What can the pre-colonial and frontier economies tell us about engagement with the real economy? Indigenous life projects and the conditions for development

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Recent writing on development coming from North America makes a distinction between Indigenous life projects and development projects. 'Indigenous life projects' refers to the desires of those Indigenous people who seek autonomy in deciding the meaning of their life independently of projects promoted by the state and market, and to people developing their own situation-based knowledge and practices in the contemporary world. As formulated by Mario Blaser (2004), these can involve partnerships and co-existences, where such are not denied by the encompassing society, and involve continuously emergent forms and resilience on the part of the Indigenous people.

Such life projects in Indigenous Australia are rarely spontaneously or comprehensively formulated but rather partial, reactive to government policy and often internally contested, especially across the generations, within even the smallest communities. If elicited in responses to inquiries, their formulation is usually ad hoc and, if they are self-conscious and coherent, they are frequently formulated in a Christian context. Nevertheless, the drive to establish outstations is certainly one of the more widespread and easily identifiable of Indigenous life projects in remote Australia. A recurrent emphasis in almost all Indigenous life projects, even if the meaning is unclear, is with holding on to 'culture'.

The currents from the wider world surrounding the formation and instantiation of such life projects are complex and often contradictory. Holding on to culture can be challenged by the emergence of consumer dependencies and autonomy in deciding the trajectory of life projects may run up against many government policies and external pressures. Indigenous acceptance of a lower standard of living (for example, by operating in a hybrid economy, Altman 2001)[1] as the cost of increased autonomy and residing at valued remote places, can be politicised by others, resulting in unsought intervention. If the health and educational statistics are too discrepant from national standards, protest from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal supporters of Aboriginal rights, and even the international community, may result in demands for action by the state, regardless of local opinion.[2]

The vulnerability of the state to accusations of discriminatory or inequitable treatment of the Indigenous minority, and the moral hazard for the state that is always present in even the most generous self-determination, means that some external pressures on Indigenous life projects are unlikely to go away until such time as people approach regional statistical equality and ultimately become no more dependent on the public purse than other people in the region.[3] It seems inevitable that in achieving such a situation, work, mainly in the form of selling labour, is going to be the lot of Aboriginal people as it is for the population at large. Most government-initiated development projects, Indigenous community plans, and statements of community needs, take the requirement for employment as a, if not the, central issue in a better future for remote communities. Currently this

is generally spoken about in terms of Aboriginal people being involved in the 'real' economy rather than the passive welfare economy (Pearson 2000). The difficulty with this formulation is that although people are, for the most part, deeply engaged in the welfare economy, that engagement has its own cultural specificities. What vitiates so many of the proposals about economic development is that they fail to explicitly address these cultural specificities and ignore the fact that all economic activity – theirs and ours – is cultural. Of course, over the years a wide range of practical accommodations have been made to these cultural specificities on the ground, and in the work place, the more formal including CDEP and contracting and the less formal including modified expectations vis-a-vis the general labour force and a wide range of ad hoc arrangements.[4] Moving from a world in which work was largely self-planned, self-directed activity and embedded in a highly specific set of social relations in precolonial times, to labour being fully commoditised in a market economy, embedded in a quite different set of social relations, necessarily entails considerable social and cultural transformations.

In this paper I want to look at the cultural structuring of Aboriginal economic activity in remote Australia at three periods: precolonial, postcolonial to c. 1970, and c. 1970 to the present and to consider how an understanding of this structuring may help shed light on Indigenous economic practice in remote Australia in the twenty-first century and the contexts within which Aboriginal life projects may develop there.

Precolonial

At the core of work is a combination of activity and effort. The primary focus of activity and effort, precolonially, was in acquiring a livelihood through the productive activities of hunting and gathering. The important point about this, and virtually all other activity in these situations, however, was its embeddedness in kinship relations and/or group relations. Further production was nearly always intimately linked with consumption, even before the activity took place, through obligations and commitments to certain kin. At the same time, within these social constraints, it was largely self-planned and self-directed activity. The social relations that encompass this activity system have been conceptualised in terms of the domestic mode of production.

Marshall Sahlins developed the model of the domestic mode of production as a consequence of research carried out by Richard Lee (1965) on the San, and Fredrick McCarthy and Margaret McArthur on Arnhem Landers (published in 1960, based on work in 1948) that dramatically challenged ideas about the nature of work effort put in by hunter gatherers. Sahlins pointed out that Aboriginal people at Fish Creek, near Oenpelli, spent only 3 hours 50 minutes a day in subsistence work if they were male and 3 hours 44 minutes if they were female and that for the Hemple Bay group on Groote Eylandt it was just over 5 hours a day.[5] The most obvious conclusion Sahlins drew from this research was that Aboriginal people, and by implication hunter-gatherers generally, 'do not work hard' (1972: 17) spending only four to five hours a day in the food quest. Further, he noted, the Fish Creek group maintained a virtually full-time craftsman who, when he was not repairing or making things, 'spent most of his time talking, eating and sleeping' (McCarthy and McArthur 1960:148). Indeed the main alternative to work was sleep (1972:19).

The domestic mode of production is a system of production and consumption organised at the household level with finite and limited production objectives to satisfy limited wants, resulting in the maximisation of free time. It is a system of underproduction because those households with much labour reach the production objectives rapidly. From time to time production is increased in response to kinship demands to support collective ceremonial activity.

Although the emphasis in his account of the 'Original affluent society' is on the maximisation of leisure, at the end of the chapter, Sahlins refers briefly to Donald Thomson's observation, given in full here, that:

> The first impression than any stranger must receive in a fully organised group in
> Eastern Arnhem Land is of industry. He cannot fail to see that everybody, man
> or woman, works hard, and that the work is well organised and runs smoothly.

> And he must also be impressed by the fact that … there is no idleness. Even the young men are engaged fully in hunting and fishing activities and work hard, in marked contrast with the conditions in similar groups close to white settlement, where the organisation is breaking down. Neither men nor women are idle for long, and even in camp as they sit around their fires they may be seen to pick up a basket, a fish net, a spear or other weapon, and work at this as they talk, just as they did when they halted at midday to rest and to cook food. Yet there is no feeling of haste, but rather of method, of system and order.
>
> What are the drives, the incentives, which lie behind all this organisation? Why does it move so smoothly, and what induces these people to work hard, so willingly, without any apparent direction, control or authority? (1949:33-34)

Thomson argued that the motivation came primarily from the social obligations of reciprocity arising out of the kinship system and leading to widespread gift exchange. This, he believed, had been intensified in Arnhem Land through the impact of the annual visits of Macassans since the early eighteenth century, which led to the development of an extensive system of ceremonial exchange, because of the demand for metal and other goods from inland peoples (1949:5).

This concern with what motivated people to special effort had first been taken up by Thomson in connection with the work he did in Cape York where he observed an elaborate set of performances associated with the Hero Cult (1933). He argued that the effort in completing the final part of the Hero Cult, especially, the 'infinite labour and patience required to fashion the elaborate masks and head-dresses', which demanded weeks of preparation, would never be achieved if it were not for a psychological force which spurred the old men on in a way that no material reward ever could (1933:489).[6] Although he is not terribly clear about this psychological force, he sees it in terms of the accumulated build-up of the earlier stages of the ceremony, acting through society as a consequence of the effect on the 'collective mind of the removal of the youths by the masked dancers to the sound of the bull roarers which give concrete form to the forces at work on the sacred ground and stimulated the old men to great effort' (1933:489). He goes on to suggest that the degree of sacredness is proportional to the amount of time invested in ceremony.

Influenced by these remarks of Thomson's, Sahlins concludes his essay by raising the possibility that among other hunter-gatherers the fragile superstructure of cycles of exchange and ritual may have disappeared without trace and that this may account for the degree of leisure time.

In Sahlins' book, *Stone Age Economics*, the chapters on the domestic mode of production are followed by three on the transfer of goods and people, or exchange as we somewhat misleadingly call it (Hunt 2000). In these chapters he continues the exploration of economy as a category of culture rather than behaviour, directed at the reproduction of social orders rather than as simply need-serving activities. The burden of his argument is that every transfer 'embodies some coefficient of sociability, [so that it] cannot be understood in its material terms apart from its social terms' (1972:183), and he goes on to develop a 'scheme of reciprocities' from generalised to balanced and negative, and to show its correlation with kinship distance. Building, of course, on Mauss, he elaborates the ways in which transfers (reciprocities, exchange) are at the heart of social life and how it is that gifts make friends (1972:186).

In his review of the organization of production across the Australian continent, Ian Keen (2003: 322-328) indicates that most work tasks of males and females required only one person although people frequently worked in parallel in small groups, especially women, who never foraged alone. Women working in parallel, controlled the product of their own labour and did not pool and redistribute food. For men the issue was more complex because they often secured quantities of meat beyond that required by their immediate household so that rules for distribution of meat came into play. These resulted in the best cuts of meat circulating beyond the hunter's household, especially to affinal kin. Central to the model of the domestic mode of production was that under normal circumstances the consumption unit for which production took place was one or two households. Such clusters of two or three households functioning as production and consumption units have been reported from

Arnhem Land (Altman 1987) while the band has never been reported as a basic production and consumption unit – that is, in a collective pooling of food.

From settlement to c. 1970

Because of the nature of the economic relations between Aboriginal people and Europeans following settlement, the domestic mode of production was perpetuated outside the towns. This was because they entered a largely cashless economy on cattle stations and in mission communities, based on rationing and payment in kind.

On cattle stations, the domestic mode of production was maintained because of the internal colonial model of relations with the pastoralists. Continued hunting and gathering by the dependents of the young men and women working for the station was crucial to the support of the Aboriginal populations on the stations, because they were only lightly rationed, and because of the low ratio of workers to non-workers. Even the workers were not employed full-time, but had long lay-off periods when they were expected to supplement their rations with foraging.

On most mission communities the situation was not much different. Governments chose to administer to Aboriginal people through mission bodies because it was a great deal cheaper for them to do so than using public servants. Rations, everywhere, were the order of the day. Rationing was a complex practice which has been examined in detail by Tim Rowse (1998). Introduced initially to prevent cattle spearing, he shows that from the beginning there was a concern that rationing could lead to pauperisation and moral decay for able-bodied people, if there were not a regime of 'no work no rations'. Living conditions on most missions were little, if any, different from the cattle stations. A great deal of foraging went on to supplement food supplies and people were protected from any substantive consumer dependency for items other than necessities, except tobacco, by their own poverty and the poverty of the missions themselves.

As Rowse points out, until the 1970s little attention was paid to Aboriginal motivations for becoming involved in a rationing relationship or how they understood it. In respect of motivation, remote Australia is of interest because considerable numbers of people were not dispossessed of their land and had a choice between continuing to live an independent life in the bush or associating themselves with Europeans. The reasons why Aboriginal people chose to associate with Europeans were clearly complex and variable but we know that curiosity, the attraction of addictive substances such as tobacco and sugar, and the avoidance of conflict with both Europeans and Aboriginal people, all played a part. A key question is what kept them attached to European settlers. Although European settlements have been referred to as 'super waterholes' (McKnight 1986), the conditions in many situations, such as on pastoral stations, were frequently appalling, and people were often near to starvation, especially those not working (Berndts 1987). Some people did move back and forth between the bush and the settlement and in some mission situations this was actually institutionalised, as the missions did not have adequate funds to support everybody at once (Falkenberg 1962), but the enthusiasm and speed with which people settled down is well illustrated with the establishment of Maningrida in 1957 (Hiatt 1965).[7]

The speed with which the bush life was given up suggests that it was probably rather more arduous or relentless than Sahlins implies, and more like the hard work that Altman's revisionist analysis emphasises. Settled life was certainly safer (Slotte 1997) and more stimulating. The consequences and transformations of settling down could not have been known or foreseen and it possible that in many cases the settling down was unintended.

From 1968 to the present

This period began with people in remote Australia entering the cash economy in a substantive way for the first time, with the decision of the Department of Social Security to pay entitlements directly to Aboriginal individuals, following the pastoral award decision that required the payment of equal wages to Aboriginal people in 1968.

Aboriginal poverty until the payment of award wages and of unemployment benefits, which

became widespread circa 1975-1977, is startling. In 1970 per capita cash incomes in remote desert Australia ranged from 6.8-22 percent of the Australia-wide figure and even on cattle stations only ranged between 13-32 percent. The grinding poverty and its acceptance by government is reflected in the fact that the sum that the Northern Territory government estimated was adequate to cover rent, food and clothing on an Aboriginal settlement was about 12 percent of the national average income (Peterson 1986:91-92)! Astonishingly, despite this low income, people did have enough discretionary income to buy cars, even with very low levels of work. This was because social security was providing in excess of 75 percent of minimal cash needs, so that by target working (working for short periods to acquire money for specific purposes) it was quite possible for people to accumulate relatively large sums of money to buy cars and/or alcohol.

The really dramatic changes came with the payment of award wages and unemployment benefits. This resulted in the great majority of the population of the communities and of the cattle stations becoming unemployed, yet because of the low consumer dependency, the communities were, relatively speaking, awash with cash. The immediate consequence was an almost a complete detachment from productive activity and a decade or so in which there was what has been referred to as welfare autonomy (Arthur 2001).[8] Concurrent changes in government policy that resulted in the development of the outstation movement, among other things, meant that, paradoxically, integration into the cash economy actually led to the renewing of difference for some people who moved back to their own lands (see Austin-Broos 2003:119).

At this point, understanding the cultural structuring of the economy in terms of the domestic mode of production becomes problematic. This is not to say that the original social relations of production disappeared but the almost exclusive focus of these relations became circulation and consumption. Like the Chinese peasants standing on tip-toe to keep their heads above water, life was precarious for many individuals. A loss at cards, a trip to town, a loan to a friend, all meant people would have to seek money elsewhere, such as from those with pensions, unemployment payments, or those few with jobs. This context then brings to the fore what Sahlins variously referred to as the coefficient of sociability or the scheme of reciprocities, as the central structuring factors in economic activity.

With circulation as *the* central feature of economic activity, attention is focussed on kinship, reciprocity and sharing practices. The centrality of kinship to the organisation of everyday activities among hunting and gathering peoples living independent, self-sufficient lives led, among other things, to the formulation of the kinship mode of production as an alternative to the domestic mode of production. Under this model, universal systems of kin classification and a strong emphasis on sharing were seen as mechanisms that ensured people access to the means of production over very wide areas, securing survival when local conditions were poor (Godelier 1975). It would be easy enough to suggest that the kinship mode of production provides insight into the economic behaviour in this period, with people activating their networks to obtain money rather than to secure access to distant places where environmental conditions were better. However, given the absence of production, theoretical attention needs to be focussed on the allocation and circulation of resources in a way that bridges the domestic mode of production of the precolonial period with that unearned income. In these circumstances, a move away from a mode of production analysis to one couched in terms of moral economy is helpful.

Moral economy has been used in two senses. E. P. Thompson (1991:339-340), who popularized the term, uses it to refer to beliefs and understandings that assign economic roles to classes and that endorse aspects of customary relations and practices across these class relationships, rather than just pure market relations.[9] More commonly it is now used to refer to values that impinge on profit maximisation. Here it is used to refer to the allocation of resources to the reproduction of social relationships at the cost of profit maximisation and obvious immediate personal benefit (for example, see Cheal 1989). Nicolas Peterson and John Taylor have proposed a model of the Indigenous domestic moral economy that focuses on circulation and which accounts for the centrality and persistence of

sharing. While sharing is inseparable from the division of labour, the minimisation of risk and the managing of uncertainty, it is also at the heart of the production and reproduction of social relations, egalitarianism and the self. There are four elements to the Indigenous domestic moral economy. It is characterised by a universal system of kin classification that requires a flow of goods and services to produce and reproduce social relationships. The circulation of goods takes place within the framework of an ethic of generosity, informed by the social pragmatics of demand sharing, with open refusal rare, since it is seen as a rejection of relatedness. In such social contexts personhood is constituted through relatedness, while at the same time it is associated with an egalitarian autonomy.

Diane Austin-Broos has examined the contemporary conflicts that occur between the Indigenous domestic moral economy, the welfare economy and the state in central Australia (2003). In the past, she argues, kinship relations were mediated by place and religious knowledge to a much greater extent than today, when 'things' (that is, commodities and the cash with which they are obtained, Austin-Broos 2003:124) are far more significant. In this context allocative power, that is the relative ability to respond to demands, becomes important (Macdonald 2000:96-99). Community bosses[10] are people who devote much of their time and energy to capturing resources from the service organizations in the community, and through getting grants, to service the Indigenous domestic moral economy. Such resource procurement is crucial to building strong and extensive families and is the focus of much activity by senior people that is interpreted as work in the Western Arrernte domain (Austin-Broos 2003:125) and elsewhere. Rather than 'working', people 'work for kin', attending meetings many of which are central to resource acquisition (Austin-Broos 2003:128). Although the frequency of meetings is much complained about in many communities, people commonly still attend them, because so many of them can, eventually, result in resource allocation. It would seem that the pursuit of allocative power is not unrelated to the ready support found for new economic and development projects because most new projects bring in a flood of resources, especially as most involve substantial start-up costs, even if there is no huge commitment to the overall objectives and often relatively little concern about their failure.[11]

Life projects and development projects

In 2003 the Productivity Commission published a major report, titled *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, for the Council of Australian Governments. This Council and the report represent a new resolve at the highest level of government to tackle 'the root causes of Indigenous disadvantage'(2003: v), for which we can read statistical inequality. The Report is based on 'widespread consultations across the country, particularly with Indigenous people and organisations' (2003:v); it recognises the existence of a diversity of situations and that, 'some central factors, such as culture and governance, are inherently difficult to quantify but remain important to document' (2003:v). Chapter 11, the last chapter, is titled 'Economic participation and development'. The chapter opens with the following statements:

> The extent to which people participate in the economy is closely related to their living standards and broader wellbeing. For the purpose of this Report, economic participation and development is examined through employment opportunities, influence over land resources, and aspects of education and training which are relevant to the goals of good governance and the capacity to govern.
> Many aspects of work affect people's wellbeing, such as hours worked, job satisfaction and security, levels of remuneration, opportunity for self-development, and interaction with people outside the home. Having a job or being involved in a business activity not only leads to improved incomes for families and communities…it also enhances self-esteem and reduces social alienation…(2003:11.1)
> There was strong feedback during the consultations that governance should be included in the framework [of the Report]. The major governance issues highlighted during the consultations and in Australian literature were: culturally informed governance structures, capacity to govern, accountability, civic engagement, and self determination. (2003:11.2)

Despite the widespread consultation with Indigenous people this Report, like almost all writing on Aboriginal involvement with the Australian economy, is astonishingly naïve, not to say ethnocentric, about the cultural nature of economic activity. The curious nod in the direction of cultural factors in the Foreword – that they are central but hard to quantify – is just that, as far as recognising that all economic activity is cultural. The notion that Indigenous people may have their own life projects in either a grand or limited sense is obscured by the pressing moral and political objective of achieving statistical equality, more or less, that comes with policies of practical reconciliation and mainstreaming.

The question of why the Indigenous people consulted have not raised their life projects in a forceful enough way for them to register in the Report, despite some obvious manifestations of them, such as the outstation movement, is worth asking. The Report hints, indirectly, at one possibility. When cultural factors are explicitly, and briefly, mentioned in the economic chapter, they relate to governance, not economics. Rather than asking whether, for instance, there is a specifically Indigenous economic practice, what Indigenous motivations drive contemporary economic activity, how work is defined and understood by Aboriginal people, what notions people have of a work career (see Arthur and David-Petero 2000) and whether any or all of these might influence the implementation and course of economic development in remote Australia, the focus is on governance.[12] While for government, governance is primarily about equity and accountability to ensure that organizations achieve their constitutional objectives, for Indigenous people it is primarily about self-determination, as the above quote suggests. The Indigenous emphasis on self-determination is fully in keeping with the workings of the Indigenous domestic moral economy because, among other things, it is related to allocative power and the controlling of resources, which, of course, is one of the great attractions of self-determination.

As has been suggested above, Indigenous life projects that do not lead to people becoming more or less statistically equal, and particularly those that mean that people's levels of health remain poor, are always under threat of development projects promoted independently by the state to modify the situation. Not only is development increasingly being seen as a right, leading to internal demands from the Aboriginal community, but there is always the threat of the politicisation of the inequality by any one of a number of external interests. However, development projects directed at remote communities to alleviate such situations clearly face considerable problems, yet these are rarely addressed directly. This is because addressing cultural issues is too difficult and it is much easier to ascribe the difficulties in getting development projects off the ground to a lack of self-determination. The ultimate irony here is that side-stepping cultural issues as an obstacle in economic development, because it can be seen as blaming Aboriginal people for their situation, is translated into a situation where it is possible to shift the blame to them, through self-determination.

If there is consideration of material factors in the way of development, one that is commonly invoked is locational disadvantage. While this is a very real problem for many remote communities it is not the key problem, as communities like Mutijulu make clear. The Aboriginal people at Mutijulu are living on Aboriginal land that is only a few minutes' drive from a large number of unskilled and skilled jobs that range from bed-making and cleaning to management. Apart from a few Aboriginal people working for the Parks and Wildlife Service, the vast majority of the community is employed on CDEP, and the population is faced with all of the social problems and difficulties found in such communities across the continent (see Smith 2001).13 Apart from the disincentives to prolonged engagement with wage labour posed by the workings of the Indigenous domestic moral economy, there is another issue. The nature of work available to the unskilled in the twentieth century is surely another component of the equation (for example, see Braverman 1974). That is, it is only when all other alternatives to securing a living have been closed off that selling labour at the bottom of the market is likely to become even mildly attractive. This is indirectly evidenced by references to 'culturally appropriate employment', the many concessions that are regularly made to the expectations of work by Indigenous people from non-Indigenous employees, and the kinds of work for which

Aboriginal people do offer themselves, such as ranger jobs. Explaining the lack of engagement with this mainstream labour market cannot then rely simply on locational disadvantage or poor educational qualifications. It has to be understood in terms of motivation, incentives or the lack of them, and the social location of Aboriginal people within the Indigenous domestic moral economy.

Richard Davis's (2004) illuminating account of the contrast between an economically successful (in conventional terms) and an economically unsuccessful Kimberley cattle station underlines the point. The successful station has an Aboriginal manager who is married to a female land-owner, a permanent workforce of his relatives, a physical residential separation of his house from the community, and isolation of herd management from claims on it by the Aboriginal land-owners of the station. Davis reports that the single most important criticism made of successful Aboriginal managers by other Aboriginal people is that they are too autonomous and have opted out of the Indigenous domestic moral economy (2004:38). What he is describing here is the process of a small family network converting an unviable communal enterprise into a viable family farm. Given that most architects of development plans are coming at them from a market perspective, the continued emphasis on 'the community' as an economic actor, suggests either great confusion or an unwillingness to face the difficulties related to development.

Conclusion

The dynamics of the Indigenous domestic moral economy cannot be understood, of course, apart from the relations with the encapsulating society. As capitalist economies, the encapsulating societies are responsible for the forces that threaten its dissolution, but as liberal democratic welfare states they inadvertently contribute to its reproduction. In remote Australia Aboriginal people come from a historically low material base which, combined with the processes of the Indigenous domestic moral economy, work powerfully to reduce the level of consumer dependency. This in turn leads to a casual engagement with development projects when people are socially located within their own communities. Only when people's consumer dependency is a great deal higher than it is today, so that it cannot be maintained by transfer payments, subsidies, grants, loans, royalty payments, casual employment or target working can people be expected to become motivated and involved in the treadmill of wage labour, and the emphasis on circulation reduced.[14]

For remote communities this would require everybody in the community to have a similar high standard of living/consumer dependency that could only be supported by selling labour, but for most such communities this cannot be done locally. An alternative might be a remittance economy supported by the young away at work. Otherwise people have to distance themselves in some way from the Indigenous domestic moral economy by moving away, by marrying somebody outside it or by adopting a completely different way of life, such as commitment to a demanding Christian sect. All these processes are going on apace among Aboriginal people at large, but in remote communities the frequencies are much lower.

The chances of many Indigenous life projects in remote Australia being able to proceed independently of development projects is small because of Aboriginal people's economic status. In theory, where such development projects minimize the loss of people's control over their own allocation of time and effort, they may have some appeal, but the tensions between rewards to the individual (compared with autonomy) and recognition of demands on which relatedness relies, will surely prove difficult for most people to negotiate when at home. Poverty, discrimination and marginalisation all increase the intensity of sharing, while affluence and emerging consumer dependency, at some point, start to reduce its frequency and nature. The entailments of these latter changes are as potentially profound as the initial resistances are strong: they bring with them a move away from exchange value to use value; the moral economy of households starts to turn inwards and an individualistic orientation becomes more pronounced. Sharing becomes the site of intense social struggle, shaming practices, threats of ostracism and appeals to ideologies of what it means to be Indigenous are turned on relatives and acquaintances who are clearly prospering, in an attempt to maintain the levels of sharing, relatedness and the values of egalitarianism.[15] For many, issues of identity also become of great importance as

individuals move into a moral and reflexive psychological space that is increasingly separated from the dense sociality of extended kin relations and abstracted from community. These are the issues that lie at the heart of engagement with the real economy. For an economy to be 'real', there have to be profound material consequences for not engaging with it. In remote Australia there remains a considerable way to go before such consequences emerge.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

[1] For Altman, the living within a hybrid economy is a rational response to the absence of a market economy in many remote regions.

[2] For example see World Council of Churches 1981; Altman 1991).

[3] By moral hazard I am here referring to the transfer of risk (not necessarily consciously) to the state from Indigenous directors of corporations, councils and associations who rarely, if ever, have to bear responsibility for actions and behaviours that would generally lead to prosecution in the wider community. The fact that the levels of scrutiny and accountability required of Indigenous organizations are so high, is a direct reflection of the problems faced by the state in respect to this issue. Further it is bound to intervene quite quickly when things go wrong, to pick up the tab a second time, because of poverty of the populations involved and the political and ethical problems that letting people live with the consequences would entail.

[4] A good example of a formal accommodation would be the slow worker clause proposed in the negotiations for the amended pastoral award in the 1960s.

[5] As has been pointed out by a number of authors, the Fish Creek group on which Sahlins bases much of his argument is completely atypical in its demographic composition, which undoubtedly skewed the analysis (see Altman 1984 who also argues elsewhere that people worked harder than is generally realized).

[6] In his unpublished manuscript, *The Aborigines of Australia*, at page xi, Thomson wrote:
    [Mummification and the] onerous ritual that accompanies it would appear to the white man merely to impose a further load upon their already heavily-burdened economy, without at first sight, conferring any material benefit upon the society. But we know that to hold a place, to remain as a functional entity, it must serve some real need in the lives of the people who have adopted it. Just what it does, and in what way it benefits the people, are among the questions that the field anthropologist sets himself to answer as he studies the people.

[7] Most people still remained engaged with the bush, leaving the settlement for ceremonies and to seek out valued and familiar bush foods instead of the staple rations of Maningrida.

[8] Even painting was abandoned for a period in some situations (see Altman) where it was the one item produced for exchange

[9] In the context of encapsulated Fourth World peoples there are two aspects to their moral economy. There is the aspect relating to the allocation of resources to the reproduction of relations internal to the indigenous social order, and there is the aspect relating to the notions about the nature of the asymmetrical reciprocity relations with the encapsulating society. At least initially, the relations of the domestic moral economy are likely to be the basis for relationships with outsiders: I will deal only with the former here. However, Fred Myers has documented the way in which Pintupi people sought to impose a moral economy on the whites they interacted with, by trying to encompass them within their own internal practices relating to authority and deference (1986).   This moral economy accords more closely with a Thompsonian conceptualisation of moral economy but is complicated by the Pintupi's encapsulation within a welfare state, the rationale for which is unknown to them. See also Scott (1989) for Cree views on colonial moral in Canada.

[10] Bosses are distinguished from leaders in that the latter are ritual experts, while the former are people who have become foci of allocative power as they have captured community resources.   There may well be overlap between the two categories.

[11] For instance in the 1980s, 87 percent of ATSIC-funded Indigenous enterprises resulted in economic failure, which led the Office of Evaluation and Audit to argue that there was a strong case for terminating the program (Martin 1995: 19).

[12]   In respect of young people in the Torres Strait, Arthur and David-Petero found that only 27 percent of their sample gave a financial reason for choosing to do particular work in 1998, whereas 37 percent said they chose the particular work out of interest and enjoyment (2000:14).

[13]   From an economic perspective it might be argued that part of the problem is the well-known poverty trap, which means that one has to earn quite a lot to off-set welfare entitlements, thus reducing the incentive to get work. I think that, in general terms, this argument is of very limited significance. This is indicated by the fact that in many remote situations, the Aboriginal people who are taking up the jobs are often from outside of the local Aboriginal community or, having got a job move away from it.

[14]   At the time of writing this, the NLC announced that it was looking to take a 40 percent stake in the proposed $500 million trans-Territory gas pipeline because the 'potential returns from the project would give much-needed economic

independence to Aborigines' (Australian 27/10/04 page 5). While there are clearly many good reasons for doing so, unworked-for income is unlikely to address the day-to-day economic problems facing individuals and families.

[15] As social relations become attenuated, 'Shame, the experience of self-inflicted injury on the person' (Austin-Broos 1996:180) becomes less and less effective.

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Contents