associated with them. People's identities were forged, however, not simply through engagement with and knowledge of a natural environment. Identities were shaped by the pursuit of diverse social paths in which subjects, through their relatedness, acted as reciprocal objectifications. As I have proposed above, the material and social were interlinked by the fact that the acquisition of knowledge was always embedded in specific milieux, many of which were kin milieux. Social relations interpreted the landscape and its potential values in ways which were manifest as place interpreting space, and species identification mediating the link between social relations and place. Relatedness realised and was itself objectified in foraging and ritual life which, in concert, gave value to the land and its species. The impact of central Australian settlement was such that this mode of objectification rapidly diminished in significance. People were drawn into settlements and dislodged from country. Though Western Arrernte and others continue to objectify themselves through the articulation of kin relations, with the demise of a foraging economy and more elaborated ritual relations, the phenomenon of kinship is gradually abstracted from its articulation in place, species, song and rite.<sup>16</sup>

A comparable but different genealogy might be written for the European settlers who came to central Australia. Part of this account would involve a remark on the growth in types of work involved in industrial and service economies of the trans-Atlantic world. Work was not always but became an abstracted utility. Though there were once guilds, and forms of domestic economy, there are fewer of these today. For many at least, career narratives, like kin relatedness, are now beset by changing contexts. From Miller's point of view, the compensation for this in market society comes in the profusion of goods that now fills the world. This circumstance expands the choice involved in objectification (see Miller 1993). In short, an increasing abstraction of career narratives has been balanced by the greater ability that industrial and post-industrial moderns have to make themselves at home in a world of chosen commodities.

Western Arrernte, on the other hand, have faced this world of goods embedded in a relatedness that makes them reluctant consumers. Although the practice of this relatedness is increasingly distanced from country, nonetheless it is still designed to subordinate portable things to its purposes. The important ontological issue here is that country did not and could not allow elaboration of moveable property and therefore of commodities without devaluing rite and obviating foraging. What portable things there were, were assimilated to the order of value in locatedness so that most food, many artefacts, and other objects of interest were interpreted as services rather than as property. Integral to this mode of objectification, 'work' was relatedness rather than production. The principal significance of practice and things was to realise the relatedness deployed to value space, objectify relatedness in country, and re-absorb it, through experience, back into identity (see Munn 1973). In short, the assimilation of portable things to relatedness was connected to a broader ontology that involved objectification through country.

Whilst this is still so, the value of country in identity is simplified and does not now act as it once did to anchor an elaborate system of differentiation and esteem. At the same time, a system of symbolic capital now objectified in terms of consumer goods only partly engages Western Arrernte who still use things to enhance relatedness in the local milieu (cf. Simmel 1990). This abstracts Western Arrernte from their previous materiality, places enormous weight on relatedness alone, and does not provide a mode of differentiation and esteem that is easily read by others or themselves. Authority seems to collapse and old people are respected less.

In sum, confronted since the 1970s with circulating cash and a rapidly growing range of goods, Western Arrernte are presented simultaneously with too little and too much. Held on the margins of market society, the Arrernte have continued to sustain relatedness. As a

consequence they have tended to assimilate the meaning of commodities and cash to this mode of social relations (Myers 1987; Peterson 1991; Austin-Broos 2003a). Moreover, deprived of rewarding forms of occupational training in a welfare environment, there has been little real incentive for most to make the shift from relative to producer, and consumer. At the same time, Western Arrernte increasingly engage the urban milieu of Alice Springs. A wider and wider world of money, goods and work confronts them and demands interpretation that 'working for' cannot provide. They are thereby compelled forward into a commodity world and the world of continuous waged employment (see also Austin-Broos 2005).

### DIVERSE WAYS TO CREATE VALUE HIERARCHIES<sup>17</sup>

Both today and in the past, Western Arrernte have managed their dilemmas by placing conflicting values in hierarchical orders. Friedrich Albrecht provides an account of this in the 1920s when men sought to encompass 'working' in 'working for' the missionary. Albrecht relates,

Years ago, at Hermannsburg, it so happened that men would come to me and tell me they were going to get some dingo scalps *for me*. I would correct them by saying: but you are paid cash for your scalps, so you are *not working for me*. Although accepted, it did not sink in very deeply. After a little more talk this man would come in the same way saying: I am going to get some dingo scalps *for you*. Again I would correct him with the same poor results. Quite obviously my attitude differed widely from his feelings in this matter. (Albrecht 1961:2. My emphasis)

The history of Hermannsburg shows that numerous people at the mission, and at Ntaria now, have engaged in work, often intermittently and sometimes continuously over many years. These careers are less likely now to exhibit such attempts to have relatedness with a *lhentere* encompass work. Nonetheless, these careers can still carry distinctive features.

There are patterns to Arrernte work at Ntaria. In Sansom's words, works sites often become 'slices of the action' (1982:131). The work role is interpreted as an 'enactment' and therefore as delimiting a kin domain (Strathern 1985:197). Various women and men have shone in particular roles: as metal worker, nurse's aide, road grader, pastoral worker or artist. The locales for their work become sites identified with them and others grow interested in the paraphernalia of enactment involved in these roles. Relatives are drawn to the site, and seek to appropriate its tools in order to participate as well. With the departure or death of the person the site often seems to vanish leaving only a faint trail or no legacy at all. This pattern also occurred at Tjuwanpa where, in the mid-1990s a road-grading contractor and a metal work professional were both active and successful with pre-apprenticeship training. With the departure of these men activity declined and soon ceased. One major exception to this is art and craft now mainly among women. These have been particular specialties reproduced over generations with an awareness that people are following a path.<sup>18</sup>

This *intra*-Western Arrernte style of encompassing 'work' in 'working for' is also exhibited by the first generation of workers in government organisations who try to generate a density of relatives in a particular locale. However, if a position is maintained, grandchildren may be sent away for education and, over a period of three generations, market-oriented work role gains over relatedness. Then, increasingly, the value hierarchy is reversed. Gradually kinship is encompassed by the value of work. Often the tensions in this value transition are lessened by indigenous people seeking employment outside their region and immediate kin domain. The advent of a circulating population of indigenous service workers in remote Australia reflects this phenomenon. If people stay close to home, a different technique can be employed. Established as public servants in the Centre, individuals still

sustain widespread family networks, but through the distribution of fame and opportunity rather than material goods. For example, relatives may come to sense that it is shaming to ask an Alice Springs employee for cash. Yet it might be appropriate to seek assistance in a royalty matter or in relation to a court case. Knowledge of the bureaucracy is here deployed as service.

Other groups at Ntaria and Tjuwanpa show a different trajectory. Part-time store work, metal work, clinic work, art and craft, and work at the school sometimes link generations. Very often 'holiday' periods of one month or a couple of years punctuate these engagements. People withdraw for a while from the stress of regular attendance and decisions about resources. Having resigned her job, a woman once said to me, 'I'm drinking now. Maybe, I bin work next year.' These Western Arrernte embody the value of relatedness with modest on-the-side personal accumulation - a better car or a washing machine. An old woman once remarked to me of her two daughters 'My daughters are working girls'. They are relatives whose relatedness encompasses working at Ntaria.

The different ways people organise values can heighten conflict between relatives and within the self. Sometimes people are deterred from work by the incessant demands that earning cash brings. The counterpart to 'burning the truck,' dispensing with a commodity that becomes the site of overly demanding nexes of relatedness, is simply to refuse to earn for a period (see Myers 1988). But a career confined to episodic work can become de-railed through drinking or violence. Parents have quandaries in counselling kids. It is hard to give school precedence over a visit to kin or a major regional gathering. The young are faced with difficult choices regarding training and autonomy. And finally, people can have awkward relations with relatives in Alice who are more attuned to *lhentere* ways. Explanations of different positions tend to emphasise corruption, secret knowledge or luck. Resentment is sometimes expressed at 'greedy' relatives or families.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, it is by these variable family routes that Western Arrernte are most likely, over time, to address the dilemmas they face.

## CONCLUSION

Four points bear emphasis in this conclusion. First, the key to Western Arrernte today is found not simply in relatedness but also in their marginalisation in market society. Positioned as they are, the Arrernte have sought to use relatedness, and its capacities for circulation, to respond to their circumstance. However, this mode of sociality, now largely disconnected from the productive tasks that were once integral to it, does not have the power to redefine and value the position of welfare recipients. Second, this circumstance is exacerbated by the fact that the service relations of kinship were once a 'technique' of objectification in country (Strathern 1988:176). Whilst relatedness still has that role, the attenuation of ritual knowledge and the demise of foraging as a means of subsistence have made those objectifications both less encompassing and more tenuous. Yet marginalised in market society, the Western Arrernte have not been able to transform their objectifications easily. Therefore they often remain reluctant consumers and struggle in diverse ways with conflicting socialities.

I have rendered this Arrernte struggle in terms of objectification and hierarchies of value. In doing this I keep in mind Dumont's account of the relations of encompassment between values. He proposed this as a way of interpreting relations between individualism and holism in a range of societies (Dumont 1970, 1980, 1992). A comparable approach can show that Western Arrernte realise different types of relation between the values of market society and relatedness. This leads to my third point, that nowadays struggles to hierarchise values in a world of changing objectification is the constitution of Arrernte subjects. A focus on this struggle rather than on cultural domains, or even intercultural ones, provides insight into why Indigenous lives are often fraught today. At the same time, there are

grounds for optimism in the fact that Western Arrernte have engaged these dilemmas over generations and are not unaware of the decisions involved, hence the observation that actions 'fight' each other (and therefore, possibly, require a resolution).

A final point returns to my early observation that both political economy and cultural analysis have ready-to-hand explanations for training failures at Tjuwanpa. Current writing in economics would explain such failures in terms of a lack of continuing employment options (Gregory 2005), or a generalised lack of success in training under-privileged youth. A recent article by Carneiro and Heckman (2003) argues that this failure is general throughout the United States irrespective of culture or 'ethnic' background. Early childhood intervention is recommended. Again, some would argue that the ostensibly casual treatment of goods - vehicles, houses and other portable things - has more to do with welfare dependence and lack of private property ownership than it does with cultural specificity (see, for example, Hughes and Warin 2005). Anthropologists cannot merely dismiss these arguments which clearly all bear on marginalisation. Nonetheless, this paper has proposed that the Arrernte, far from being simply in or outside market society, have drawn on established forms of relatedness in order to respond to structures imposed on them. Their circumstance now involves a complex mix of value that includes 'problems about work' and a certain distinctive way with things. A cultural account is required to address this history of difference and its continuing transformations. Such an account needs to address not only relatedness but also the forms of power and value that cash and commodities, and waged work, bring. This will produce less triumphal analyses, but more accurate ones.

## NOTES

1. This paper continues a conceptual project begun in Austin-Broos (1994, 1996a) It was then that I first reflected on the changes involved in an emerging Western Arrernte modernity (see also Morton 1992). The work has renewed my interest in economy as culture. These are the underlying themes of most of my publications on Western Arrernte people in and around Hermannsburg/Ntaria, west of Alice Springs. Research for this paper has been funded by Australian Research Council Large Grants A5923078 and A59700469. The orthography employed throughout is described in Breen (2000). I would like to thank all the Western Arrernte people who have contributed to my research. In the interpretation of Western Arrernte terms I would especially like to thank Lilly Moketarinja, David Roennfeldt, and Gary Stoll. I am deeply indebted to Paul Albrecht for access to the unpublished papers on apprenticeship written by his father, Friedrich Albrecht. Neil Maclean, Nic Peterson and three anonymous reviewers have all made helpful comments for which I am most grateful.
2. I provide a very brief account of the Western Arrernte outstation system in Austin-Broos (2001). Further essays on the outstation system and its history are currently works-in-progress.
3. 'Straight-out' is the Western Arrernte English term used in the title of Henson's (1992) biography to describe Albrecht's practical approach to the Hermannsburg Mission in the wake of the scholar Carl Strehlow's regime.
4. These social circumstances have been the basis for an extensive contemporary literature on demand sharing. For example, see Peterson (1993), Macdonald (2000), Austin-Broos (2003a) for some overviews of this literature.
5. Work for the dole or CDEP (Community Development Employment Project) is a much discussed federal government program seen as a workforce alternative to welfare that involves transfers for community infrastructure as well as for individuals. Austin-Broos (2001) describes the scheme's operation at Tjuwanpa. The program becomes little more than welfare in remote circumstances where its projects have limited viability. It does not seem to act as a bridge to 'mainstream' employment although it does much to reduce the recorded rate of remote indigenous unemployment (see Taylor and Hunter 1998, Hunter, Kinfu and Taylor 2003).
6. This discussion is skewed towards male apprenticeship and training because most Tjuwanpa schemes were for young men. It is my impression that among Western Arrernte there are more women than men with some formal or informal vocational training. Women who work at the supermarkets or as teachers' aides gain skills on-the-job. Nonetheless, the patterns I describe apply both to men and women in and around Ntaria.
7. These 'subject-into-object' constructions in the land that mark the unfolding of mission settlement evoke not only Munn (1973) but also Rumsey's (1994) description, following Munn, of inscription as a general 'mode of orientation.'
8. Also see below. Isaacs (1999) describes how women potters at Ntaria today see their forms of decoration as carried forward like design from the earlier Hermannsburg school of watercolour painters. In this style, various activities at Ntaria today are seen as reproducing a 'way' or *tyeye*. This path, which is also one from male to female interpretations, is possibly the equivalent of the feminization of rite that Dussart describes for the Warlpiri (see Dussart 2000).
9. In the mid-twentieth century, this orthodoxy became social science, in the first instance as Talcott Parsons' functionalist account of the family (see Parsons 1949).



10. Strathern's discussion is of 'bride service' and 'bride wealth' societies. Like Merlan (1991) I have rendered the former as 'service' societies for the purposes of this discussion. Issues of *bride* service are no longer relevant to the Arrernte although kinship as a service economy is still the dominant mode of being (see Strathern 1985).
11. The names used here are pseudonyms.
12. The paper I am referring to in Sydney is entitled *The Big Issue* and is sold for \$4 each. The small paintings that Arrernte people often use in the same way are usually in the style of Albert Namatjira's watercolour landscapes rather than acrylic dots which, at Ntaria, are associated with the Warlpiri and the Pintupi.
13. This particular phenomenon is portrayed vividly in the Australian television series 'Bush Mechanics' which focuses on a group of young Warlpiri men, their guardian ancestor, and a fascination with motor cars.
14. Among the Western Arrernte, it is grandparents and especially grandmothers who are child-rearers rather than parents.
15. I am indebted to Noah Pleshet for this point in the course of more than one illuminating conversation.
16. Peterson (2000) gives an excellent account of the manner in which ritual life in central Australia has been simplified over time as engagements with country have changed.
17. See Dumont (1970, 1980, 1992), and my conclusion below.
18. See above, footnote 8.
19. Hiatt relates that the Anbara regarded accumulation as evidence of sorcery (Hiatt 1965:104-5). Today, corruption or 'stealing' has taken the place of sorcery. Service workers can be accused rightly and wrongly of stealing from the community, especially when they build or purchase a house in Alice Springs. The charges are made irrespective of the person's skin colour. The two different charges indicate a similar thing: the difficulty in this kin-based sociality of imagining sustained accumulation.

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