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‘Shifting’: The Western Arrernte’s outstation movement

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Gustav Malbangka (Malbunka) and his family lived at the Hermannsburg Mission in central Australia. Like many other people, they wish to leave the social problems of the congested settlement behind them and return to their traditional land at Gilbert Springs ... to carve out a more satisfactory life for themselves, drawing strength from being in the homeland again.

... Encouraged by the ‘out-station movement’, many people like Gustav left the mission to return to their traditional country, leaving Hermannsburg looking ‘like a ghost town’.

Life at Gilbert Springs is not easy: until bore water is provided, everyone has to live close to the Springs in bush shelters. Gustav, however, has plans to build houses with running water, and to establish a viable station with a church and

¹ I would like to thank all the Western Arrernte people who offered me information and insights on their outstation movement during discussions throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. I would also like to thank a small group of Lutherans who, as erstwhile residents of Hermannsburg, also contributed to my understanding. John von Sturmer assisted my entry into the milieu of Ntaria/Hermannsburg. I remain indebted to him. Shortcomings in this account are my own.

a school, growing produce and raising cattle. [For the moment they depend] on a weekly visit from a travelling 'store truck' and have their financial affairs managed by the truck's operator, Murray Pearce. (Levy 1975)²

This passage is part of the cover note to a film made in 1975 by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS), directed and produced by filmmaker Curtis Levy with anthropologist John von Sturmer acting in the role of associate producer. The film was narrated by the late Gus Williams, a Western Arrernte man. Members of the Malbunka group first moved out of Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission in the Northern Territory in 1974 as part of a larger group that camped along Ellery Creek. Soon they began to move again, this time west to their ancestral land, which soon harboured numerous camps. These initiatives east and west of the mission were, to the east, close to an ephemeral creek that allowed soakages and wells used in the past both by Aboriginal people and by pastoralists. To the west, the camps were close to ancient underground springs that fed permanent waterholes. In a desert region, both the creek and the underground springs held ritual as well as practical significance. Other sites that became outstations posed greater problems concerning potable water. Nonetheless, these initial shifts presaged a major move by Arrernte and some Luritja and Luritja-Pintupi people also resident at the mission, which was established in 1877. By mid-1976 there were 17 outstations, with an Aboriginal population of about 450. Eight more camps would be added by the end of the year. Outstations were located at distances up to 60 km from Hermannsburg, which, at the time, retained little more than 100 people.

Nine years after the shift began, in 1983, the Western Arrernte outstation movement numbered 33 sites. Prior to this year, the movement had been resourced by grants to the mission for the management of a Western Arrernte outstation project. In 1983 Hermannsburg, now known as Ntaria, became an incorporated Aboriginal community, and early in 1984 Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre (TORC) was also incorporated under the Federal *Incorporations Act 1983*. Thereafter funding for the outstation movement, which grew to 40 outstations before it began to contract in the mid-1990s, was channelled through TORC, which, under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), became the hub of a major Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program. Although today there are significantly fewer than 40 outstation sites with continuous residence, the movement left an enduring legacy: it involved a significant step away from both settlement life as manifest in the Hermannsburg mission and a pre-settlement life reflected

2 *Malbangka Country* was directed and produced by Curtis Levy, with photography by Geoff Burton, edited by Stewart Young, sound by Fred Pickering, liaison by Murray Pearce, narrated by Gus Williams and anthropologist and associate producer John von Sturmer. The film is available today through Ronin Films, Canberra.

in the central role that ceremony and foraging played in linking people across a region. Western Arrernte life today is neither simply settled nor traditional. It commonly involves regular movement on a weekly basis between outstations, the community hub of Ntaria/Hermannsburg and the regional centre of Alice Springs—a new life foreshadowed in the initial phases of the outstation movement. The Arrernte, like other Aboriginal people, would cease to be wards of the state and become citizens with specific Indigenous rights that made it feasible for them to pursue this life.

In addition to the aspirations of Arrernte people and some mission staff who assisted them, this legacy rested on at least three factors. In part, it was due to the land rights movement and the fact that the erstwhile mission lease became five land trusts of the Western Arrernte people under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (ALRA)*. In part, the move back to country was made feasible by improved resourcing, first under the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and then under ATSIC. Finally, the period of very rapid outstation growth also coincided with the 1970s take-up of unemployment benefits by many Central Australian Aboriginal people. Similarly, the transition to CDEP payments at the end of the 1980s once more stabilised incomes to residents and made feasible the maintenance of numerous outstation camps.

The following discussion has three sections. The first juxtaposes two types of event. One was created by developments of national significance in the 1960s and 1970s that set the stage for outstation movements—understood as self-determination for Aboriginal people. The other was local change at Hermannsburg responsive to national developments, but also largely controlled by the mission. At both the national and the local levels, those involved understood these developments as a move away from assimilation practices. Nonetheless, the first such initiatives at Hermannsburg failed. Consequently, at least some mission staff looked in a different direction that beckoned towards outstation development. As events clearly show, Western Arrernte people grasped the moment. The second section of this discussion considers the local experience of Western Arrernte people and the developments that oriented them towards outstations. For a time, their interest coalesced with that of some missionaries. While the latter saw outstations as a way to sustain a Christian Arrernte community, Arrernte themselves saw outstations as a way to realise an autonomous life that could accommodate both some Indigenous ways and some settlement activities they valued. From the beginning of the outstation movement, Arrernte people sought to use it as a medium to reconcile a range of institutions—some drawn from the mission settlement and some from their Indigenous domain. Their movement actually conformed to the original sense that anthropologist Anthony Wallace gave to the notion of a 'revitalisation' movement: a 'deliberate, organized attempt by some members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture by rapid acceptance of a pattern of multiple

innovations' (Wallace 1956: 265). In fact, although the Western Arrernte did retrieve substantial forms of tradition, their movement was also a new initiative in life-ways. The second section of this chapter draws on recorded comments of the time and the film *Malbangka Country* in order to typify the innovation that the return to country involved. The final section of the discussion considers a retrospective view of the outstation movement offered mainly by older Arrernte women between 1998 and 2000. Their view is a touchstone for remarks on three different notions of self-determination found in contemporary literature. A short conclusion follows.

The context for an outstation movement

Perhaps the most general backdrop to the Arrernte's outstation movement came in the postwar years of the late 1940s and the 1950s when first the Federal Government and then the states and territories began to move via legislation away from the notion of 'Aboriginal natives' outside an Australian nation, first to citizens without rights and then to citizens with rights that ultimately would include at least some Indigenous rights (Chesterman and Galligan 1967). After the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal Australians were not only 'counted' in censuses but also included in national population tables. Moreover, increasingly, they received benefits previously denied them. In Central Australia, for example, Aboriginal access to unemployment benefits was only secured in the 1970s, after the 1966 Gurindji stockmen's strike against the Vestey Company at Wave Hill (Hardy 1968). In sustaining a claim for equal wages, the Federal Government paved the way for Aboriginal people to receive unemployment benefits. The Wave Hill strike, precipitated by attempts to delay the implementation of equal wages, also involved a land claim component. Strikers withdrew their labour and sought land beyond both station and reserves on which they might reside and work independently. This dialogue about traditional Aboriginal land usurped by the state had already received national prominence due to the Yolngu people of Yirrkala. Their protest over land in the form of the Yirrkala Bark Petitions presented to the Federal Parliament in 1963 became a *cause célèbre*, especially among some Labor opposition politicians (see Williams 1986). Like the diffident extension of equal wages to Gurindji, the fact that negotiations over reserve land between the Federal Government and the North Australian Bauxite and Alumina Company (Nabalco) had not included Yolngu Traditional Owners demonstrated the enduring assumption, even in the midst of assimilation, that 'Aboriginal natives' were perhaps permanently beyond the nation. Creeping along through the 1950s and 1960s, and reaching a culmination

in the *ALRA*, these developments began to shape a different view of Aboriginal people among many non-Indigenous Australians. This process also informed life at Hermannsburg, though possibly in a peripheral way before the late 1960s.

It is important to juxtapose an account of these momentous events with those offered by Gary Stoll, Paul Albrecht and Elizabeth Sommerlad regarding social change at Hermannsburg in the 1960s and early 1970s. Stoll was mission superintendent during this period and Albrecht was the Lutherans' pastoral field superintendent for Central Australia. Sommerlad, based at The Australian National University, produced a report in 1973 regarding 'community development' at the mission station. Of the three, Albrecht has been most explicit in noting retrospectively the larger context in which local events unfolded (see Albrecht 2002: 33–4). However, reports at the time, mainly to the Lutheran Synod or to the church's Finke River Mission Board in Adelaide, as well as Sommerlad's ANU Continuing Education Report, focused mainly on issues of conflict, social order and social control. Stoll and Albrecht traced these matters back to unanticipated or unwanted 'consequences' of the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948*, followed by the Commonwealth's confirmation of voting rights in 1962. The latter facilitated the Northern Territory Aboriginal enfranchisement but also anticipated the demise in 1964 of restrictions on the sale of alcohol to Aboriginal people. The Lutherans identified three such consequences: growing drunkenness even among male elders, increased petty theft and lawlessness among male youth, and heightened conflict between families often manifested in schoolroom and schoolyard spats. This conduct was described in terms of the failure of assimilation policy, 'as it was being implemented', and the need for Arrernte people to take more 'responsibility' for the changes in their lives brought by the postwar legislation (Albrecht 2002: 40–2; Austin-Broos 2009: 185–6). There was a keen view among those involved at the mission that these eventualities were undermining the authority of the mission and the Lutheran Church overall (Albrecht 2002: 46).

The Village Council, established in 1963, was the first of three all-Aboriginal elected councils to be formed at Hermannsburg. The council was conceived as a local law and order body not unlike the 'night patrols' still common at Ntaria/Hermannsburg in the 1990s and 2000s. Village councillors could appear as witnesses in the courts held periodically at Hermannsburg by an Alice Springs-based magistrate (Sommerlad 1973: 37). The council had no legal status, though, and did not fill the 'authority vacuum' that Albrecht and Stoll saw emerging at Hermannsburg as federal legislation began to redefine the mission milieu. On Albrecht's recommendation, an elected Town Council with governance roles was established in 1970. The mission sought to instigate and maintain a system of elections based on family groups, which, to a degree, coincided with the residents of regionally identified camps around the mission at the

time: east camp and west camp. From the outset, not every family group elected a representative to the council and some groups elected more representatives than others. In short, there were differing degrees of engagement with the project among the groups at Hermannsburg. One of the council's initial roles concerned 'booking up' at the mission store—an activity the Lutherans felt demanded oversight as a cash economy expanded. The council supervised the new beer garden and the ingress and egress of drinkers to and from Hermannsburg. It also had some responsibility for the hiring and firing of Aboriginal people employed in the mission's various divisions such as maintenance and housing, the store and the garage (Sommerlad 1973: 36). This role did not extend to the hiring and firing of non-Indigenous mission employees, although this was foreshadowed by the chair of the Town Council, Jeffrey Wheeler, in 1973 (Albrecht 2002: 50–2). Perhaps its most ambitious act was the incorporation of an Ntaria Housing Society, although the initiative did not flourish. Once Federal Labor came to power in 1972, the mission's intent was to see the Town Council evolve into the settlement's governing body. Its initial roles, however, largely involved low-level policing of the Aboriginal population. Before too long, it was overtaken by events.

The School Council, dating from 1971, was the third council to be established and involved the most interesting dynamic, pointing towards a 'decentralisation' of mission activity that would dovetail with an outstation movement. A significant decrease in school attendance was concurrent with the increase in alcohol consumption and a more rebellious spirit throughout the community. Albrecht's view was that the decoupling of school attendance and child endowment payments—a system previously controlled by the mission—caused the decline in attendance, especially among 'more traditional' Arrernte (Albrecht 2002: 102). At the end of the 1960s, the school principal, Rex Ziersch, and an Arrernte assistant, Nahasson Ungwanaka, consulted on the issue. Ziersch proposed a school council and Ungwanaka observed that such a council should comprise a representative from each 'skin-group family' that had children at the school. The council played roles similar to those of the other two councils: following-up absent kids, keeping the schoolyard clean and securing school buildings (Ungwanaka 1973). However, it also had a more ambitious agenda. The council was in charge of both hiring and firing Aboriginal teaching assistants financed by the Federal Government's newly introduced training allowances. These allowances were intended as an interim measure between the 1950s cash-and-kind payments to Northern Territory Aboriginal state wards and the payment of equal wages and benefits to Indigenous Australian citizens foreshadowed in the Wave Hill strike. The council, it was proposed, also would be involved in the selection of non-Indigenous teaching staff. It promoted the teaching of 'full English', or idiomatic spoken English, as well as textbook written English. In a rapidly evolving regional circumstance, some

parents called the former 'inside' English—a secret language that in the future their children would need to know. A suggestion from the council was that this type of English be taught in a family environment, and thereby involve senior generations as well as the school kids (Sommerlad 1973: 39). Families should be assigned one teacher as their 'own' and the authority structure of the classroom in fact would be a kinship structure.

Heightened conflict at Hermannsburg recommended this kinship-oriented approach to some Arrernte and missionaries alike. By 1972, the conflict was evident in the Town Council, which, Gary Stoll reported, was 'strongly divided between two family groups', the one 'trying to move into a position of overall control and another, larger group trying to prevent them' (Stoll 1972a, 1972b, 1973). This kin-based struggle over new forms of resources and authority, also informed by the respective ritual standings of those involved, ramified in the classroom where children saw each other on a daily basis. Some families asked for children to be separated in different rooms. In 1973, both the specific issue of family conflict in the classroom and the more general one of family and regional conflicts in the community sent Rex Ziersch to study Aboriginal social organisation with anthropologist John von Sturmer at the University of Queensland. Thereafter, up to and including 1975 when the film *Malbangka Country* was made, von Sturmer had an intimate association with Lutheran mission staff, informing their evolving view of Arrernte kinship and relatedness, as well as mapping with various Aboriginal men much of the mission lease that would be scheduled as Aboriginal land under the *ALRA*. On Ziersch's return to Hermannsburg, the view rapidly evolved among missionaries that safeguarding of 'the Christian families', as they were known among Arrernte, and the protection of the church's standing, as well as the promotion of relevant forms of governance, rested on pursuing a 'decentralisation' of family groups from the mission settlement on to their traditional lands. This process, the mission hoped, would create a network of nexus between kin and country that would provide a framework for governance. Thus, a new way forward was identified in preference to the previous one that merely sought to indigenise imposed 'European' structures such as elected councils. While this might be a very particular understanding of Arrernte social organisation, this changed direction on the mission's part brought its support for some evolving Western

Arrernte aspirations. (The mission stance did not entail support for the advent of a Central Land Council (CLC) or, even entirely, support for an Aboriginal community council, which was established at Ntaria/Hermannsburg in 1983.)³

Western Arrernte outstation life

In February 1973, the Finke River Mission Board resolved that discussions should be 'instigated whereby the way is opened for the disposal of the assets and lease at Hermannsburg to the Aboriginals' (Leske 1977: 115). This decision and the local events that led to it were preceded by a regional event that likely prompted some Luritja, Arrernte and Luritja-Pintupi people to look to life beyond the mission. In 1963, gas and oil reserves were discovered at Mereenie in the Amadeus Basin, about 150 km west of Hermannsburg. In 1965, gas reserves also were discovered in Palm Valley, proximate to Hermannsburg. Through 1970 and 1971, discussions were taking place between the miners and involved Aboriginal people, including some based at Hermannsburg. This was the initial stage of negotiations that ultimately would see gas royalties and rental for a gas pipeline to Alice Springs come to Western Arrernte people. Relatively speaking, the payments would be modest. Nonetheless, their advent offered a new source of power and dignity to regional Aboriginal people. These negotiations also provided a different frame in which to reflect on local governance issues at the mission—a frame possibly linked to developments in Yirrkala and Wave Hill. In a milieu where the Mission Board proved reluctant to give Aboriginal people a role in hiring and firing non-Indigenous staff, Gary Stoll reported of the Mereenie negotiations:

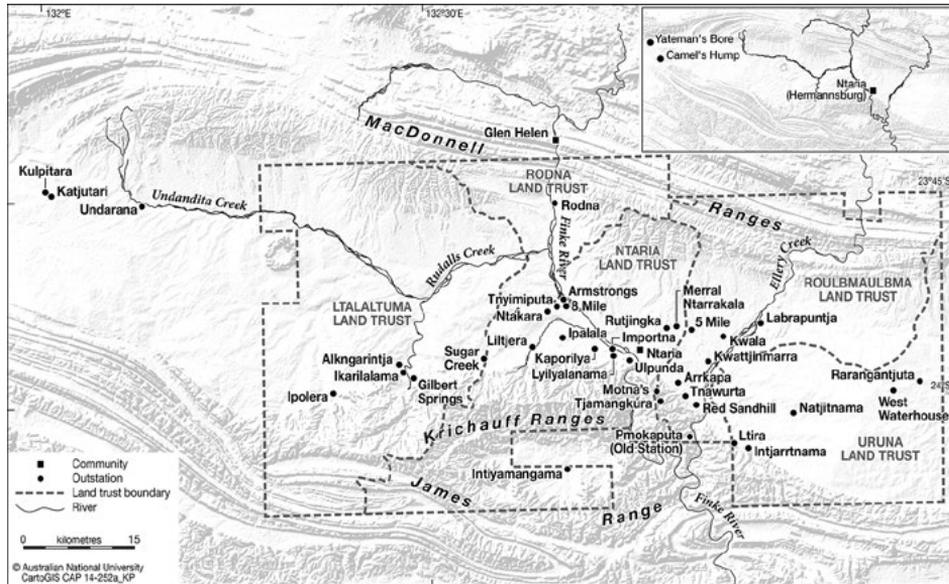
3 In 1975, Paul Albrecht, with the cooperation of a number of Lutheran mission staff, organised a petition of some 250 foolscap typescript pages that contained the recorded and translated statements of land owners and their managers regarding countries in and around what had been the Hermannsburg Mission lease. The submission was presented to the Australian Prime Minister, the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and to all members of the Federal Parliament (see Albrecht et al. 1976). As Albrecht would later summarise, the thrust of the submission was that the Aboriginal landowners involved did not wish to be bound by land trusts or other elements of the legal apparatus of the Australian state. In Albrecht's terms, Aboriginal people had their own 'imperium' or legal-moral order quite independent of the state and its legal and administrative apparatus (see Albrecht 2002: 69–74, 93–108). Clearly, this position derived in part from the mission's failed experiment with councils and its staff's newfound insights derived from anthropology and especially the study of kinship. The engagement with anthropology was a commendable one but also naive to the extent that it hid from the missionaries their own engagement for generations in roles pertaining to the state. In short, the Aboriginal 'imperium' had already been much trammelled and the outstation movement would require a range of measures beyond the return to tradition (with Christianity in train) that Albrecht and his associates hoped for. Possibly the Hermannsburg mission also felt some regret at the prospect of the transition from a Hermannsburg mission to a secular Ntaria. Tensions between the Ntaria Council and lay Lutherans at TORC extended for many years. See Eames (1983) for a critique of the mission's procedures in the early land rights years. Unfortunately, his account, although politically correct, is impoverished by his misplaced certitudes and moralising. Ironically, the Hermannsburg submission remains a fascinating record of the way in which missionised Arrernte deployed managers with more extensive knowledge to keep substantial links with their country. It is a moving document despite its background politics.

The thing that all [Aboriginal participants] felt very strongly about was that whether the mining operation be small or large, they want to own it and where possible work it. In the event of it being necessary for Europeans to be involved, they do not want them to become partners but rather employees. The last people they want interfering in their business are government personnel. They also felt they want Europeans kept off the reserve as this was the place they can call their own. (Stoll 1970, 1971; also cited in Austin-Broos 2009: 187)

Talk between Arrernte and missionaries began in 1973, and by early 1974 one large group had decamped to Kwatjinmarra on Ellery Creek (Austin-Broos 2009: 214–5). As one missionary reported:

Suddenly people began to pack up and move out from Hermannsburg to settle as kinship or clan groups on their own chosen area ... It was a spontaneous migration ... The people simply left the conveniences and opportunities provided at Hermannsburg, to start off again at the grass-roots of their culture. (Leske 1977: 115)

In 1999–2000, people at Ntaria/Hermannsburg estimated that the original camp attracted up to 60 people. Lack of water and shelter became a problem and soon there were further, smaller relocations determined as appropriate by senior men—to Pmokaputa (Old Station), Tnawurta, Ilbal' Alkngarrintja (Red Sandhill) and Arrkapa, among other places. Before too long a riff of outstations was established along the northern edge of the James Range and in proximity to Ellery Creek (see Map 4.1). It was in this milieu that ceremony also began again, led by men, some of whom were guests of the Arrernte from the south, north and west. Often the guests had forged connections with Hermannsburg men through cattle work on Tempe Downs and Henbury stations in the south or on the mission lease itself. Contacts were also made via the cattle camp at Undandita that drew in men from the Glen Helen Station in the West Macdonnell Ranges.



Map 4.1 Arrente outstations.

Source: Karina Pelling, CartoGIS, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Kevin Coulthard, a man whose father, Jack, was central to events, described it this way:

Well, that mob from Hermannsburg. Too much drinking, fighting. They want family to stop separate, away from trouble. Then they had ceremony. Lotta ceremony. All those old bloke pass away now ... Kwatjinmarra first outstation. Then Ungwanaka mob talking about Apma Kapurta [Old Station]—that's southern Arrente language. Then we build big fence around here. Gardening. And after that my father and uncle talkin' with Nahassan to get outstation for my father. Maybe Illamurta, then Tnawurta was better. (cited in Austin-Broos 2009: 219)

Lutheran Gary Stoll, invited as a mediator between the men and the 'Government', provided this moving account of:

[T]wo complete ceremonies involving many days and quite a few nights of singing and re-enacting the travels and exploits of various 'ancestors' ... The impression ... this has made on me is hard to describe. I was staggered by the extent and intactness of knowledge and skills still retained by men ranging in age from their late twenties to mid-seventies, many of whom grew up in the Mission and among whom I would have confidently predicted little of this kind of traditional knowledge remained. The efficiency of the organisation was also impressive as was its complete independence of any European assistance ... Another revelation was seeing men one has known for 18 years and many of whom have not impressed one as being other than mediocre, playing a very significant role and being very important in this situation. (Stoll 1976; also cited in Austin-Broos 2009: 192)

It was from this milieu that a group led by Traugott Malbunka broke away to move west of the mission and locate at Liltjera in April 1974. Soon thereafter, in December of the same year, Traugott's eldest brother, Gustav, established his camp at Ltalaltuma or Gilbert Springs. In the next year, the youngest of these siblings, Colin Malbunka, would establish his own outstation north of the Gilbert Springs at a place called Alkngarrintja. Colin Malbunka was already an ordained pastor with the Lutheran Church, while Gustav and Traugott were evangelists, the latter to be subsequently ordained. At the time of the initial outstation shift in 1973–74, Pastor Colin Malbunka held a missionary position in the distant location of Neutral Junction, north-east of Hermannsburg. He was granted an assignment home in order to participate in the outstation movement and thereby occupy his 'block'. It seems unlikely that the Malbunkas maintained an Indigenous ritual milieu as rich as that at Ellery Creek in the early days. Nonetheless, the Malbunkas' actions showed something else: that even Arrernte people close to the mission as a family could maintain some knowledge 'all round', as they described it and as Gary Stoll had found. Moreover, the order of priorities reflected in Colin Malbunka's return simply reflects the order of priorities among mission residents in general when they moved to Kwatjinmarra. As resources became available, even modest ones, and as the values of assimilation flagged, Western Arrernte became engaged in an outstation movement that they saw in significant part as a pursuit of autonomy.

Yet, even the resurgence of rites near Ellery Creek, and the strong preference expressed for domestic units and authority structures based on kinship and locality did not make this outstation movement simply a return to tradition. The human technologies that the mission brought had fundamental ontological impacts. These included the persuasions towards a sedentary life provided by domestication and processed foods as well as bore water accessed in places where previously Western Arrernte generally would not have had more than ephemeral camps. Again, space–time coordinates were rearranged first by horseback travel and then by motor vehicles, which were being used increasingly by the 1970s. Even when vehicles were driven across country or on ungraded tracks sometimes etched previously by stockmen and cattle on their way to soakages, the duration of a trip between two camps could become some hours rather than two or more days. All these changes would affect expectations regarding the activities that occurred each day in camp, the frequency with which near and more distant relatives were engaged, and the types of regional connection that could be maintained. Both processed food and greater ease of travel would affect the intensity with which Arrernte in camp would engage their immediate environment and the micro-ecologies through which they regularly passed. Where many family groups were concerned, two or three previous generations in the mission brought a relativising of cosmology. A Lutheran Christian view of the world had to be located and, initially at least, bounded in relation to another

world that became specifically an Arrernte or 'blackfella' one. Eric Kolig (1972) suggests that Aboriginal people held the new European presence on the very edge or 'horizon' of their world. Where the Western Arrernte were concerned, over time they seemed to locate Lutheran 'law' at Ntaria/Hermannsburg and along that section of the Finke River that passed by the mission. Missionaries came to that site because they brought a law that had been forgotten for that place. In this way, Arrernte sought to accommodate the missionaries quite some time before women would say, in the late 1990s, that though ancestral stories were not 'true', Arrernte kept them for their country.⁴

Finally, the actual pattern of outstation settlement reflected a significant reconfiguration of people on land due to the impact of settlement. Gustav Malbunka could claim his country as the country of his great grandfather Mangina. However, most of the relations to country on the basis of which Western Arrernte took up outstations were negotiated by groups of men, some of whom retained ritual knowledge and some of whom were prominent as leaders in the mission. In fact, these negotiations of locality reveal the ingenuity of the Western Arrernte in their drive to reproduce a system significantly disturbed by European settlement. Outstation leaders could in fact be 'mother's side', 'occupying mother's father's country'; more immediate affines of owners, 'occupation negotiated through wife' or 'occupation negotiated through son-in-law'; or guests with knowledge, 'occupation negotiated with traditional owners', some of whom took over sites 'occupying land that is part of their dreaming [where] traditional owners may have died out' (Haeusler 1976). Such negotiations would have occurred in pre-settlement times due to drought or prolonged feud, or even according to aptitude. In this instance though, the negotiations were extensive and laid the grounds for petty and more serious conflicts later on.

Malbangka Country provides some insight into daily life circa 1975. Gustav Malbunka's camp was constructed of a number of shelters made from native brush, canvas, corrugated iron and blankets. Careful scrutiny of the film indicates different locales for older women, among them Gustav's father's second wife, Della, and young men, some of them in cowboy gear and presenting a lively demeanour in contrast to old Gustav's restraint. The film's introduction invites Malbunka to name his conception site and to stipulate the origins of both his father and his Luritja mother from further west. He also indicates that his father was mission-raised while his mother was not. She came 'naked' from Mereenie to Hermannsburg. As these matters are discussed, Gustav helps a small

4 Although his discussion fails to address the Western Arrernte, Peterson (2000) gives an excellent account of the general manner in which ritual knowledge and practice might attenuate with the types of changes cited here—especially the attenuation of diverse and specific regional rites that rested on uses and knowledge of the land that new technologies and social practices have rendered obsolete or nearly so.

grandchild play a cassette of country and western music that pervades the camp. A young man carries a charred bullock head, which he places on a wire bed. He splits the skull with an axe to obtain the roasted offal. This source of food is juxtaposed with another. The store truck arrives, driven by the stock manager from the mission, Murray Pearce. He brings meat, drinks and various fruits and vegetables. He also brings pension cheques and child endowment payments—all to be signed for. The commentary notes that this Malbunka station also has a government grant to pay for fencing materials and for the wages of the young men. Does the family still hunt for food? Though the film will later show women and children bringing home a rabbit and perentie caught from one hole, Gustav Malbunka observes that hunting is 'stranger for us now'—'too long' with sugar and flour. The other form of foraging shown is by women searching for bush tobacco, which remains a perennial of Arrernte life.

Pearce also discusses with the elder Malbunka and his wife, Eileen Ungwanaka, father's sister to Nahassan, the task of sinking a bore that, he suggests, might be done by the younger men. The film cuts to the nearby springs and a women's ritual site and camp located at a distance from Ltalaltuma, a 'big place' for men. The women's site and camp is used as a water source, but men are still reluctant to use it though it has been 'freed'—a common Lutheran term for conversion.

As evening nears, the elder Malbunka calls his group together for devotional hymns and prayer—a daily ritual still maintained in the 1990s by surviving Malbunkas of the last mission generation. In turn, this practice is juxtaposed with another form of ritual concern as Malbunka on another day inspects the caves that hold some of his stone *tywerrenge* (*tjurunga*). The cave is near collapse and another one must be found as a storehouse. Gustav Malbunka consults a *kwertengerle* (*kutungurla*) on a new location for the ritual objects. Another day and two trucks head for Areyonga to visit other *kwertengerle* of Gustav Malbunka, who are managers for sites in that locale. Malbunka relates that the entire country down to and including Areyonga is Malbunka country that harbours many significant sites. Areyonga was established as a government ration depot in the 1920s as drought-affected Pitjantjatjara to the south moved north (see Long, this volume). In 1943, the Hermannsburg Mission assumed the depot's administration and also offered some social welfare services. Neither measure, Gustav underlines, involved significant consultation with the Malbunkas whose land it was. With his managers, Malbunka inspects one particular site of great significance.

Malbungka Country begins and ends with Gustav Malbunka's hopes for the future. His remarks are notable for the fact that he projects patterns of settlement that mirror Hermannsburg but in a context that evokes a specifically Indigenous life: Malbunka envisages 'proper' houses with running water and his own church and school. Asked about outstation income, he suggests that the

family might grow vegetables and fruit, perhaps to be sold to other settlements. He notes that, on its closure, the mission will probably distribute some cattle (it did), which would be the foundation for a Malbunka breeding herd, and also a source of fresh meat. In the years to come, services, employment, cash and ritual coherence along with intergenerational authority relations and debates between families about where 'the boundaries' of countries are, would produce frustrations both for the Malbunkas and for other groups. Numerous such issues would impinge on well-being. Nonetheless, the outstation movement did realise new life-ways in which family camps in various locales—on country and 'in town'—allowed space for Arrernte people to modify but also maintain very dense fields of relatedness. Paradoxically perhaps, a sedentary life, motorised transport, lower levels of infant mortality and cash incomes had encouraged relatedness even in the midst of change. As the Lutheran mission withdrew and as land rights were secured, Arrernte people strove to realise a revitalised life.

Self-determination and the Western Arrernte

Discussions with Western Arrernte around the end of the 1990s underlined a thought-provoking point: in the view of these elderly women and men, there always had been outstations linked to settlements. Asked to list outstations, most did not confine themselves simply to the Western Arrernte outstation movement. Various initiatives, often associated with the mission, were described as 'outstations'. Some accounts began with Jay Creek and the Lutheran Church in Alice Springs. The latter, established in 1938 and also known as the 'mission block', had acted as a refuge for 'full-bloods' whose visits to Alice Springs at the time were illegal.⁵ The block had also served as an old people's camp and had provided some accommodation for Aboriginal people visiting relatives in hospital. As an extension of the Hermannsburg Mission, it was indeed an outstation. Less often, Jay Creek was cited. Established as a camp for 'half-castes' in 1937, it seemed to earn the name 'outstation' because T. G. H. Strehlow, son of the missionary Carl Strehlow, resided there as a patrol officer between the late 1930s and early 1940s. Other outstations commonly mentioned were the ration depots at Haasts Bluff and Areyonga. Haasts Bluff had a long prior history as a site for trade in artefacts, skins and dingo scalps between Aboriginal and European people. Resourced by the Government from 1939, the depot was staffed by the mission beginning in 1942. Because it also had a missionary role, it was commonly called 'Old Albrecht's Station', referring to Paul Albrecht's father, Pastor Friedrich Albrecht. Areyonga, as discussed above, had multiple

⁵ This circumstance was integral to the laws that regulated residence in and around Alice Springs for different, racialised categories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

links with the Malbunka family. In addition, for many years the driver of the truck that supplied Areyonga was Colin Malbunka's father-in-law—like the Ungwanakas, a Southern Arrernte.

Other places commonly cited were Pmopakuta (Old Station) and Undandita, which long before the Western Arrernte's outstation movement had been cattle camps. The former was attached to Henbury Station in the south and the latter to Glen Helen Station, north of Hermannsburg. Of this stock-camp type, the earliest outstation cited was one from Hermannsburg itself: the goat camp at Labrapuntja on Ellery Creek, established by the mission in the early 1880s. More recent outstations from Hermannsburg included Albert Namatjira's artists' camp at Tjuwanpa, established in 1945, and another on the Finke River north of the mission. The latter was provided for Manasse Armstrong on his retirement in 1959. He was Hermannsburg's Aboriginal works manager and senior tanner for many years.

In short, Western Arrernte saw outstations as a perennial of settlement. Therefore it is not surprising that many described the more recent outstation movement simply in terms of 'shifting' from one site to another: to avoid 'noise'; to move from a Hermannsburg in which there were 'too many family'; and to leave a camp where there was now 'no room' and where people quarrelled 'for anything' and 'all the time' (see Austin-Broos 2009: 220). Yet this shift was also different from previous ones both before and after the mission settlement. This move was to a place or 'block' where a form of authority was reclaimed; a return to a particular milieu in which one or another group was acknowledged as 'boss' for a place with ritual significance. Moreover, this time the Arrernte shifted because they wished to and because now they could—due to changed legal status and an increasing access to resources denied them for generations.

These factors bear on two different notions of 'self-determination' at large in Australian society and in some academic writing. One identifies self-determination with the outstation movement as such, as a return to country by residential groups seeking a local Indigenous autonomy. Another view is that self-determination involves building an 'Indigenous sector' in the wake of land rights and the outstation movement; Aboriginal administrative control of a new social formation consisting of outstation systems and regional administrations linked to various state centres of governance. This account has argued that, for the Western Arrernte, their distance from foraging and the attenuation of their ritual life would mean that outstations also retained major dimensions of settlement life—and life within the state. For this reason, the second notion of self-determination is a necessary adjunct to the first. Within the bounds of the Australian state and with all the legacies of settlement, there could be no resumption of simply local practices. But neither, in Arrernte experience, was the outstation movement only or principally an exercise in a state-related

politics. It was also a statement about the mission's social-moral limitations and, as well, its faltering power. When the Western Arrernte began to shift, they did so to preserve and reinvigorate a valued kin-based life on ritually significant country that seemed to facilitate autonomy—'same but different' from the past. The outstation movement sought a new way and realised some initial steps towards it. This path has brought some particular challenges as Arrernte struggle to incorporate in it livelihoods and forms of education compatible with their desired milieu (Austin-Broos 2010, 2011, 2012). These are parts of any culture, old or revitalised, and call on further dimensions of self-determination (Austin-Broos 2013a, 2013b). Notwithstanding, the outstation movement was and remains the first successful step in a journey away from the forced dependency of mission life—which the Arrernte themselves deemed unacceptable.

Conclusion

This discussion has focused principally on the early years of the Western Arrernte outstation movement. It has not addressed the tangled and instructive history of TORC, especially during the 1990s as it evolved from a mission-derived organisation into a secular one answerable to the state in the form of Federal and Territory administrations and their changing policies shaped by the politics of Aboriginal issues nationwide (see Austin-Broos 2001; 2009: 229–37). A notable document linked to that history is a letter written in 1985 that begins 'Dear Charlie'. The letter was addressed to Charles Perkins, then secretary in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. It carried a direct request for more resources to support the 600 people living at the time on outstations located on one or other of the Western Arrernte's five land trusts. Among the letter's signatories was Jack Coulthard, a leader of the Western Arrernte's ritual revival, who, like some others involved, signed with a cross. They had not been mission schooled. The letter was also signed by sons of Gustav, Traugott and Colin Malbunka who had taken over as leaders of their fathers' outstations, along with a youthful Herman Malbunka, whose father, Jeremiah, had died in 1975. The document presaged the struggle that unfolded to maintain the outstation system as it was initially conceived. Like the film *Malbungka Country*, the letter is a symbol of the Western Arrernte's engagement with revitalisation: the 'deliberate, organised attempt by some members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture by rapid acceptance of a pattern of multiple innovations'. This was and remains the significance of the Western Arrernte's outstation movement.

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