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Values, voice and choice : Western Arrernte outstation engagement in the Northern Territory intervention

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Values, Voice and Choice

Western Arrernte Outstation Engagement in the Northern Territory Intervention

Annie Elizabeth Kennedy

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Philosophy

Southern Cross University

New South Wales

2013

Statement of Authorship

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Annie E Kennedy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Kennedy', with a stylized, cursive script.

Signature:.....

June 24, 2013

Date:

White-European they coming now, listen this story

Because this story wasn't anyplace.

Other Aborigine somewhere, same story

But they worry about this culture.

This the one ... culture, now.

You must not lose, leave your culture behind and story.

You got to hang on and give it behind ... your children.

Keep going.

If you got story, heart ...

Then speak yourself, stand for it!

(Bill Neidjie, Story About Feeling, 2007 p. 118)

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I am indebted to all of the people from the Western Arrernte outstations and Tjuwanpa Resource Centre and dedicate this work to them. It is their knowledge that is represented here. I hope I have done justice to their experience and wisdom. Jane Rosalski, Thatha and Solomon travelled with me throughout. Without their knowledge, friendship, support, and time, I could not have even begun the journey let alone have finished it. To others at Tjuwanpa, especially Orgki, Ngulpa, Az, Lee, Marie, Sovariel, and Johnson I also owe my thanks. Gordon I remember for his wide, open smile and his call to me, '*Good morning Annie my friend.*' His greeting always made my day.

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Abstract

This study examines engagement with the state from a remote, Aboriginal perspective. It aims to foster a better understanding of *how* we work *with*, not *what* we *do to* Aboriginal people. Set in the context of everyday outstation lives in the Central Australian desert, the study privileges the voices of Western Arrernte men and women as they encounter three of the reforms introduced under the Howard Government's contentious 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and its continuation over the next two years under the incoming Rudd Labor Government. Through narratives of outstation encounters with the myriad of policy reforms, programs, services, projects, trainings, rules, and meetings underneath the bough shelter that accompanied the reforms, ordinary men and women offer their perspectives on their engagement with the people and institutions who aimed to improve their lives. In their stories are important insights into what might 'engage' remote Aboriginal peoples as governments go about the business of '*closing the gap*' on Indigenous disadvantage.

The findings from the study suggest the engagement of people like those from the Western Arrernte outstations is a matter of choice - not coercion. In a remote setting such as the Tjuwanpa outstations, choice is vested in Aboriginal wellbeing values where being well, feeling well, and acting well are valued functionings, which prioritise relatedness to kin and place. Choices also take account of the heterogeneity of individual circumstances, where state reforms merge with practical needs for cash and cars as well as the realities of language differences and a limited desert economy. Revealed through the study, however, are the struggles outstation families experienced in trying to make informed choices about their futures. Further, as the changes unfold we see the continuing absence of their voice, leaving families no means to negotiate Western Arrernte wellbeing values or articulate their aspirations and the circumstances of their lives.

The study suggests that if government commitment to Aboriginal engagement in national policy is to be more than feel-good fuzz words, the engagement of remote

Aboriginal people on the ground needs to recognise the inter-relationship between Aboriginal agency, Aboriginal constructions of wellbeing and Aboriginal voice. Given the absence of meaningful opportunities for voice in remote communities, the narratives are used to reflect the changes required in current government policy and practice.

Key words: Aboriginal engagement, wellbeing, relatedness, voice, informed choice, capabilities approach, Northern Territory Emergency Response.

Notes on Terminology and Language

In this paper, **Indigenous** is the term used for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. **Aboriginal** is the term used for Indigenous Australians who are not of Torres Strait Islander descent. As the study site is located in a remote area of Central Australia, those referred to in the study are ‘Aboriginal’.

When used in Australia, the terms ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’ refer to the people of a particular place. Capitals are thus used. When referring to all indigenous peoples of the world, the non-capitalized indigenous is used. The term ‘Traditional Owner’ is also capitalized. This distinguishes these individuals as people of special knowledge or high distinction.

Use of the plural ‘**peoples**’ when describing Aboriginal or Indigenous populations recognises the many different language and cultural affiliations present in Australia and elsewhere. Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups tend to identify first with totemic family and clan associations, and link themselves to distinct language groups before adopting the singular Aboriginal or Indigenous identity. The term ‘Aboriginal peoples’ better represents these multiple identities.

The Aboriginal population inhabiting the Central Desert to the east, south and south west of Alice Springs are known as the **Arrernte**, pronounced as ‘*Ah-runda*’. The people inhabiting the lands adjacent to the West MacDonnell Ranges to the southwest of Alice Springs are Western Arrernte. The traditional spelling of the German Lutheran missionaries used the spelling **Aranda**. The most common spelling used today in official and academic writings, however, is Arrernte and this is the spelling used throughout in this dissertation.

Outstations are small, decentralised communities of close kin, established by the movement of Aboriginal people to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them. Outstations are also known as ‘**homelands**’ – a term that came into common

usage following the return of Aboriginal families in the Northern Territory to their ancestral lands during the 1970s and 1980s. ‘Outstation’, is the term used by Western Arrernte people and in this dissertation, the term ‘outstation’ is used throughout. When a distinction is required as to whether the place or the people are referred to, the terms ‘outstation land’, ‘outstation residents’ or ‘outstation families’ is used. ‘Homelands’ is used to refer to the homelands movement, which is generally understood to have begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s as Aboriginal people began to return to establish more permanent settlements on their ancestral lands. The term ‘Tjuwanpa outstations’ is also used. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples use the term ‘**country**’ to describe associations with particular areas of land relating to their ancestral and totemic origins. In common usage it is not capitalized, and is not preceded by an article such as ‘the’.

‘**Tjuwanpa outstations**’ refer to the 37 Western Arrernte outstations surrounding the Aboriginal township of Hermannsburg and serviced by the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre. Most outstations consist of one to three permanent houses and several unlined tin sheds – the original accommodation constructed in the years following the return of Western Arrernte families to their homelands.

On June 21 2007, the then Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough announced an emergency existed in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory requiring the intervention of the federal government. This emergency was called following the release of a report detailing extensive abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. The official term for the body of legislation and policy reforms supporting the Commonwealth’s announcement of the emergency is the **Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER)**, commonly referred to locally and throughout Australia as the ‘**Intervention**’. Both terms are used throughout.

A different font is used in Chapters 2 to 5 when quoting outstation participants’ stories. A common story-telling device used by Western Arrernte is to quote verbatim what they said to another or what they have heard another person say. When this occurs in the narratives, the text uses quotation marks and is depicted in italics.

'No matter how good the framework, no matter how much money is available, you cannot drive change into a community and unload it off the back of a truck. That is the lesson of the Intervention.'

Tom Calma, 2008, *'A human rights agenda for the Northern Territory'*,
Australian Human Rights Commission

Prologue

The Meeting Underneath the Bough Shelter

Their hands deep inside their jackets, a small group of men huddle in the winter sun outside the Tjuwanpa office. It is nine o'clock and already a steady stream of cars is pulling up outside the dusty building. Two days before the Resource Centre had received word that the government staff in Alice wanted an urgent meeting with the outstations. The Manager had been told there were important changes coming through that residents needed to understand. They would arrive at 10:00 in the morning and would put on a BBQ lunch afterwards.

Thatha is asked to advise the outstations. She mutters her frustration at the late notice, worrying people might not attend.

‘There’s a funeral tomorra at Santa Theresa and lots a families gotta go. And how am I gonna tell the outstations? Only four phones workin’ right now. Maybe those government people think we’re all waitin’ there under a tree for them to come. We’re busy you know. We’re busy!’

She calls out to others in the office and picks up the phone.

At 9:30 on the day of the meeting a large Toyota pulls up outside the main office. The walls of the corrugated iron building are adorned with desert landscapes and a multi-coloured depiction of the rainbow serpent. On the roof is a red, gold and black Aboriginal flag. A few cars are parked to the west of the bough shelter where the meeting is to take place. Children are playing on the playground equipment nearby. A two year old, his nappy askew, cries to be taken to the top of the slippery slide to be with his brothers. A small group of men are sitting on the iron benches in front of the office but they move quietly away as the visitors

disembark from their vehicle. It's Blackie – a very large mongrel dog, who greets the visitors and with wagging tail, follows them into the office.

Over the next 10 minutes a few plastic office chairs are dragged over to the bough shelter. By the time the visitors reappear, some of the older women and men have taken up positions on the chairs where there is sun. Women appear from the art room opposite the playground and men in bright yellow safety shirts straggle in from the yards behind the workshop sheds adjacent to the office. Most sit some distance away gathering in small groups. By 10 o'clock more cars are pulling in, a cloud of dust heralding each arrival. From the bright blue house to the east, the Rangers make their appearance, but they too keep a respectful distance from the action. The Rangers have had to delay their work on weed eradication, which they had scheduled for today. Other Aboriginal workers have either waited for the meeting before starting their day, or got another family member to replace them at their job so they could participate. All in all it's not a bad turn out. Most families have someone there.

The government visitors introduce themselves and people are thanked for coming. Although the children in the playground have been shushed the westerly wind makes it difficult for those beyond the bough shelter to hear what the visitors are saying. There is something about CDEP, which people strain to hear. They know CDEP is changing although they're not too clear about what's going on. A lot of what is said passes by. There are quite a few words that people haven't heard before and those sitting away from the bough shelter can't hear anyway. Listening to English gives Ngari a headache. Even though he uses English with the Ranger Coordinator, it's easy for Ngari to talk with him because he's known him for years. Thatha hasn't got a clue about what is being said either but she isn't too worried. As she works at the office, the Manager will eventually tell her what's going on.

After speaking for half an hour or so the visitors pause and ask if there are any questions. There is silence. Finally Connie speaks. She always does. She's had an education down south and speaks good English. She said she's heard things in town about this change and asks a few questions to check if what she's heard is

right. She listens respectfully, and then tells the visitors she is pleased to hear the government is talking about children's education and stopping 'sit down' money. For years she's been pushing to get more young people working back on their outstations. She reiterates this in Western Arrernte to the group and some of the older people murmur agreement.

The group falls quiet again. Finally, the Tjuwanpa Manager asks some questions. Twenty minutes go by as the visitors respond. Solomon listens hard. He hears the words 'quarantine' and 'income management' but he's not sure what these mean. He'll have to wait till he gets home when he can pull out his old, dog-eared dictionary.

'Are there any other questions?'

Silence. Finally an old man pipes up.

'What about that Shire that is takin' over the land? We don't want that! And I want Tjuwanpa to go out and fix up that bore for the horses. I've been askin' n askin' but still nothin'!'

The visitors look perplexed. There is a rumble of voices then a rapid exchange. Eventually someone apologises to the visitors explaining the old man did not understand what the meeting was about.

There is another opportunity for questions but people have begun to get restless. Some have already wandered off. Others hope that things will wind up soon so they can eat and get on with their day. The meat is on the BBQ and it smells good. The old man isn't saying anymore. The government visitors continue. Residents are told how important it is that they have come today. They are thanked for participating and everyone claps, indicating that the business side of things is finished.

Grabbing plates of food, families sit in groups on the ground, leaving the visitors to the seats under the bough shelter. With the smell of the BBQ, a few dogs have appeared in the hope of a feed and the children have returned to the playground.

Shortly after, children are packed into cars, the workers disappear, and the Rangers roar off in the troopie. The wind keeps up scattering serviettes, drink cans and paper plates around the front of the office.

Once the visitors leave, Thatha sits in the sun in front of the office, pulling a cigarette out of her bra where she has stored them – her tactic for stopping people humbugging her for a cigarette. She raises her eyes and shakes her head in exasperation.

‘Cause that meeting was just rushed! It was a rushed meeting! Didn’t have no time for people to think! You know ... think and I mean, should have made it for about three hours so people can think ... and slowly and in plain English! You know it was just bang, bang, bang! They just really wanted to get out of there. Didn’t give much time for people to think ... think what you gonna say. I know people had questions but... you know people just had no time! Insteada sayin’, “Think about it first. If you got any question.” You’ve gotta give people time to think you know!’

Chapter 1: Indigenous Engagement – Mapping the Terrain

Understandings, derived from perspectives of the excluded or “culturally different” allow for an appreciation of the nature of justice, the invisibility of the process of oppression, the power of difference, and the insight to be gained from recognition of divergent cultural uses of long hidden knowledges that highlight both our social construction as individuals and the limitations of monocultural ways of meaning making (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008 p.140).

1.1 Introduction

Encountering news of another government reform, a new policy directive or revised rules directing how Aboriginal people would behave, Solomon would often say to me, ‘*Annie, we just gotta understand the understanding.*’ A Western Arrernte man, elder, and father of four, Solomon constantly bemoaned the impossibility of making sense of government intentions. He struggled to understand what these intentions meant and how he should then act. At the same time, he was expected to engage in new programs and support the policy reforms arriving under the banner of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). Solomon’s difficulties lay in two directions. Firstly, he could not understand how the government reforms and the agreements he was expected to support would impact on the wellbeing of his family and their futures. Secondly, he was frustrated at his inability to ask questions or engage in communications that might have enabled him to have his priorities and perspectives understood by government authorities. *Understanding the understanding* was therefore Solomon’s way of expressing the difficulties he faced when trying to comprehend how government reforms would impact on his family, and his inability to find a voice through which he might negotiate their futures.

Over the past decade, the Commonwealth's Indigenous policy has increasingly referenced the notion of 'engagement' as essential to Indigenous people achieving the futures desired for them by the state. While Indigenous engagement is one of six core principles defining the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) – the '*Closing the Gap*' policy document underpinning the Commonwealth's Indigenous policy arrangements (COAG 2009a), the term remains undefined and its meaning ambiguous. The term therefore deserves interrogation. Perhaps in using the word engagement the Commonwealth intends to convey governments' commitment to encourage the involvement of Australia's Indigenous citizens in a relationship with the state, a commitment made explicit in former Prime Minister Rudd's historic apology to Australia's '*Stolen Generations*' (2008). Certainly, the use of the term in current Indigenous policy indicates the desire of Australian governments to see Indigenous peoples participating in state programs aiming to reduce the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous wellbeing (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009).

The Commonwealth's policy rhetoric regarding engagement, however, essentially assumes Indigenous people have the desire and capability to embrace and partner with governments around objectives and within processes, timeframes, and institutional arrangements determined by the state. A critical assumption underpinning the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) framing of engagement is that remote Aboriginal peoples will understand and share the state's interpretation of what is best for Indigenous wellbeing. In other words, the Commonwealth assumes Indigenous citizens share the state's vision for their futures and how this is to be pursued. Is the framing of Indigenous engagement in these ways sufficient to meaningfully engage ordinary Indigenous people on the ground in government programs and services aiming to improve their wellbeing? While the Commonwealth's position on Indigenous engagement reflects a desire to work with, have a relationship with, or capture the involvement of Indigenous people within state efforts to improve indigenous wellbeing, how do remote Aboriginal people frame their conditions for a relationship with the state? While the Commonwealth has invested in efforts to improve cross-cultural communications and Indigenous leadership in remote areas (COAG 2009c), do

Aboriginal people feel these arrangements reflect conditions within which their voice has meaning, influence and authority?

This study, set in a very remote Western Arrernte context in the Northern Territory, reflects on Indigenous engagement with the state as it happened. It draws from the experience of a group of Western Arrernte outstation residents as they encountered state wellbeing efforts under the Howard Government's 2007 Intervention¹ into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and its continuation under the incoming Rudd Labor Government. The NTER was termed 'an emergency' by the Howard Government in response to *The Little Children Are Sacred Report*, which detailed extensive abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory (Wild & Anderson 2007). Set within narratives relating to three of the NTER measures, this study examines how a remote group of outstation residents understood and responded to the reforms.

Understanding the terms and conditions for Indigenous engagement in this study is therefore set within Western Arrernte responses to contemporary events unfolding in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory in the period between May 2007 and May 2009. Drawing from the perspectives of those who are the target of Indigenous policy arrangements in the Northern Territory, I discuss the conditions that make the term 'engagement' meaningful in the context of remote Indigenous lives.

By studying contemporary events as the NTER took place over its first two years, this dissertation seeks to shape a broader understanding of how remote Aboriginal peoples engage with the state and the conditions making this possible. As the findings from this study suggest, the engagement of Aboriginal peoples in state efforts to improve their wellbeing will not be achieved through expert opinions or meetings underneath a bough shelter that aim to confirm decisions and approaches already determined by governments (Eversole 2012). Nor will the engagement of

¹ The NTER is most commonly known around Australia as the Intervention. In this study, both terms are used when referencing the package of measures introduced under the NTER.

Indigenous peoples in remote areas such as the Western Arrernte outstations be determined by well-meaning outsiders taking the high moral ground and urging them to participate. Indicators of Indigenous engagement will also require more than statistical assessments counting Indigenous participation rates in government programs. This study makes the case that if engagement is to become something other than feel good rhetoric, absolving the state and blaming Indigenous people when the relationship falters (Macfarlane 2008), the reasoning underpinning Indigenous choices to engage and the characteristics of Indigenous interactions in the public domain, need to be understood from Indigenous perspectives.

1.2 The study's focus and rationale

The focus of this study is therefore on how a remote group of Western Arrernte outstation people understood and responded to contemporary state reforms seeking to improve their wellbeing. Its central aim is to expand the understanding of policy makers and service providers about the conditions influencing the engagement of remote Aboriginal peoples in government programs and services.

1.2.1 The study questions

Three overarching questions frame this study. First: *How did Western Arrernte outstation families understand and respond to key NTER measures?* Setting the findings from the study within Australian and international literature the second question asks: *What does this tell us about the conditions underpinning remote Aboriginal peoples' engagement in government wellbeing efforts?*² These questions are posed within outstation responses to the Commonwealth's imposition of a lease over the Aboriginal township of Hermannsburg; the quarantining of fifty percent of Commonwealth income support and welfare benefits to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory under what is known as

² I use the term 'peoples' to reference the different Indigenous language groups in Australia, each with distinct identities.

‘income management’; and the *Welfare to Work* reforms introduced by the Commonwealth under the NTER. These reforms were part of a package of measures through which the Commonwealth sought to change the economic opportunities and behaviours of Aboriginal citizens living in remote areas of the Northern Territory.

Considering the conditions for Indigenous engagement emerging through analysis of the Western Arrernte outstation narratives, the third question addressed in this study is: *Does Commonwealth policy and practice reflect the conditions that would facilitate Aboriginal engagement in state wellbeing programs and with those responsible for their implementation?*

1.2.2 Conceptualising engagement

In the context of Australia’s Indigenous policy, understanding what the Commonwealth means by the term ‘engagement’ is elusive. Despite its frequent use in speech making and its centrality as one of six principles underpinning Indigenous policy, Indigenous engagement is nowhere defined. As Indigenous engagement is exhorted as an idealised state of being in the Commonwealth’s ‘*Closing the Gap*’ policy document (COAG 2009a) where the term is mentioned 31 times, this begs the question of exactly what Indigenous engagement means.

As a state of being – to be ‘engaged’ – is, ‘to occupy the attention of a person’ or to commit to a promise to a course of action (*The Macquarie Dictionary* 1991 p.579). Engagement thus speaks to conditions underpinning individual motivation, self-regulation and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci 2000). When used with the term ‘community’, engagement refers to two-way processes of involvement between communities of interest and those concerned with public policy and decision-making. It is therefore associated with the means,

‘ ... by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors in policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment’ (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2005).

In this study the term ‘**engagement**’, is therefore conceptualised as a dynamic having two key elements. As an active verb, to be engaged implies that one is choosing to pursue an involvement with something or someone towards a valued end point or state of being that one values. This contrasts with coercion, which means to participate in events against one’s will or under conditions leading to a sense of alienation (Ryan & Deci 2000). This study therefore examines the priorities, motivations and circumstances underpinning outstation assessments and choices associated with the NTER reforms. Engagement is also about the spaces or processes giving rise to the capability to meaningfully participate – to feel at ease, safe, and able to express oneself in interactions with others. This study therefore also focuses on the considerations that outstation families brought to social interactions within the work, training and meeting environments that government policy makers and bureaucrats expect remote Aboriginal people to engage in.

In the context of Indigenous lives and policy, engagement is also necessarily about ‘**wellbeing**’. Wellbeing was central to the values and aspirations underpinning Western Arrernte and other remote Aboriginal people’s assessments of the NTER reforms. Wellbeing is central to the Commonwealth’s interests, with Indigenous policy assuming that Indigenous engagement will result in improvements to Indigenous wellbeing. In setting the parameters for wellbeing I have drawn on Sarah White’s three-pronged framework. This situates wellbeing as a socially and culturally constructed experience, incorporating inter-related subjective, objective, and relational assessments of life (White 2010; White & Pettit 2004). Engagement in this dissertation is thus positioned within the material, moral and relational considerations that outstation people brought to their assessments of their lives (White 2010) – lives within which the Western Arrernte people in this study sought to be well, feel well and act well.

1.2.3 The rationale for the study

Over the past decade notions of engagement and relationships with Indigenous peoples have increasingly become part of national policy rhetoric. In 2002, COAG

commenced a series of trials, which aimed to explore how governments and Indigenous communities could work together to address Indigenous disadvantage. Although these trials were underpinned by the principle of shared responsibility and relationships between governments and communities for finding and implementing solutions, government departments struggled to find a way within which they could work with Indigenous people on the ground (Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination 2006). Believing that all citizens have a right to be involved in the decisions affecting their lives, many Indigenous leaders, academics and heads of government have also called for governments to expand their efforts to engage with Australia's Indigenous population (Briggs 2009; Calma 2008; Dodson 2008; Edwards 2010; Henry 2007a).

The Little Children are Sacred Report (Wild & Anderson 2007) was used as a platform for the Howard Government's Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Acknowledging widespread child abuse and neglect, its authors spoke to the centrality of Aboriginal engagement in tackling the problem. Their view was that

‘... there needs to be a radical change in the way government and non-government organizations consult, engage with and support Aboriginal people’ (2007 p.51).

Ignoring the centrality of engagement in the report's recommendations, the Howard Government initiated its military-led emergency response. Over a year later, the team reviewing the NTER commented that, ‘The notion of engagement is a distant memory’ and emphasised the need to urgently rebuild the trust and confidence of Aboriginal peoples that had been shattered through the Intervention (Yu, Duncan & Gray 2008 p.48).

Early in 2008, the incoming Labor Government sought to reset Australia's relationship with its Indigenous peoples in a historic apology to the nation's *Stolen Generations* (Rudd 2008). Following the apology, the notion of engagement as relationship began to emerge in Indigenous policy. Looking to the future of the NTER, the then new Labor Government emphasised the need to re-engage with

Indigenous Australians. Indigenous engagement was subsequently set within one of the six core principles underpinning Commonwealth, State and Territory financial investments in remote Indigenous communities under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). This established, ‘the importance of Indigenous culture, and engagement and positive relationships with Indigenous Australians’, as a central principle underpinning its implementation (COAG 2009a p.3).

In supporting the implementation of the engagement principle, NIRA emphasises Indigenous-government partnerships, improvements in communications between government and Indigenous communities, and the development of grassroots Indigenous community capacity and leadership. While an elected national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body and expert advisory groups will represent Indigenous interests and provide high-level technical advice in the formulation of policy and programs, Indigenous engagement on the ground is to be achieved by:

‘Utilising available arrangements and existing informal ongoing personal interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and building relationships over time, is another important way of engaging with and building partnerships with Indigenous communities’ (COAG 2009c A-23).

The Commonwealth’s commitment to engagement in the Northern Territory is implemented through funding available under the Remote Service Delivery Bi-Lateral Plan between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory Governments (NTG 2009). Here Aboriginal relationships are to be fostered through investments in a Government Business Manager and Indigenous Engagement Officer based in Aboriginal townships. These Commonwealth Government employees provide a single government entry point in remote communities and facilitate communications between Aboriginal residents and government agencies. Communications on the ground are also supported by improvements in interpreter services, governance training supporting Indigenous participation in local governance structures, and cross-cultural training for government staff involved in service delivery. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal involvement in decision-

making is via representation on local government Shire Boards, which are responsible for undertaking local area planning, and through consultation processes regarding development of township plans.

In the Northern Territory, the Territory and Commonwealth Governments' policies assume that by expanding the Aboriginal interpreter pool, investing in cross-cultural training for service providers, and placing bureaucrats and liaison officers in Aboriginal communities, relationships and communications between government and Aboriginal peoples will improve. By implication it is assumed these measures will see remote Aboriginal peoples more readily engaging in government programs designed to improve their wellbeing.

A number of writers have expressed concern with the use of engagement as an all-embracing term without articulating its underlying normative assumptions. Carter argues that engagement in Indigenous policy represents a co-opting of Indigenous citizens into state initiatives (2010) rather than representing the notion of participation as a feature of deliberative democracy (Measham et al. 2009). Mcfarlane (2008) illustrates how engagement in the context of Indigenous education is accompanied by prescriptions for how parents are to engage with schools, leading to Indigenous parents' exclusion or denunciation when they fail to comply. An ethnographic study highlights this danger in Indigenous education policy, where parental engagement in schools is taken to imply good parenting (Lea et al. 2011). Lea's study concludes that while appearing to be inclusive, Indigenous policy assumes terms for engagement that exclude consideration of the everyday material realities that face Indigenous parents in their efforts to send children to school. The risk is therefore that engagement is a buzzword that becomes a fuzz word (Cornwall & Brock 2005) – a feel-good rhetoric accompanied by normative notions of how it is to be enacted – justifying particular courses of action while ignoring the conditions that might make it meaningful.

There is therefore a need to better understand the terms and conditions for Indigenous engagement from the perspective of those Indigenous peoples who are expected to engage with government officials and in state sponsored programs and

services. This position does not deny that governments need to support better health, housing, education, and employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples. Rather, I argue that we need to better understand the motivations, aspirations, and considerations that ordinary Indigenous citizens bring to their assessments of government wellbeing strategies and the choices they make about their engagement in them. We also need to understand the conditions within which Indigenous peoples might have the capability to voice this knowledge, so that government policy commitments to Indigenous engagement in decision-making have teeth.

The rationale for this study is therefore the pressing need for governments' investments in Indigenous services and programs to work in support of Indigenous wellbeing. Understanding how Aboriginal peoples themselves encounter development and wellbeing opportunities on offer from the state, hearing from them what underpins their meaningful engagement in government programs and consultations and what mitigates against it, and how they frame what it is that enables them to *be well*, is critical to the design and development of effective services and programs. While the desire for Indigenous engagement is evident in government policy rhetoric, it is not clear whether the terms for partnerships – and the Indigenous leadership development and communications strategies being resourced by governments – reflect the conditions under which Indigenous peoples might meaningfully engage with the state.

1.3 The study context

1.3.1 The Indigenous policy environment in the Northern Territory

On June 21 2007, the Howard Government declared a state of emergency in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Responding to findings of widespread child abuse and neglect in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, contained in the Little Children are Sacred report (Wild & Anderson 2007), the Commonwealth stated that the dysfunction in Aboriginal families and

remote Aboriginal townships constituted a national emergency. This had to be addressed without delay (Brough 2007b). Using federal powers over the Northern Territory and suspending the Anti-Discrimination Act, a package of measures known as the Northern Territory Emergency Response was introduced into the House of Representatives as five bills in August 2007. These bills were passed by the Australian Senate less than a month later.

The NTER measures immediately grabbed national attention. The federal government compulsorily acquired seventy-three Aboriginal townships under five year leases, over-ruling the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act that had returned traditional lands to Aboriginal peoples in 1976. Commonwealth payments to Aboriginal citizens in the Northern Territory were subjected to income management. This quarantined half of all Aboriginal Centrelink income support and welfare benefits and restricted this to expenditure on food or essential items. The measure was only applied to Aboriginal clients in remote areas of the Northern Territory. Additional police were stationed in Aboriginal townships, alcohol and pornography banned, the permit system required for entry to Aboriginal townships lifted, and Commonwealth Government officials appointed to manage affairs in Aboriginal townships. In July 2007, a month after announcing the NTER, workers on the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) – a government supported Aboriginal work and training program – were informed that the program would close. CDEP workers would be registered on Centrelink with CDEP wages replaced by Centrelink income support payments. This enabled the Commonwealth to apply income management provisions to 6,000 Aboriginal CDEP workers in the Northern Territory.

Within two weeks of the Indigenous Affairs Minister's June 2007 announcement of the national emergency, a large entourage of government officials arrived in the Northern Territory Aboriginal township of Hermannsburg to begin implementation of the NTER reform agenda. A contingent of Norforce troops³ and

³ Norforce is an infantry regiment of the Australian Army Reserve employed in surveillance and reconnaissance of remote areas of Northern Australia.

a team of doctors hastily assembled from around Australia accompanied the team⁴. Across the dry bed of the Finke River just over a kilometre away, a group of Western Arrernte men were participating in a training workshop at the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre. Hearing that troops had arrived in Hermannsburg the men stopped what they were doing and looked up puzzled. After a short pause one asked, *'The army! Is there a big fight over there or something?'* The men presumed a clan-based fight had broken out, which had got out of control. The Howard Government's Intervention in the Northern Territory had made national headlines for weeks. Western Arrernte outstation families, however, knew nothing of these events nor the controversy and debate surrounding them. As the NTER entered the lives and the lexicon of outstation families they struggled to understand what it all meant.

My involvement in the study area began in the six months immediately preceding the Howard Government's June 2007 announcement of the emergency in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. My fieldwork ended in May 2009, approximately two years after the Intervention began. By this time, a new Labor Government had been elected under former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. As detailing the reforms introduced over this period – first as the package of measures known as the NTER and later as amendments or extensions to these reforms – would be a task that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I have detailed the reforms in attached appendices.⁵ The package of legislation enacting the NTER consisted of some 512 pages. The subsequent emails, guidelines, fact sheets, directives, and reports shaping and responding to the implementation of these reforms over the ensuing years amounted to hundreds of files. I have therefore woven details of the reforms throughout Chapters 2 to 5 to provide a contextual

⁴ The medical teams were initially tasked with undertaking compulsory health checks of all children. Following a public outcry, the medical checks were subsequently made voluntary.

⁵ Appendix 1 provides background information on the key reform measures. Appendix 2 details a chronology of NTER events as they occurred at Tjuwanpa or in nearby Hermannsburg.

reference point to outstation residents' responses to events.

When my fieldwork ended in May 2009, the new Australian Labor Government had reviewed the NTER legislation and promised to reinstate the application of the Anti-Discrimination Act. At this time, Labor had already reintroduced a modified CDEP and increased its financial investments in remote Aboriginal communities. In 2009, these investments were negotiated with the states and territories under a series of National Indigenous Reform Agreements (COAG 2009a, 2009c, 2009d), known as '*Closing the Gap*' policy. In the Northern Territory, these Commonwealth agreements saw large government investments in housing and government service provision in 16 Aboriginal townships. These investments were conditional on Aboriginal agreement to extend the existing five-year township leases for 80 years or alternatively, to agree to 40-year housing leases. Effectively, the original NTER measures, including income management of Centrelink payments were continued. Although CDEP was rebadged as a new CDEP, the wages of new participants were subject to income management. Under these arrangements, Commonwealth funding for outstation services and housing was restricted.

Each of these changes was initiated during the period of this study. The narratives therefore reflect the reforms taking place under the Howard Government's NTER arrangements as well as its continuation, although in modified form, under the new Rudd Labor Government. The analysis in this dissertation draws from these narratives, contrasting Western Arrernte concerns underpinning their engagement with the reforms with the Commonwealth's Indigenous engagement policy as articulated in the NIRA (COAG 2009a) and the investment agreements in place to support it.

1.3.2 The study site: Western Arrernte Outstations

The Arrernte people are believed to have been living on their lands for more than

20,000 years. They are the custodians of Central Desert country⁶ forming the township of Alice Springs (Mparntwe), lands to the east to the small Aboriginal settlement of Wallace Rock Hole, lands to the west to Watarrka (Kings Canyon), and lands to the south-west as far as the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. Arrernte is part of the Arandic group of the Pama-Nyungan languages, spoken by approximately 3,000 people in Central Australia. Western Arrernte is one of five Arandic dialects spoken across the region.

Represented in this study are residents of 37 tiny, Western Arrernte outstation settlements known locally as the ‘Tjuwanpa outstations’. Scattered across approximately 4,500 square kilometres of traditional Western Arrernte lands, the outstations are situated on five Aboriginal land trusts representing the five major patrilineal clan groups. These lands stretch south-west of the West MacDonnell Ranges and across the Finke River catchment towards Kings Canyon. At the time of the study 300 people were resident at the Tjuwanpa outstations (ABS 2006a). Enumerating the number of people living on the outstations at any one time, however, is difficult. Outstation population numbers vary substantially due to mobility between the outstations and the Western Arrernte township of Hermannsburg, Alice Springs and other remote areas.

The outstations surround the old Lutheran Mission town of Hermannsburg, also known by its Western Arrernte name, Ntaria⁷. Occupied by extended family groups with clan and totemic associations linked to Western Arrernte country, the outstations were originally established with support from the Lutheran Mission at the time of the Northern Territory ‘Homelands Movement’. This movement, which began in the early 1970s, saw Aboriginal peoples across the Territory

⁶ For Aboriginal peoples, ‘country’ is a living entity, embracing the people, plants and animals of a place as well as its seasons, stories and creation spirits. Country is a place of belonging, a way of believing and sets responsibilities for the conduct of social relations. In common usage, it is called ‘country’ and not ‘the country’.

⁷ Western Arrernte participants in this study used both names when referring to the township.

returning to their traditional lands.⁸ This area of Western Arrernte country was formally returned to its Western Arrernte custodians in 1982 under five separate land trusts, set up under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act (1976).

The outstation landscape is characterised by the spectacular colours of the rugged West MacDonnell Ranges, which quickly fall away to flat, treed grasslands crisscrossed by a series of dry creek beds feeding the Finke River. When the rains come, the river swells and the rough outstation roads become impassable. Alice Springs, normally a road trip from the outstations taking an hour or two, becomes inaccessible. Each outstation commonly consists of one, two or three permanent houses as well as several single-room, tin dwellings – the original housing constructed when Western Arrernte families first returned to live on country in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre, registered in 1984 as an Aboriginal Corporation, provides essential outstation services, and manages government-funded housing for the outstation population. The Resource Centre also manages a local Centrelink Agency, a large CDEP program, Arts Centre, and a variety of smaller government grant programs. Tjuwanpa also hosts an Indigenous Rangers team. Taking the name of the Resource Centre the outstations are referred to locally as the Tjuwanpa outstations.

At 8.30 in the morning on workdays, a group of Western Arrernte men on the Works Team can usually be found assembled outside the office chatting and having a smoke. This group of men is indispensable at Tjuwanpa, maintaining outstation roads, water, power and sewerage infrastructure, local roads and outstation housing. All too often they are called out to repair breaks in water pipes where feral horses have broken joiners in their search for water during the dry season. Reticulated bore water is essential to outstation survival. When mail is delivered twice weekly on Tuesdays and Thursdays the Tjuwanpa office gets busy.

⁸ Additional details concerning the history of the Western Arrernte homelands movement are provided in Appendix 3.

Discarded envelopes and Centrelink forms litter the floor near the mailboxes. Pinned to a well-used notice board at the front of the office, papers flap in the wind, providing information on everything from upcoming government initiatives to state and federal elections. It is details of the local football draw, however, which receive most attention.

Every year the Resource Centre takes care of hundreds of visitors, most of whom are government officials. Visitors frequently arrive unannounced – wanting information, requesting assistance with organising a new government initiative, or communicating news of new requirements for government programs. Outstation families, however, form the majority of faces seen at Tjuwanpa. They come to pick up mail, find Western Arrernte staff to help to deal with the English communications required to deal with banks, government offices or finance companies – often about car repayments, or to seek help with jobs or family troubles. The office becomes quiet during December. At that time, staff take Christmas leave and preparations begin for men’s cultural business, which takes place annually during the hot summer months. Travel near ceremonial areas is restricted during this time. Women bunker down at home with children and avoid moving across country, often relocating from their outstation to stay with relatives in Hermannsburg.

1.4 The significance of the study

Although media commentary on the NTER continues to make headlines, and academics and community groups have published extensive analysis of the NTER measures and their continuation under the Labor government (Altman & Hinkson 2007; Amnesty International 2009, 2010; Edmonds 2010; Hunter B 2007; Johns 2008; Langton 2008; Lattas & Morris 2010; Moreton-Robinson 2009; Stringer R 2007; Wadiwel & Tedmanson 2010), this study is unique in two respects.

Firstly, it is the only in-depth study of Aboriginal understandings and responses to NTER events as they took place. Existing analyses has been largely undertaken by academics, reporters and government reviewers, whose lives remain untouched by

the reforms. In this study Western Arrernte voices and perspectives are privileged in the analysis and presentation of the findings. These voices were muted when facing media microphones, government driven meetings, and rapid-fire questions from unknown journalists or well-meaning government officials.

While two publications extensively quote Aboriginal views of events (Concerned Australians 2010, 2011) their comments have been displaced from the context and lives within which they were voiced. In this study, however, Aboriginal responses to the NTER and its continuation under the new Labor government are elicited over a two-year period. The longitude of the study – and the six months I spent in the area before June 2007 – enabled outstation residents to talk about their understandings as events were unfolding over time. Importantly, however, the long timeframe for the study permitted relationships to develop through which Tjuwanpa's outstation families shared stories of their experience of the reforms within broader narratives of their lives – stories that talked to their everyday life and hopes for the future. Positioned in this way, people's responses have social, cultural and historical reference points anchoring the meanings they gave to the reforms.

Secondly, the study uses the NTER as a backdrop that enables us to hear how Indigenous people frame their choices about their engagement in government efforts to improve their lives. Although a large body of literature focuses on determinants of Indigenous wellbeing (Biddle 2011a; Carson et al. 2007; Dockery 2009; Jordan, Bulloch & Buchanan 2010; Pholi, Black & Richards 2009) and discussion of government neglect and misguided policy frameworks (Altman & Hinkson 2007; Dillon & Westbury 2007; Hughes 2007; Hughes & Warin 2005; Johns 2008; Rowse 1998) this study examines the link between policy, wellbeing and the critical role the capability for voice plays in informing Indigenous wellbeing choices.

Some Australian scholars and practitioners have looked to experience on the ground to inform the development of government programs and services that are responsive to the needs of Indigenous people in Australia. Recent work has highlighted the centrality of kin-based networks in governance arrangements

within remote Indigenous communities (Hunt & Smith 2007), the role of power, motivation, legitimacy and trust underpinning Aboriginal participation (Eversole 2003; Saggars 2005) and the possibilities for enhancing convergent user-centric design, based on user narratives, to improve service delivery (McIntyre-Mills 2010). Indigenous scholars and practitioners concerned with developing appropriate service models in mental health and dispute resolution settings have elaborated the critical importance of trusting relationships, family, deep listening, a sense of ownership, and cultural competency (Atkinson 2002; Bauman 2006a; Dudgeon, Garvey & Pickett 2000; Oxenham 2000; Purdie, Dudgeon & Walker 2010). This literature provides valuable insights from practice guiding how we might structure the way we engage with Aboriginal people in remote program environments. This study complements these efforts. It is unique, however, in that it privileges the perspectives of Indigenous beneficiaries as they engage with the state. It is through their voices that the conditions that could foster their engagement with the state are made known.

The study is therefore situated in understanding the lived experience of Western Arnernte outstation families as they encountered three of the measures introduced under the banner of the NTER. Its focus is on how families interpreted the Commonwealth's efforts to improve the wellbeing of remote Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Territory. It seeks to give voice to the meanings that Western Arnernte people gave to the Hermannsburg township lease and the Commonwealth's *'Welfare to Work'* policy arrangements and introduction of income management. These events are used to understand the conditions within which Aboriginal people in a remote, Central Desert environment *engaged in* government efforts to improve their wellbeing and *engaged with* outsiders who sought to help them.

Denzin (1989, 1992, 1997) calls for interpretive work to allow the voices, emotions and actions of those who are subject to state interventions to speak to their perspectives and experiences of events. He argues that this kind of research is required,

‘ ... when the researcher wants to examine the relationship between personal

troubles...and the public policies and public institutions that have been created to address those personal problems (Denzin 1989 p.10).

Denzin refers to life-changing events, such as those taking place under the Northern Territory Intervention, as *epiphanies*, which he describes as occurring when trouble experienced by the individual becomes a matter of public interest and external intervention. In this study, the trouble was reported widespread child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (Wild & Anderson 2007). The public interest was the decision by the Howard Government in 2007 to mount the NTER to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory and the Rudd Government's decision to continue the measures, albeit in modified form. This has involved sweeping reforms to Aboriginal welfare payments, Aboriginal land rights and the legal status of all Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal governance, and Aboriginal service arrangements. Denzin's view is that,

'The perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by applied programs must be grasped, interpreted and understood if solid, effective, applied programs are to be created' (1989 p.12).

The NTER thus represents a critical opportunity to understand the meanings given to the reforms by those affected by the Northern Territory Intervention and through their perspectives, to reflect on the integrity and appropriateness of the Commonwealth's efforts to engage its remote Aboriginal citizens.

1.5 The research approach

1.5.1 An indigenous research paradigm

In this dissertation I draw extensively on outstation voices and position them in the first half of the dissertation. The rationale for privileging of outstation narratives in this way has emerged in response to the concerns of indigenous scholars from around the world. These writers challenge research standing outside indigenous concerns, epistemologies and cultural practice. Here I will touch only briefly on

these arguments and how they have subsequently shaped this study in terms of its epistemological positioning, methodology, and presentation. I have deliberately placed the detailed discussion of my research standpoint and methodology as an appendix to the body of the study (Appendix 4). I have done so to emphasise the centrality of the voices of the storytellers in this dissertation and to engage the reader in their accounts before discussion of the more technical elements of the study (Stringer, E. T. 2007).

Australian Indigenous scholars (Martin 2001, 2003; Nakata 1998; Rigney 1997) and others involved in indigenous research across the globe (Bishop 1998, 2005; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008; Smith 1999, 2005) argue that knowledge derived from non-indigenous epistemologies and methodologies has been used – and continues to be used – to oppress indigenous peoples. These writers challenge the validity of truth claims that privilege Western epistemologies and the research practices bedded within these epistemologies (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008). They therefore reject as ‘real’, knowledge that is located outside indigenous systems and cultures. They demand a reframing of research away from its focus on the problematisation of indigenous peoples and its gaze on difference (Jones & Jenkins 2008) and call for work situated in an analysis of power relations, which aims to advance indigenous self-determination (Rigney 2000; Smith 1999, 2005).

Indigenous scholars argue that knowledge in indigenous contexts is grounded in an ethic of relationship (Smith 2005). This necessitates working within indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2003) requiring a change in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Here the researcher is asked to be accountable to indigenous peoples for the knowledge and meanings derived from the study (Bishop 2005; Marker 2003). The positions of these indigenous scholars merge with the push in qualitative studies for work positioning knowledge in lived experience, which aims to harness knowledge for social transformation (Bourdieu et al. 1999; Christians 2005; Denzin 1989; Lather 2006).

The arguments of indigenous scholars set the epistemological considerations for my study within an indigenous research paradigm (Wilson, S. 2001) whereby,

‘Indigenous research needs to reflect Indigenous contexts and world views’ and is set within, ‘a fundamental belief that knowledge is relational’ (2001 p.176). Wilson’s position reflects the centrality of relationship in the research process, an emphasis which features across the indigenous research literature. Martin (2003) describes such an approach to research with Australia’s Indigenous peoples as working within Indigenous ways of *knowing*, *being* and *doing*. These views are reinforced in Australia by the ethical principles guiding research with Indigenous peoples. These principles call on researchers to respect Indigenous cultural practice and values, and interrogate their own cultural positions in the research process (NHMRC 2003, 2007).

Responding to the concerns of Indigenous scholars, this study seeks to raise our consciousness of the lived experience of a group of Western Arrernte outstation residents as they encountered changes wrought through the Northern Territory Intervention. In doing so I position the knowledge derived from this study epistemologically in terms of understanding (Fehér 1998) thus framing the key question for the study as, ‘*How did Tjuwanpa’s outstation families understand and respond to key NTER reforms?*’ In setting the question in this way this study seeks to understand human actions, not predict them. It aims to reshape non-Indigenous consciousness of the way the state and other groups conduct their relationship with Western Arrernte outstation families and other Indigenous peoples (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008). Most importantly, this study seeks to build an understanding of Western Arrernte terms of engagement with the state from *their* perspective.

1.5.2 A methodology of relatedness

Working within an indigenous research paradigm this study was therefore not a dispassionate encounter but a relational process (Bull 2010; Nicholls 2008; Smith 2005; Wilson, S. 2001). Relationality and subjectivity entered into the research and implied rights, obligations and responsibilities (Bishop 2005; Marker 2003). *Dadirri* – a deep listening and the sharing of experience was required (Atkinson 2002). Working within a Western Arrernte world view knowledge is a privilege of acknowledged relationship – shared through the development of trust and actions

of caring (Austin-Broos 2009).

Entering into a Western Arrernte world I could not therefore be an objective bystander. In all aspects of the methodology I worked within culturally embedded ways of being and doing. Who I spoke with, what was shared, how conversations were conducted, and the ways in which informed consent was obtained therefore worked within Western Arrernte ways of respectful, ethical practice, which in this dissertation I call a 'methodology of relatedness'.

Time was of the essence here. I was introduced to the Tjuwanpa Management Committee in December 2006. My planned 12 months of fieldwork turned into two and a half year stay. People shared their stories with me only after repeated weekly visits to the Resource Centre. Time enabled me to share daily life with the Western Arrernte staff working at Tjuwanpa. Through shared experiences, some of the staff began to trust me. Once people began to build a relationship with me they felt comfortable and safe enough talk with me, telling me what they were thinking as they encountered events. Over time they began to pass me around to other members of their extended families, a sampling approach akin to the snowball method (Champion, Franks & Taylor 2008).

Interactions typically consisted of 'yarning' (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010) – an Aboriginal English term encompassing two-way, informal, and relaxed communications. Recording, and later transcribing these yarns enabled me to capture the nuance and pace of their stories. The process of hearing the narratives again and again also enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of what the storytellers were endeavouring to convey.

The selection and positioning of the narratives in the text was a process of inductive analysis (Patton 2002). This was not pre-defined by a theoretical framework but emerged in response to whether the text selected captured something important in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke 2006). The narratives are thus positioned to answer the questions, *How did Tjuwanpa's outstation families understand and respond to key NTER measures?* and, *What does this tell us about the conditions that underpin Western Arrernte outstation*

engagement in government wellbeing efforts?

Conscious of indigenous concerns regarding the potential to shape interpretation of the research, and indigenous calls for researchers to be accountable to indigenous peoples (Bishop 2005; Marker 2003; Smith 1999; Wilson, S. 2001), I secured three kinds of permissions. Firstly, I sought formal agreement from the Tjuwanpa Committee of Management to undertake a study in the area. This was backed by the first of four Southern Cross University ethics approvals⁹. The ethics approval process was an iterative process, starting with approval for a feasibility study. The scope and focus of the study was refined over time as conditions in the field changed. The onset of the Intervention turned the early study focus from Indigenous ownership of outstation service provision to the nature of outstation engagement with the state.¹⁰

Secondly, before each conversation I sought verbal permission to record people's stories, explaining that I wanted to hear what they thought of the changes they were encountering under the Intervention. At that time I explained that I would not use what they had spoken about with me until we had jointly reviewed the parts of their transcripts I wanted to use and shared my broad schema for the findings with them. It was not until I had done so that I sought written permission to use individual stories. I argue that obtaining written consent could only be obtained at this stage of the research process. In the context of indigenous concerns regarding research, my aim was to secure each participant's consent for me to speak to the *meaning* they intended to convey. This third permission was therefore significantly more than an agreement to participate in the study. It was permission for me to situate outstation words within an agreed and shared framework of meaning.

In the first half of the dissertation the extensive use of Western Arrernte outstation

⁹ See Appendices 5 and 6.

¹⁰ The loss of CDEP in 2007 threatened the survival of the Outstation Resource Centre and outstation services.

accounts has two purposes. The first is to permit the possibility for an empathic understanding of outstation lives by turning away from the dominant meta-narratives about Indigenous peoples in Australia. These narratives shape perceptions of Indigenous identity and experience as disadvantage, difference and dysfunction. My intent is to help the reader imagine themselves in the lived experience of outstation participants as they encounter key NTER reforms (Bourdieu et al. 1999; Denzin 1989, 1997, 2008). Through outstation voices it is hoped the reader will develop an empathic understanding and insight into the meanings people give to their actions (Chase 2008; Denzin 1989). Privileging Western Arrernte narratives in the first part of the dissertation is therefore a tool to help the reader imagine how things are and how they could be different (Phelps 2006; Ricouer 2006). These are voices of people who have been largely silent in the public discussion and debate about Indigenous policy in the Northern Territory. In Chapter 2, hearing Orgki call out to an absent Prime Minister and Indigenous Affairs Minister, '*I'm here, I'm here!*' as the Commonwealth imposed a lease over the township of Hermannsburg, she is trying to convey that she is a real person, that she is alive, and what concerns her matters profoundly.

Being able to speak about their lives, hopes and fears is also a matter of justice for outstation families as citizens (Phelps 2006). People's stories are the means through which government statistical and narrative accounts of what it is to be an Aboriginal person experiencing the Northern Territory Intervention become an ultimately human encounter. Storytelling by outstation families also provides a means through which Western Arrernte families are able to shape the public narrative as people, not as statistics (Denzin 1989). With their narratives forming the heart of this dissertation Tjuwanpa's outstation families have an opportunity for voice, which as this study shows they are largely denied.

What is captured in these accounts is not *the* Aboriginal story of engagement with the NTER. The study does not attempt to essentialise Western Arrernte outstation stories located in a particular time and place (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008; Morris 1994). Nor is there an essentialising of outstation responses as merely proponents or opponents of the NTER reforms. This would encode outstation responses as

fixed and unchanging, making impossible a different accounting of events that changing policy and relationships might see emerge. Rather, I use the narratives to frame up what are common experiences, unique events and illustrations of Aboriginal engagement with the institutions and agents there to ‘help’ them. It is an outstation framing of the problems, solutions and experience regarding their engagement with the state from where they stand. Families talk about the everyday complexity of what is taking place from the perspective of their lives in the Central Desert and as such, form a constitutive accounting of events from different perspectives. The literature is then used to illuminate different elements emerging from their accounts and to discuss the relevance of the findings for governments’ engagement policy and investments in processes to support it.

1.6 The structure of the dissertation

The narratives in this study are positioned in the four chapters following this introduction. Extensive reference is made to the literature in Chapters 6,7 and 8. The literature is used to reflect on the narratives and extend the reader’s understanding about key aspects of Western Arrernte engagement with the NTER reforms found in the outstation accounts. The appendices provide further detail about the NTER reforms (Appendices 1 and 2); the Tjuwanpa outstations and their history (Appendix 3); the study methodology (Appendix 4); and details relating to ethics and permissions for the study (Appendices 5 and 6). A Glossary of Terms and List of Acronyms is also provided (Appendices 7 and 8) for those readers who are less familiar with the language of Indigenous policy and the Northern Territory Intervention.

In all, this study draws on the voices of 18 Western Arrernte residents and Resource Centre staff, with eight of these participants appearing often in the narratives. Chapter 2 introduces some of the storytellers. Here men and women of different ages are heard discussing the Commonwealth’s compulsory acquisition and leasing of Aboriginal land on which the Western Arrernte township of Hermannsburg stands. Solomon, Jack and Janjula are three men aged between 45

and 65. All have worked at different times at the Resource Centre or as pastoral workers. They are fathers and grandfathers, and each has been initiated into and taught the privileged knowledge of country. Lee, Marie, Thatha, Orgki, Julia and Connie are women from three generations of Western Arrernte families. Lee is in her early 20s with no children. Her friend Marie who is two years younger already has two. In her early 30s, Thatha has a new baby daughter and five year old son. Orgki is 40 and although she has only one son now in his 20s, she has fostered many children during her life. Julia at 52 and Connie in her early 60s are surrounded by a growing number of grandchildren. In this chapter the men and women talk about the Commonwealth's measures to pave the way for Aboriginal home ownership, expand private investment in local businesses in Aboriginal townships like Hermannsburg, and secure government infrastructure investments in remote Aboriginal communities. Conveying their understandings of the differences between Western Arrernte law and Australian property law, men and women talk to their understandings about how country is constructed within a Western Arrernte worldview and the implications the changes have for their lives.

In Chapter 3 Nungari and Ngulpa are introduced. Nungari is trying to get the last of her children through school while also raising many of her grandchildren whose mother or father have problems with alcohol. Although Ngulpa is only in her early 40s she is already a proud grandmother to a young baby boy and she wants him raised on his grandfather's country. In chapter 3 they join Connie, Marie, Lee, Thatha and Orgki, all of them expressing their concerns for children. Some of the women have been educated away from the Hermannsburg Mission and are reasonably proficient in English. Through their own experience of a school-based education Connie and Nungari are passionate about seeing Western Arrernte children going to school. As each of the women encountered the changes to CDEP and the introduction of income management they held differing views on the promise of these reforms. Common throughout, however, was a focus on Western Arrernte identity and what the practical implications were for outstation families and their ability to raise children in a contemporary world.

Moving into jobs is the central focus of Chapter 4. Rather than focusing on the

pathology of Aboriginal unemployment, this chapter hears from men and women who have jobs. Thatha, Solomon, Johnson and Rex were all employed by Tjuwanpa. Thatha got her first job at 18 but lasted only a couple of weeks. Her second job came after the birth of her first child at 27. In his early life Solomon had had sporadic employment but at the time of the study he had been on the Works Team at Tjuwanpa for five years. Rex was a new arrival on the Works Team, related to Solomon by marriage. Of the four Tjuwanpa staff, Johnson at 50 was the only one who had been employed throughout most of his life. Like his father before him, had always worked in different jobs across the Central Desert. The men on the Ranger team are aged from their early 20s to late 30s. Many have small children, debts and at some stage in their lives, a history of contact with the police. The women and men in this chapter talk about the meaning of work in their lives and the conditions under which they can reasonably take up work or training. Accounts from this perspective provide the basis for understanding the conditions within which outstation residents engage in employment and training opportunities as well as the rationality at play in the context of a remote economy.

In Chapter 5 people talk about coming together and having a voice. This chapter picks up on complexities inherent in Western Arrernte participation in non-relational encounters, issues touched on in the earlier chapters. The narratives in this chapter reveal that Western Arrernte interactions – whether enacted in work environments, public meetings or simple encounters with an unknown contractor coming to fix an electricity pole – present substantial challenges for Western Arrernte outstation families. Focusing on the norms governing Western Arrernte interactions, this chapter explores the nuances of language differences, the conduct of speech, and how public interactions give rise to particular emotions and behavioural patterns.

Following the outstation accounts, Chapters 6 and 7 examine how the literature views the characteristics of Indigenous engagement revealed in Chapters 2 to 5. This body of literature is diverse as it draws on academic studies, practitioners' writings on Indigenous engagement, and selected case studies of Indigenous engagement in government programs. It uses ethnographic studies of the ontology

and behavioural characteristics of Indigenous peoples, practitioner experience of what works on the ground, and the writings of those concerned with the conduct of Indigenous governance to view the different elements of Western Arrernte engagement put forward by Tjuwanpa's outstation families. In this way the Tjuwanpa narratives can be seen against a broader body of accounts that examine how Indigenous Australians conduct their relationships with each other and with the state in contemporary service settings.

Chapter 8 reviews and discusses the key findings from the study against a body of literature and studies from Australia and overseas. These writers point to the necessity of understanding the link between individual choices and motivations underpinning engagement, and their link to culturally located, heterogeneous wellbeing choices. Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach (Sen 1992, 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2009) I argue, however, that choices need to be informed and subject to reason. For this to happen, a pre-requisite is the capability for voice within which there are meaningful opportunities for public dialogue, knowledge sharing and debate over preferences. Indeed as shown in Chapter 8, case studies from around Australia point repeatedly of improved outcomes for Indigenous wellbeing when this is done. I then contrast the study findings in the context of these writings against Indigenous '*Closing the Gap*' policy arrangements and engagement principles articulated in NIRA (COAG 2009a). I conclude that the way Indigenous engagement is conceptualised and approached in current Indigenous policy arrangements has significant limitations despite aiming to improve Indigenous wellbeing outcomes.

In Chapter 9, I address the question of how this might be resolved. My argument is that the narratives of Tjuwanpa outstation residents show that meaningful Indigenous engagement is located within cultural aspirations and values that are central to Indigenous wellbeing choices. Cultural values – or what it is important to do, be and act – underpin the willingness of remote peoples to engage *in* state programs and services, and *with* representatives of the state. As these values, the conditions of everyday social life, and the circumstances of remote environments impact on the capability of Aboriginal peoples to take up the opportunities

provided by the state, there needs to be the space for culturally appropriate public deliberation and rational dialogue. This makes possible understanding of local conditions and Aboriginal aspirations and values, while also providing the means to inform Aboriginal decisions and subject them to reason. Aboriginal engagement is therefore more likely to be realised through understanding choices, valuing Aboriginal wellbeing aspirations, and resourcing appropriate processes through which aspirations become known, choices are debated, conditions negotiated, and power over Indigenous futures is shared. Taking this position, this final chapter discusses the implications for Indigenous engagement policy and practice.

Chapter 2: All Lost Without Country

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we hear Western Arrernte responses to the federal government's decision to impose a lease over the township of Hermannsburg. Using outstation narratives, this chapter speaks to the values and aspirations underpinning Western Arrernte outstation assessments of the Aboriginal township leases – one of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) reforms, which sought to improve the economic and wellbeing opportunities available to Aboriginal peoples in remote townships in the Northern Territory.

The narratives began in May 2007, approximately six weeks before the announcement of the compulsory acquisition of 73 remote Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory as part of a package of measures introduced by the Howard Government to improve remote Aboriginal futures. It was at this time that Solomon¹¹ heard news of an old man signing a lease over his outstation land at Wadapuli – a tiny outstation of 35 residents on the edge of a flood plain near the Aboriginal town of Wadeye in the Northern Territory. Solomon did not know then that just two months later he would find himself attending a meeting in his hometown of Hermannsburg. There he would be told that the Commonwealth is about to compulsorily acquire and impose a five-year lease over the township as

¹¹ The people quoted in this dissertation chose the names they wished to be called, with the exception of Elva, who insisted I use her real name as she wanted to be directly identified with her comments

part of the Northern Territory Intervention to protect Aboriginal children (Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination 2007). This was necessary, he was informed, because the lease would provide the structural underpinnings to expand local economic opportunities, facilitate individual home ownership, and help secure government financial investments in town infrastructure – particularly public housing investments.

One year later, the Commonwealth Government Business Manager in Hermannsburg informed Solomon and other Western Arrernte elders that the incoming Rudd Labor Government was proposing a new deal for the township lease. Instead of the original five years, the community was asked to agree to an extension of the Hermannsburg lease for a further 40 to 80 years (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2008).

Solomon and other Western Arrernte families speaking through this chapter struggled to understand the logic behind the Howard Government's push for community leases and Aboriginal home ownership. They did, however, understand what was critical for their social and spiritual wellbeing and the survival of their families and their children's identity. It is these issues they speak to in this chapter. Unfolding over a two-year period, the lease story provides a lens through which we gain an understanding of the values and aspirations shaping Western Arrernte lives and decisions. Outstation responses to the Hermannsburg lease also highlight the tensions existing between Indigenous Australians and the state regarding how wellbeing is constituted, raising questions about whether the engagement of remote Aboriginal peoples in the state's wellbeing initiatives is possible in the absence of shared priorities about what is important for life and a shared understanding of meanings.

2.2 Outstation assessments of township leases

The compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal township land effectively over-rode the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (ALRA) – the first body of

federal legislation to recognise Aboriginal title to customary lands in the Northern Territory and indeed, anywhere in Australia. Although ALRA had been amended several times prior to the NTER, previous attempts to compulsorily acquire Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory had been overwhelmingly rejected by the Australian Parliament (Reeves 1998).

In 2006 under the then Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough, however, the Commonwealth began a concerted effort to engage with Traditional Owners (TO) in negotiations regarding government leasing of Aboriginal land to facilitate home ownership. Brough argued that short of reforming the law, leasing was the only avenue to individual land title, without which Aboriginal home ownership would remain impossible in remote communities. Leasing would also give government control of publicly funded Aboriginal housing, which up until 2007 had been predominantly controlled by Indigenous corporations. The Commonwealth argued government control was essential to ensuring the best outcomes from government investments in housing stock (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2007). By mid 2007, however, despite media fanfare over Wadapuli and some preliminary agreements in the Tiwi Islands to consider a lease, township lease negotiations with Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory had stalled.

As the narratives here reveal, the logic linking leases to better Aboriginal futures did not make sense to outstation families. They saw the leases creating the very conditions that Commonwealth sought to ameliorate. Given Western Arrernte law and the practicalities of the local economy, the imposition of a lease as a means of stimulating Aboriginal home ownership was also seen as absurd. As outstation families talked about the leases, what emerged was a deep sense of mistrust regarding government intentions, fear and frustration that the government did not recognise how country is central to Western Arrernte identity, and fears that loss of country would undermine family responsibilities to protect and nurture children on their land.

2.2.1 ‘Future ... for their little grannies’: Country and family futures

Until he saw the May newspaper article heralding the signing of a 99-year lease over Aboriginal land at Wadapuli, Solomon had heard nothing of the Australian Government’s proposals to make him either a homeowner or public housing tenant. Although he tried to catch the news on TV, most of the time he found this impossible. The kids were watching their shows or he just couldn’t hear above the racket his grandchildren made. So while government lease negotiations with Traditional Owners in the Tiwi Islands and other Aboriginal towns in the north had been making news for many months, Solomon was unaware of government plans for his family’s future.

A newspaper story brought into the Resource Centre office, however, had grabbed his attention. He read about how four families on a small outstation near the large Aboriginal township of Wadeye in the Northern Territory, had signed a paper allowing the government to hold a head lease over their land for 99 years (Wilson, A. 2007, May 4). Under the program, Aboriginal families in the Northern Territory could agree to lease their land to the government. This would enable them to borrow money from a special home loan program set up by the Australian Government through Indigenous Business Australia, lease the land back, and then buy the outstation houses they were living in. Under these arrangements, family owners could sell the house to someone else, borrow against it, or pass it on to their children; thereby establishing the house and land as an economic asset.

The news alarmed Solomon. Normally shy and reticent to speak his response was immediate.

It’s blackmail! That fella didn’t know what he was signing. They told him about the words at the top but they didn’t tell him about the words at the bottom. It’s blackmail – that fella’s been cheated!

Solomon struggled to make sense of what the old man from Wadapuli had done and was aghast at his actions. How could he agree to give away his land? It was Solomon’s view that the old man did not comprehend the long-term consequences arising from his decision. From his perspective this was the only logical

explanation. Why would a Traditional Owner allow government to take control of his land? Solomon went on to explain.

See, the thing is, that they gotta kinda try out to keep the outstation goin'. And there's an opportunity for them to pass their knowledge and ideas to their grandchildren. To the daughters, sons, nephews, nieces... and when they have their own little family, then they can pass that knowledge on to their kids ... to their grannies¹², while the place is still attached to the outstation – to the land itself, without gettin' the government's foot onto the land. You gotta try to protect the land itself if you do any changes (under non-Aboriginal law).

A couple of days later, Solomon discussed with Jack what he had read in the newspaper, explaining to him the federal government's intention to negotiate leases over Aboriginal land as a way of helping Aboriginal people purchase their own homes. Sitting in the winter sun, Jack shook his head in disbelief.

Jack: Oldest grandson or oldest son will take over. Oldest son when he gets older, he passes on his knowledge to his son ... the grandson. We got one grandson, eldest grandson, he'll take over and the second grandson, he'll be the second in charge.

Solomon: See, not like you (non-Aboriginal way). You sign a will, and who's got the most will gets to take over the house!

Jack: I got dreaming way. I got it here. I can't leave this place. From a young fella I was born in bush ... here at outstation. Then they brought me to the dispensary here – Tea Room¹³ now. I grew up, go to school here. My father ride the horses out west way. That's my country. I got songs I'm just telling you. All my young fellas ... gotta teach them black fella ways, white fella ways. They can't lose this – the main one (Western Arrernte way).

As Jack talked, he described the immutability of Aboriginal Law and contrasted

¹² 'Grannies' is the term used by many Aboriginal people for their grandchildren

¹³ The Hermannsburg Tea Rooms, now a small tourist café, once housed the Lutheran pastor in charge of the Finke River Mission where Jack grew up. It contained a small clinic that provided for the health needs of the Mission settlement.

this to non-Aboriginal notions of property ownership.

I got my (land) title there – sitting in the office – but we got our way. The white way – that paper can just go in the rubbish! Old men, we pass on knowledge and it goes on and on and on. When you sing 'em, you got 'em on your tongue all the time. You can't forget. This country is the Centrelink office for us.

Nobody can push me out. I got title here. That's why I don't like leaving. I got grandchildren here...all grow up here. If they want lease, tell 'em to take their houses back...I'll live in a humpy again!

Jack and Solomon acknowledged land ownership *white-fella way*. Jack understood that a piece of paper in an office somewhere gave him formal title to the land. Solomon, in talking about a will, understood that land could be transferred. But as Jack puts it, these pieces of paper are merely *rubbish* under Western Arrernte constructions of land. Western property title represented laws that changed ownership of land rather than securing it. As such, these laws did not make sense to the two men under Western Arrernte constructions of their future. For Jack, Western Arrernte law was immutable and this secured his family's ongoing relationship with country. Under the '*white way*', legal documents were changeable and transferable. As such they were '*rubbish*', because they enabled conditions that would undermine Western Arrernte family security and identity. Jack makes the point that just as Centrelink provided the financial support that enabled him to survive on his remote homeland, his land was central to his survival as a Western Arrernte man¹⁴. If government wanted a lease in order to secure Aboriginal housing, then as far as Jack was concerned they could take his outstation house back and he would go back to living in a humpy! Walking the land, not holding on to a piece of paper or living in a house was what secured his

¹⁴ Albrecht (2000) describes hearing Western Arrernte people often describe *tjurrunga* - *the Law* - as their Aboriginal bank. Jack here uses a more contemporary reference to Centrelink, saying effectively that his country is what he depends on for his survival in the same way that Centrelink sustains people in terms of their financial needs.

future. Looking out across his land he spoke slowly, carefully articulating each word; describing how his ancestors are seen in the unchanging elements of the landscape.

Mara¹⁵ ... that's the only place we can be. Go that way; see that thing (on country); think of grandfather. Still got 'im. Everywhere we go we think of him. Grow older, always thinking. Sometimes people write a letter then somebody come ask 'You got that letter?' 'No, sorry.' But my grandson come. I tell my grandson, 'You go look at that thing' ... always there, always going.

For both men the future is vested in their family's enduring connection to their land, not in paper agreements. They believed this future must be protected at all costs. Although Solomon and Jack grew up and went to school in Hermannsburg, their outstations lie on country linked to the spirits of their father's father.

Solomon went on to tell the story of how an old uncle had entrusted his country to him. The old man had lived alone on the land after Aboriginal people were free to move away from the mission settlement in Hermannsburg. Solomon remembers that during the hot summer months from December to February – when it was time for men's cultural business – he would travel out to find the old man and go with him to the men's ceremonial grounds. Under his uncle's tutelage, Solomon learned the law, songs and ceremonies of the spirits of his land. He 'owned' the land through his knowledge of it.

In the early 1980s, Solomon had moved onto his outstation with his wife and four children. At that time there were few comforts. The family lived in one of three unlined tin sheds. Water came from a nearby tap stand. When there was enough money for fuel, a generator powered a single light globe. Almost a decade later the family moved into a new brick house – the first of three permanent houses built on the outstation at the end of the 1980s. Ten years passed before he moved back to Hermannsburg. At that time he felt it was appropriate for younger families to bring up their children on their grandfather's country. His son, nephews and nieces now

¹⁵ 'That's right'; 'That's good'

occupy the permanent houses with three of the younger men travelling into Hermannsburg and Tjuwanpa daily for work. Although Solomon has a four-bedroom house in Hermannsburg he has plans to repair an old, abandoned tin shed on the outstation. Housing and amenities were not his priority.

Solomon sees the future through an enduring connection to country. He believes a future in the city would see his sons and grandchildren struggling for work and housing, but most importantly to him – for their identity.

See they can't live in white man's world ... nah ... it's gonna be pretty hard for them to cope ... like in big cities and that. Even in Alice Springs there ... it's pretty hard! Where they gonna get a job, and where they gonna live and all that?

See I think it's very important for people to stop at the outstation. It's for their future ... see it's very important to pass the knowledge on to them ... the stories ... the country line ... all that kinds of things you know. Otherwise if they gotta go out 'n' stay in Alice Springs, they all lost. You lose all your culture, and it will be pretty hard for them to come back and look around ... story line and all that. Just put it in like I said you know ... these little outstation ... the future ... all the grannies, nephews and nieces.

2.2.2 'Just gonna make more problems': Macro policies and local realities

Thatha struggled to understand the reason for the introduction of five-year township leases. As she worked at the Resource Centre Thatha had access to Tjuwanpa staff housing and felt she was lucky not to have to live in Hermannsburg. Too much trouble and noise there, she complained. Eventually she planned to go back to live on her outstation. She would go tomorrow if she could but the two permanent houses and the renovated tin shed there were already full. One day, maybe one day – once she had her car paid off she said, she could save up enough money to build something small there – just something small for her and the kids. In 2007, hearing about the leases in Hermannsburg, however, the future of her outstation and her plans to live there became extremely uncertain.

Yeah, they was goin' to give people out five-year...not give them...people are really worried about that anyway. I mean what are they goin' to do now if they don't have their Land Trust and if they get taken off from their Land Trust and things for five years. Is that true if they goin' to get five years? You never know. People are scared they goin' to get 99 year lease – that's what people are thinkin'... yeah. They don't know really what to do anyway. They just probably terrified or something ... they gonna get, I mean, that's *everything* that they get taken away ... you know. Yeah. They had families livin' there ... grandparents ... might be their energy there as well.

Thatha was worried about where families were going to end up. Her fear was that people would be forced into Alice Springs where she believed all the trouble originated.

Yeah, because they don't really know – I mean they just hearing about this five years lease and they don't really know what's really gonna happen on their lands or ... I mean are they still gonna be livin' there or what they gonna do? They gonna kick them out or have to go somewhere else and live?

From her perspective the lease contradicted the government's intent under the Intervention to make kids safer and flew in the face of commentary she had seen in local newspapers that wanted Aboriginal people from the bush moved out of Alice Springs and back to Aboriginal settlements (Chandler 2007, April 26).

And where they gonna live? Yeah. All go back into Alice Springs and live? That's where all the trouble is. I mean ... before they didn't want people in Alice Springs. They had to go back to the bush. Now they're pulling them back into town. Seems like that. (Laughs) I mean that's where all the domestics 'n' violence 'n' everything's gonna happen there (laughs)... child abuse ... I dunno – everything ... yeah ... seems it's like that anyway ... hmm.

Some weeks after the Intervention had been announced, young Lee and Marie sat musing on talk of the leases following a long day of work in the Centrelink office. Hearing that the leases were a means for Aboriginal people to buy their own homes, Lee burst out laughing. Never shy to put her opinions forward to those she knew, she exclaimed heatedly:

It's stupid. It *is* stupid! If anyone want to come 'n' buy the house – I dunno, a person from in town who have the cash (might come and say), '*I want this house... straight out!*' And then the people that are livin' in that house they gotta go out. And then we call that another family's house ...! And then, I don't know ... and then it goes on and on and everybody get out of their own houses and where they gonna end up?

So they gonna do that for outstations or what? It's stupid! (She starts laughing) What if the person that's in that house built a humpy? Some person gonna come along and buy that too? Laughs. That's why it's so *stupid*. You know Ohhh!

Under Western Arrernte Law Lee saw the reforms as absurd – so absurd that she imagined a humpy with a 'For Sale' sign in the front yard. Housing on outstations was tied to country; country was tied to families – and this was laid down according to claims by birth, association and knowledge. The notion that housing located on Aboriginal land could be sold implied the ability to transfer ownership to someone who was not family. This was impossible under Aboriginal Law.

The two young women also believed that home ownership for most Aboriginal families was a ludicrous proposition from a financial perspective.

Lee: But they don't have the money.

Marie: If they take out a loan they gonna to have to pay for the loan...pay the loan back.

Lee: If they can get a loan!

Marie: ... if they take a loan. What if they can't pay the loan on time and have other problems and all that ... they just gonna make debt for themselves and more problems for them.

Annie: Have you ever thought about ...would you like to buy your own house?

Marie: Could be interesting.

Lee: I've thought about it. Thinkin' put me in debt!

Marie: The people don't have financial security ... that's the main thing ... financial situation.

Lee: A lot of these people don't know the way to get things ... like the loans and all that ... they don't understand it.

Marie: Like if people...like if the white people come and tell them, 'We gonna give you a loan to own your house' ... they'll go, 'We own that house now. We don't have to pay any money back.' They think that you know. 'We own this house now and we bought it and we don't have to pay anyone back.' They'll think like that you know.

Lee: That's right. It'll be hard for people ... to get that loan because they gotta work before they get that loan. They gotta work and have a balance. Something like that ... gotta have a payslip from their employer.

The implication as Lee saw it, was that any attempt to impose market conditions over Aboriginal land would leave outstation families homeless. What was also nonsensical to the two women was the assumption that Aboriginal people in the area would be interested in getting a loan for a house they already owned¹⁶. Even if they wanted to buy a house, people would be faced with the impossibility of obtaining a loan, managing it, and finding the means to pay it back. None of the three women believed that leases would provide Western Arrernte people with the practical means to achieve better futures. All they could see was that the measures would eventually force people off their land, with the only option being a move into Hermannsburg or Alice Springs, the places where all the trouble was in the first place.

2.2.3 'Goin' back to ration days seems like': Taking away recognition of country

The leases were also seen as a change in the Australian Government's recognition of Aboriginal relationship to country. Thatha was the first to express the view that after more than 30 years of government support for the homelands movement, outstations no longer mattered.

And it's like this as well you know ... like bringing the outstation people back into the community (Hermannsburg). They pulling everybody in! For

¹⁶ Housing assets on Aboriginal land are held by the respective Land Trust and as such, are effectively owned by the people recognised as having traditional rights to be on this country.

the schooling, the education and health ... so they's not recognising the outstation!

It was not only in the imposition of the township lease that Thatha noticed a change in policy, but also in the gradual centralisation of services in Hermannsburg. Two outstation schools had closed and the government no longer appeared interested in having Aboriginal people living on country.

The change in government position was also of enormous concern to Orgki. She was of the view that the Hermannsburg lease had changed Australia's recognition of Aboriginal relationship to country and was therefore a return to control over Aboriginal peoples.

Well there are some very big changes. Not only for myself, but for everybody else as well. Well as of yesterday we found out our land is getting' taken away; our permit system is getting' taken away...might as well say our ownership you know ... so ... we left with nothing, just like in the 70s early 70s¹⁷. They (government) give and they take. Like, what's gonna happen next? Nobody really knows. But I know what they're thinkin'. It's like the government is trying to take us back to the past.... like to the ration days and things like that ... so, don't really know.

But why did they do that in the first place ... give back land? It's our land anyway. It's gonna change. The government's takin' everything back anyway. The government's gonna take our land as of tonight – that's what they're sayin'. Aunty Alison¹⁸, she came and told us you know. Nobody will be Traditional Owners as of tomorrow. So what is there for us and for our kids ... you know.

Orgki's thoughts went straight to her children's futures. As she continued to talk she expressed deep feelings of dislocation and dispossession.

¹⁷ Orgki is referring to the time before the introduction of the 1976 Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act and government support for the outstation movement.

¹⁸ Alyson Anderson, an Aboriginal MP with family connections to Hermannsburg, Haasts Bluff and Papunya, was elected to the Northern Territory Parliament seat of MacDonnell in 2004, 2008 and 2012.

(It's) Very bad. I feel sorta outta place now you know. I feel ... we don't exist. Like government is taking everything away from us you know. Like we stood around yesterday and we heard that what Aunty Alison said and nobody knew what to say. So yeah, that's what everybody that I've contacted ... they've just been talking about ration days. And my brothers and sisters what stay together, '*Why are they tryin' to take everything away from us? Haven't they done enough!*' The government you know.

At this point Orgki paused, took a deep breath, and shouted out across the empty yard in front of the office:

Recognise us ... we're here, we're here! We were the first ones here you know!

Orgki was primarily concerned about the threat to her self-identity should she lose her land. As she understood it, the government's ability to compulsorily introduce five-year leases undermined her certainty about Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory. The leases subsequently put at risk the core of her identity and future. She could not understand why the government would want to retake control of Aboriginal land when her connection to the land had been recognised by government when it introduced the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1976. For Orgki the reforms represented a return to ration days – a time when Aboriginal peoples had no land or citizenship rights; their movements and access to food controlled by government and Mission authorities (Austin-Broos 2009; Rowse 1998).

As Orgki talked, Lee sat down with her. In her early 20s and not having kids at home, Lee had started tuning into the news on TV. Both women sought to understand the rationale for the government's decision but as they talked they became increasingly angry and resentful at the way that government decision-making had shown no consideration of the lives they themselves were leading.

Orgki: Big question mark. Yep. Why?

Lee: Because they came up with child abuse and they try to take all the Traditional Owners away.

Annie: From what I can see it doesn't affect the outstations.

Orgki: But it does affect it eh! You know, leases ... Not only the five-year leases, the actual lease!

Lee: What is that five-year lease?

Orgki: They've taken it away ... taken the land away for five years and gonna give it back to us in five years time! What for? We're here! Where the bloody hell is he! (The Prime Minister) He's not livin' here ... on the outstations! Or in the community. He's not even in the community ... only his name and his face on TV. Yeah, you know ... don't start makin' me excited cause you'll be hearin' a lot! Yeah ... so ... why hand the land back ... give Aboriginal people leases and take it off them again? And what use is that to him? What ... he gonna come 'n' put up big mansions and things here? What ... every community – now that it's his he's gonna come and, and

Lee: Build Parliament Houses!!

Orgki: ...hmm...

Lee: ... in every community!

At this point the women burst out laughing as they imagined the grandeur of Canberra in the dust of the desert.

Orgki: Who in the bloody hell does he think he is! Where's he from anyway?

Annie: Who?

Orgki: John Howard! (Everybody laughs) No ...

Lee: Oh Mal Brough¹⁹ ... where's he from? One of them two ... where are they from?

Orgki: Where are them two from? Where are their ancestors from?

Lee: England.

Orgki: Exactly!

Lee: They should go back and own their own land.

Orgki: Try 'n' get something off Queen Elizabeth 'n' something!

¹⁹ The Minister for Indigenous Affairs at that time

Lee: Queen's got more power than the government.

Orgki: That's what I'm sayin'! But why? Why us you know? Bit like punishment.

Lee: For nothing!

Orgki: Yep. That's it ... they're punishing us! For what! It's crazy!

Orgki and Lee make the point that under Aboriginal law, if the Prime Minister did not have links to the land through his ancestors, he had no rights over it. But recognising that government was in fact taking over Aboriginal land, Orgki felt betrayed. Government was reneging on its agreement with Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Territory as expressed through the 1976 Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act – or as Orgki calls this, '*the actual lease*'. The women could only explain this action in one of two ways. Either the government wanted to punish Aboriginal people, or it wanted to rid country of its people so it could use Aboriginal land for its own ends. Despite 30 years of Australian Government investment in Aboriginal peoples return to country, Orgki suddenly saw herself faced with a reversal of policy that she feared would leave her homeless. Although the compulsory acquisition of towns under five-year leases did not directly affect outstation title, Orgki and Lee were not making this distinction. In their minds, the leases were taking back recognition of Aboriginal rights to the land. It was a return to the days when the government and the Lutheran Mission controlled Western Arnernte land and Western Arnernte people's movements. It was ration days again.

2.2.4 'The changes is wreckin' the families': An attack on family

In her late 40s, Elva is widowed with grown children. Suffering diabetes and emphysema she moves between her outstation and her daughter's home in one of the Alice Springs town camps. She has spent years raising her children and her sisters' children; also helping adolescents addicted to petrol or alcohol to dry out on her outstation. After seeing Prime Minister Howard during his visit to Hermannsburg late in August 2007, she returned to the outstation – angry and

confused about the reforms taking place in the name of protecting children.

News of the Intervention and its link to child abuse and neglect brought back to Elva the treatment she and other Aboriginal people had experienced at the hands of white Australia, memories that triggered deep emotions. As we talked, she expressed sadness and frustration at not knowing where her mother was buried after having died in hospital when Elva was a child. Hospital authorities had kept no record of her grave. Knowing her mother was not buried on her land caused Elva deep pain. The Intervention – with its talk about land and child protection – resurrected for Elva other memories. The abuse of Aboriginal children at the hands of the authorities; the sexual abuse of young girls by taxi drivers when they needed to get back to the Alice Springs town camps; a young boy in anguish as he was led into custody, and the battering she used to receive at the hands of her husband – a non-Aboriginal man. She expressed frustration at the lack of recognition by government authorities about what she had tried to do on her outstation to protect young people experiencing addiction. Repeatedly she expressed anger at the failure of government to protect Aboriginal children committed to care under the judicial and welfare systems.

Sitting up in her bed, out on her veranda where she could see who was coming and going, Elva returned again and again to talk of her fear that changes to ownership of land would further fragment and destroy Aboriginal families; family bonds and family roles that were already being dismantled through Aboriginal children being removed by governments. She was angry and showed it.

All I know is the changes is wrecking the families. The families shoulda been getting' together. Yeah. And these white people like John Howard and all them are braggin' 'bout comin' in and takin' over. That was our job and we don't want no changes! We wanna be the way we grown up. With our culture! They're takin' them (the kids) away so that they don't learn any culture from us. In the future, who is gonna get up and talk for them? Because they been taken away, they only know the white way. They won't know what is goin' on. The old people's law is gonna be changed.

Elva was deeply suspicious of the Commonwealth's intentions, believing that underneath the Howard Government's sudden interest in Aboriginal welfare was

an agenda involving financial gain linked to mining. Despite her emphysema, Elva's voice was loud and emotional.

Why does this bloke here turn around all of a sudden? All of a sudden he turn around to help us! Nobody helped us ... he never looked around John Howard ... all of a sudden he turned around to help us. We've always been left to roam around like the dingoes. Why is that? Because I know ... because I know what is under the ground here! Five years 'n' a lease ... and they'll pay for the damage. What damage? They'll be mining for uranium. That's what it is. That's why he all of a sudden is lookin'... because there's money in it.

Although she was still young at the time, Elva remembers the talking and meetings preceding the establishment of the five Land Trusts on the old Lutheran Mission lease in 1982 (Albrecht 2002; Austin-Broos 2009). Over the years she had listened to proposals to explore for gas and mineral wealth, all promising economic betterment for Western Arrernte people. She mistrusted these proposals and she mistrusted change.

Now they change it all around again! Our stories don't change ... still the same. Where the government mob is, they toss and turn, toss and turn all night – then next minute ... have a little dream. Next minute big skyscraper's going up! Yeah. But ours is still the same. We look after each other ... our connections with the country and the spirits. Spirits is ours ... we still got the connection there ... country and all that. Now ... nothing. And that's all the changes!

I don't know it might be good it might be no good ... we'll just have to wait and see this ... the changes ... what the changes is gonna be. No good ... we don't understand it. I suppose when we go along we'll see what's going on then.

Although she believed that mining interests were driving the government's reform agenda, Elva's overall fear was that in any actions, which severed Aboriginal ownership of land, government was effectively undermining the role of Aboriginal families in protecting children. Using her outstation base she had been fighting for

years to create an outstation environment that would connect her children and other young people to country. She believed it was the removal of Aboriginal children from country and families that had led to children being vulnerable. It was the role of Aboriginal families in the context of cultural knowledge and practice that could repair the damage. In the end, however, she really didn't know how the government reforms would turn out. Government constantly changed its mind. All she could do was '*wait and see*' what would happen next.

2.2.5 'Did you look after it?': Responsibility for country and its repercussions

While the Howard Government had compulsorily acquired Northern Territory Aboriginal townships for a five-year term, the incoming Rudd Government maintained that it was necessary to keep and to extend these leases. Unlike the previous government, however, it would do so in consultation with Aboriginal people (Macklin 2008a). Less than two years after the compulsory acquisition of the Hermannsburg township under the NTER, Western Arrernte people were asked to enter an agreement with the Commonwealth to extend lease arrangements. There were two choices. Aboriginal Land Trusts could either agree to a federal government 40-year housing lease or they could agree to an 80-year whole-of-community lease. One or the other was required before any government-funded infrastructure or housing could be constructed in the town. Despite the acute overcrowding in Hermannsburg, government services and township infrastructure investments would only be secured with a lease that would remain in place across generations of Western Arrernte people.

Janjula was a clan elder of country held under the Ntaria Land Trust, which held title for land the land on which Hermannsburg was built. He was deeply concerned about negotiations over the extension of Hermannsburg head lease. Now to be extended over the lives of his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, Janjula felt the pressure of the immutability of Western Arrernte law up against the changeability of *white man's law*. As he talked he echoed Jack's views two years earlier.

You know white man's law – you gotta write it down. When that paper gets old you gotta chuck it in the rubbish and try to start all over again! Our law – you can't forget ... it goes through the old people, and then old people can straighten you up just by tellin' you stories. Then you know it. When that old person passes on, then you gotta start talkin' to your grandchildren ... to respect the law and all that. Then when I must pass away, then he startin' to tell again...

Janjula's dilemma was that under '*white man's law*' things always changed. Under Western Arrernte law, his responsibilities were constant and known. There were serious implications for him if he made a wrong decision.

Well I gotta talk to my family. If I make a mistake, I might die. It's very important because I can't put that land in a dangerous situation. You can't give that land to the wrong people you know. If I tell you to look after my land just for four, five years ... (for instance) if I go somewhere else and I come back, then I'll ask you, '*How did you go?*' You mighta put someone else in my land you know. Well, that's why you gonna get into big trouble ... for breaking the law ... our law – Aboriginal law.

If I trust you ... if I trust him with this one (land) here then he might say, '*You can leave this one here for me to look after.*' It might be five years. After five years, well then I gotta come back to you. '*Oh, you done a lotta wrong things. You burn all the sacred sites.*' You gonna get punishment. In another way, if you look after it very well and you give it back to me, well next time I'll trust you again. If you looked after the land for five years and you gave it to me back, I gotta look around. If it's alright, well next time we'll trust you.

Central to Janjula's decisions about the lease was his ability to trust the government – as the new custodian. In the context of a multi-generation lease proposal, would the government protect the land within the framework of Western Arrernte Law? Could the government be trusted? He needed to know this before he could make any decision to hand over his responsibility for the land to another authority. Within his beliefs, his Law did not change and could not change. His responsibilities for custody of his country were clear. Given that Australian laws

could change at any time, how could he trust that the agreement he entered into today with the government would be the same one his children might encounter tomorrow? Under the government's proposal he therefore worried about certainty in the future. The stakes were high. Under Western Arrernte Law, a mistake on Janjula's part could mean his death.

Writing on the history of Western Arrernte contact with the Hermannsburg Mission and negotiations over the establishment of the five Land Trusts, Albrecht notes that only Traditional Owners and custodians have legitimate authority in relation to the land and its *tjurrunga*. It cannot be held by anyone else. Therefore the vesting of land rights or decision making in an external body is inappropriate and dangerous, 'as this is seen as a major infringement of the traditional landowners rights, possibly resulting in the application of the death penalty' (Albrecht 2002 p.82).

Western Arrernte views on the future wellbeing of their families and the role of land in this future were significantly at odds with the federal government's views of the relationship between land and Aboriginal wellbeing. From the Australian Government's perspective, leases were essential to building Aboriginal capacity to enter the mainstream economy and improve Aboriginal housing options, thereby securing the wellbeing of Aboriginal families into the future. From a Western Arrernte perspective, however, family wellbeing was deeply threatened by changes to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act. At heart it reneged on recognition of Aboriginal people's relationship to country and as such, the future of their identity.

Jack, Solomon and Janjula make the point that paper laws change – while their Law remains unalterable, intrinsically linking people to their past, present and future. For them the changeability and therefore the impermanence of government's paper laws risked their becoming lost as a family and a people. Their Law goes '*on and on and on*' through relatedness conferred by birth, rights accorded by family, and knowledge shared about the country (Albrecht 1997; Austin-Broos 2009; Stanner 1969). For Solomon, Jack, Janjula, Orgki, Elva, and Thatha the takeover of Aboriginal land therefore raised deep fears about the future welfare of their families. All spoke about the loss of connection and the

subsequent loss of identity, knowledge and family cohesion that would result.

In addition, the men were deeply fearful of physical punishment if they failed to meet their obligations under Western Arrernte Law. Women were anxious about losing access to the social protection outstations provided away from trouble in town. Lee and Marie – the two younger women, believed linking a head lease to home ownership was ridiculous in a remote context. People simply would not agree to transfer title and even if they did, the practicalities of managing a large loan were insurmountable and would ultimately make people homeless.

There was, however, a further impact. As the lease was imposed it reminded those like Orgki of a time when they had no say over their futures. While outstation land remained unaffected by the leases, the decision to acquire Aboriginal townships was seen by people like Orgki as Government reneging on its recognition of Aboriginal ownership of country – like the old ration days. It sent the message that country did not matter and therefore, Aboriginal people did not matter.

2.3 Communicating the changes

When the Indigenous Affairs Minister announced that he was dealing with an emergency in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities (Brough 2007b) new words entered the lexicon of remote Aboriginal people. People heard the terms '*compulsory acquisition*', and '*township lease*' for the first time. Over the next two years families struggled to understand what these terms meant. Without understanding the meaning of the word they were at a loss to understand what implications these changes would have on their lives. As outstation residents talked about the difficulties they had understanding the reforms, the assumptions that the government made about outstation people's abilities to comprehend the language of the reforms and the processes used to negotiate the leases, became evident.

2.3.1 'Gotta understand the meaning right down under':

Understanding the government's intentions

Although most outstations were not directly affected by compulsory acquisition²⁰ Solomon's predominant concern was that he and others did not understand what was happening.

They (outstation families) still really gotta understand. Some people can understand English, the easy part, but not the one down under. Otherwise you gotta come out with the dictionary. This is like a question to them ... gotta come up with an answer to explain ... what *meanings* ... see for lease and permits on Aboriginal lands. You might have an educated person but they still don't understand what's happening. You gotta understand the *understanding*!

See, it's just that people out in the bush and workin' in the community gotta be aware you know, what step they gonna take forward. It's either they're gonna take a step backward or, hold your horse there for a moment ... we gotta think about it. See, it's just that if there's gonna be no more outstations and they're gonna start a lease, then anybody can come here and say, '*No this land is my land.*' It might come to that the way these changes occurring!

We just gotta really try to understand it – what they're saying.

Solomon saw real difficulties for outstation people in understanding the intent and implications behind words like *lease* and *permit*. This was a matter of understanding meanings, not just words. He noted that in entering into an agreement about land he needed prior understanding of its intent, its practice, and its consequences. He needed to fully understand how a lease and any new

²⁰ The initial coordinates used to determine which land would be acquired under the compulsory five year leases, meant that one outstation in the Tjuwanpa area and the Resource Centre itself came within the Hermannsburg leasehold boundary. Government revised the coordinates for all compulsory acquisitions in April 2009. This resulted in 50 percent of land initially affected by the 5 years leases being returned to Aboriginal ownership.

government housing arrangements would operate. '*Understanding the understanding*' was therefore to understand the meaning and the ramifications of the changes. Solomon believed, however, that the meaning – the *one right inside ... the one down under* in government proposals – was not articulated. It was hidden. He had to understand, however, as a wrong decision on his part would permanently alienate his children and grandchildren from country.

They (government) just tell you the top part but not the part deep inside! How long that person gonna live after he sign that agreement? It's gonna last long ... maybe five years or 99 years ... And who is gonna take over after when you're six foot under?

See ... I think there still is a question mark there! See, it's just that you gotta understand the understanding! For the meaning, you gotta try to understand that too! See it's not just like it's written there. They'll understand that! But the truth ... they (outstation families) don't know you see!

Solomon could not get a clear picture from local government officials about what was happening and as the months went by he become increasingly frustrated and anxious.

...well, I don't know what that truth is. See that's why I gotta try to understand that! The meanings of that one ... what it really means to the people. Sometimes these people in government don't communicate. People live in a dark corner here looking for the light. Where is the light? Just feeling their way. Big wall between here and there. It's too difficult for these people (on the outstations) to give you an answer. It's up to them (government) to give us an answer. Gotta be a bit of both. Talk to government and give people answers.

But at the moment it's like a ... I dunno ... just like a big whirl of water ... you know if you stir that water round it's just like goin' round in circles! You got circles, and you just got bits and pieces comin out! See, you don't get the full story outta what the government tells you. There's even people do a little plain talkin' amongst ourselves but still it goes round in circles. It doesn't grow roots 'cause it still goes round and round.'

Communications seemed to be getting nowhere. The only way forward that Solomon could see was if there was some opportunity to talk with government.

As the months went by other outstation leaders also talked about their confusion about the leases and their concern over what the implications would be for their land. Finding answers was difficult for outstation families. Compulsory acquisition of Hermannsburg was briefly mentioned as one of the many reforms announced by NTER Task Force representatives when they arrived in Hermannsburg early July 2007, two weeks after the NTER was announced. The community meeting was poorly attended. Hermannsburg and outstation residents stayed at a distance from the presenters, as they were confused and fearful due to the military presence.

Some months later, in discussions with the Government Business Manager, appointed to Hermannsburg by the Commonwealth to facilitate the implementation of Emergency Response measures, Solomon had been reassured that the lease would only be imposed for five years. Beyond this communication, however, none of the Australian Government teams visiting the Outstation Resource Centre in the six months to the end of 2007 spoke to Western Arrernte families about the leases. The teams were concerned with the closure of CDEP and the introduction of income management. When questioned, they knew little beyond the fact that Aboriginal townships had been compulsorily acquired for five years.

It was not until the legislative amendments to the ALRA went before Parliament in August 2007 as part of the NTER package of legislation, that there was any formal advice to Aboriginal landowners in the Northern Territory about what was taking place. As the draft legislation was not publicly available until just before its introduction to the Parliament, the Central Land Council (CLC) was unable to brief Aboriginal delegates until the Emergency Response legislation was tabled. The CLC subsequently released a set of fact sheets about the NTER reforms that included information about the Aboriginal township leases (Central Land Council 2007). It was not until October 2007, however, that the Commonwealth published information about the leases on the web. This was on page 28 of a 33-page government fact sheet covering all measures imposed under the Intervention (FaCSIA 2007b).

Even if some family members could read sufficient English to wade their way through this document, accessing it required being linked to an official mailing list or email network. This in turn presumed access to computers, a capacity to access the Internet and sufficient computer proficiency to navigate the internet. At the time of the study there was no internet service available on the outstations. Even if outstation or Hermannsburg residents had access to the fact sheets, the language used in the document required a grasp of English beyond the capacity of most Western Arrernte speakers in the area. It required a conceptual understanding of terminology such as *compulsory acquisition*. Certainly no one at Tjuwanpa understood the sentence, '*If a 99-year lease is put in place, it will become the land-tenure arrangement*' (FaCSIA 2007b p.28).

While there was a constant stream of media reports around Australia concerning different aspects of the Intervention, these reports were difficult to access at Tjuwanpa and Hermannsburg. Although television signals can be received in Hermannsburg and on several outstations with pay TV satellite dishes, the ABC and SBS – the media channels providing the most detailed coverage of the Intervention, tend to have low viewing rates when compared with commercial broadcasters. Newspaper access in Hermannsburg and the outstations is limited to the weekly Alice Springs News or twice-weekly Centralian Advocate. Only a small number of copies of these were available at the two shops in Hermannsburg and their coverage of the Intervention favoured opinion pieces. These rarely contained reform details, particularly about the issue that people were most concerned with – the five-year leases.

Western Arrernte families therefore had little real access to news or explanations of significant Indigenous policy events as they unfolded. Details of the reforms were not made available until the legislation was tabled in Parliament. The few outstation families who had accessed the CLC and FaCSIA fact sheets at the Tjuwanpa office found the documents too complex to understand. Until the incoming Rudd Government promised to engage Aboriginal communities on the future of the NTER, there was no consultation with Aboriginal peoples over the Northern Territory leases. People were left to try to figure out what it all meant.

2.3.2 'They got a lotta tricks': No choice but to say yes

While the Rudd Government promised to reset its relationship with Aboriginal peoples, and directed its Government Business Manager and newly appointed Indigenous Engagement Officer to facilitate negotiations over the extension of the Hermannsburg lease, outstation families were deeply troubled by the processes employed. As the narratives reveal, the government's attempts to improve communications did little to ameliorate Western Arrernte concerns and further eroded outstation trust in the government's intentions.

From the time that he first heard about the leases, Sovariel had struggled to understand why a lease was necessary. In 2009, as the negotiations over the extension of the Hermannsburg lease gathered pace, he spoke with despair.

We got a five-year lease there at Ntaria (Hermannsburg) and the government still want to put another forty years. Forty years! But we already have a Land Trust! Why they want to put forty years on top of that 'cause we (already) have freehold title of that land?

Sovariel could not fathom why, if his family had freehold title to the land, the government wanted a lease in the first place. Now the government wanted to extend it.

As the Hermannsburg negotiations unfolded Sovariel felt powerless to stop what was happening.

But government always push through. They speak nice to people ... to (get them to) give an answer 'yes'. 'Yes' is an important word for any people in the government. If they (the people) say 'no', you know government will still go around that! They will go other ways. And they will tell that people still say 'yes'. They got a lotta tricks. Government got a lot of tricks. When people say 'no', they still went around and try to trick them to say 'yes'. Lot of difficult words for people to understand. Especially strong words.

Sovariel believed Western Arrernte would be forced to agree to the leases regardless of what people really wanted. At the time that Sovariel was talking about tricks, media reports were focusing on the protracted negotiations over the

Alice Springs town camp leases. These suggested the Minister would compulsorily acquire the town camp lands if agreement for leases were not forthcoming (Toohey 2009, May 23). Whether he was aware of these reports or not, Sovariel was firmly of the opinion that the government would go ahead with the leases regardless of what Western Arrernte Traditional Owners had to say.

Julia too had a deep distrust of the government's intentions. Like Sovariel, she felt the government had already made up its mind about the leases and was pressuring Western Arrernte people to sign the extension regardless of their views. She was frustrated and angry that her people were not being heard in the negotiations. As she spoke Julia was scornful.

It went away from the child abuse ... it's supposed to be in for child abuse! And it went away from that ... it got sidetracked! And that's what my cousin always say, *'We are supposed to be here for child abuse and you come up and ask for land!'* Did you know that they're going to make a little town out it – Hermannsburg and Lajamanu and places like that?

Nobody wants someone to take over the land. Nobody wants ... the people are looking at the 40 years (leases) coming up now. People still want them (government) to understand that it's still Aboriginal land – not to be taken away from them. Like that Intervention mob. They just came and took that land for five years, and we didn't even know about it! It was already in place! And, and ... like this forty years and eighty years²¹ (leases) of these two governments coming in ... and not even going through the TOs (Traditional Owners)! They even put the boundaries out... things like that!

The only thing is that we can't wait any longer now because everything is

²¹ Julia refers to the housing lease possibly being for 80 years. This is likely a reference to the option for an 80-year township lease, which the Commonwealth offered to Hermannsburg, Lajamanu and Yuendumu as an alternative lease option to the 40-year housing lease. These townships were targeted for lease negotiations, as they were the only towns in the Central Desert region to be offered new homes. Under the Commonwealth's secure tenure policy, this meant that government investment in infrastructure was conditional upon securing a lease over the land where infrastructure was to be built. The leases, however, cover land containing new and existing housing.

right on top of us. We just have to rely on our own voices because it's all happening now! They're (government) just ridin' people now you know ... not listening to us. I think they think they wasted too many times now²² so ... it is up to us to stand up and ... but for them to listen. I'd still like them to just listen hard to us ... what we say!

Julia now felt the government – even though it was talking to people – was not listening to what Western Arrernte people wanted. She was also skeptical of a government agenda that had first rationalised the township leases to stem child abuse and had now moved to township development. In her mind the lease had nothing to do with either. It had everything to do with the loss of Aboriginal rights to make decisions about their land.

2.3.3 'That voice is the wrong way':

Julia had been shocked at the Howard Government's failure to consult the Traditional Owners when the five-year leases were first put in place. Ever since the negotiations that had led to the establishment of five Western Arrernte Land Trusts in the late 1970s and early 1980s, governments and the Central Land Council had always recognised the role of traditional authorities. This had now changed.

And they don't seem to be coming and asking the TOs now anymore. And it seems like the TOs are being pushed aside. They are talking to the Shire Councillors that's been picked! That's what's happening now.

The government use Land Council to come and speak out – because of

²² Julia appears to be referencing the Commonwealth's negotiation of leases over the Alice Springs town camps. This was headlining the news at the time that she made these remarks with reports that the Rudd Government would withdraw services and funding to the camps if a lease was not signed. Town camp residents had resisted pressure to sign a lease since 2006 when the former Indigenous Affairs Minister under the Howard Government, Mal Brough, had tied town camp housing improvements to an agreement to sign long-term leases.

Land Council representing us for mining and royalties and things like that. Well, they think that people will say yes to the Land Council. But we have our ways of saying no to the Land Council too. That Land Council voice is the wrong way of carrying ...we haven't agreed!

The issue of who should rightfully speak for the land concerned Julia deeply. Her voice rose in indignation as she continued.

Why send down a second-hand person to bring the messages out. They don't even understand us, and what we want – and they are bringing all these strong words out to us you know. And the strong word goes through the Central Land Council to interpret for us. And we say, '*No, you want part of it too.*' But we have to make a deal or else they'll just come and take over, whether we say yes or no.

The only thing what we want...how come we are not bosses of our own land? Even though they might be caretakers coming in but what kind of a care-taker? Cause they'll be coming in and building ... Kentucky Fried?

Like Elva, Thatha and Orgki, Julia felt that business interests were driving the leases, not the concerns of Western Arrernte landholders. But her primary concern was that in the lease negotiations over Hermannsburg, traditional authority was being undermined. She was suspicious of the intentions of the Central Land Council, which under its statutory obligations had been tasked with facilitating the lease negotiations between Aboriginal communities, Traditional Owners and the Commonwealth. She also felt that people associated with the new Shire Council and its Local Advisory Board were engaging in decisions about land they had no right to make.²³

Julia's resistance to the Central Land Council's involvement in the lease negotiations appeared to be widely shared. On June 5 2009, the media reported that 450 people from Hermannsburg had signed a petition challenging the Central

²³ In October 2008, the Northern Territory Local Government reforms had led to the election of three Western Arrernte councillors from the Hermannsburg and outstation areas to the new MacDonnell Shire as well as the establishment of an Advisory Board.

Land Council's role in the lease negotiations saying, 'This country is ours and we wish to control it ourselves without the Central Land Council' (Ravens 2009, June 5). The report noted that people were tired of the protracted lease negotiations, wanting to directly engage with the government to resolve the impasse and enable housing negotiations to proceed.

Connie also articulated her extreme discomfort over the conduct of the lease negotiations. Although she had been a staunch supporter of the Intervention's aim to improve the lives of children, she was outraged that the wrong people were involved. Her central concern was the establishment of a precedent in terms of who was being given legitimacy in the negotiations. She was also troubled by the proposed centralisation of services in Hermannsburg. Each of these measures would, she believed, impact deeply on family cohesion and authority. As she talked she became increasingly distressed.

People should come here and face the people...sit down and talk to people ... that's the government people we want to see doing this ... even our electorate, our people's electorate (our Member of Parliament) ... our own should come back and tell us what the change is gonna be. And then we can tell 'em, '*We don't want that changes from the government. We want this way!*

Connie was deeply concerned about the role being played by the Indigenous Community Liaison Officer, appointed by the Commonwealth Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) in 2008.²⁴ This position was created to facilitate communications with the local community regarding the introduction of the various reforms. Her voice rose and strengthened as she spoke.

²⁴ Under the Rudd Government the name of the Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) changed to FaHCSIA, to include the Commonwealth's housing responsibilities.

And what we have is a problem with the interpreters²⁵ ... the interpreters don't focusing on what he or she should be interpreting ... (don't use) exactly the right word to the people! They just think about themselves. Now, they are selected people and they are just more or less listening to the government rather than his own people. And that's why we're having family problem with all this changes coming, because we got people who are high above us ... our people ... who are selected or maybe who were appointed to work for the government. They just thinking about taking control of that land so he or she can be recognised by the government. They aren't real Traditional Owners! We still got our elders ... our leaders are still alive and they are more older than these young ones.

Connie believed that the male Indigenous Community Liaison Officer was taking on roles that were the domain of traditional family authorities. He was speaking out of turn, advancing his own family's interests and speaking on behalf of the land without right knowledge or authority. Land issues were represented by Traditional Owners not people appointed by governments.

Annie: So you're saying you've got real difficulties in terms of who is speaking to represent you...?

Connie: Yes that's right ... and that's why we try to fill in the gap. For government to come in ... to walk over through that gap ... to come over and listen to us. So we still have a problem in getting our people right... their relationship right. Like we're trying to get family genealogy right ... for family to look back with genealogy or descendants. Are they the right people to talk for this land?²⁶

'Cause we feel sad about our elders and leaders were thrown out from this land. And someone is coming in and working under the government, and saying people should be focusing on him or her ... looking up to them. And that really breaks our family relationship and our spirit has been broken.

²⁵ Connie here is referring to the person in the middle who is interpreting the message rather than a language interpreter.

²⁶ Connie is possibly referring to past negotiations over the Palm Valley Land Claim (Justice Grey 1999). As three clan groups were involved in the contentious claim the resolution of the claim required extensive documentation of genealogies and storylines.

In employing a local man in the lease negotiations, Connie believed the government had legitimised an alternative Western Arrernte authority and this was now situated over traditional authority. This situation was creating significant tensions within families and distress to the elders.

2.3.4 'The community is not for everybody': Removing links to family authority

Under the Rudd Government the leases were tied to housing improvements and the centralisation of government services in Hermannsburg under the Commonwealth's Remote Services Agreement (COAG 2009c). Connie understood that the leases would mean improvements in housing quality and availability in Hermannsburg, but along with this she saw threats to traditional authority and serious impacts on social cohesion. What Connie predicted was that better services in Hermannsburg would draw people into town, in turn undermining family-based outstation groupings.

For that reason now that I keep talking to my people ... about people moving into Hermannsburg. So Hermannsburg feel happy now about getting people back to the community ... bringing in more people. But people don't see that it's *really* upsetting the elders of this land!

'Cause (before) the elders were happy. 'Cause each Land Trust got their own elders and leaders to look after the young people. But then they moved back to Hermannsburg and this upset the elders! And then, this young people – they got into all these bureaucrat position, so they can be strong to tell people – *'Now you come back and live here. This is everybody's community.'* But we're lookin' at the community has rules and laws within family system. Government just think that the land can be for everybody. *No!* We lookin' at our elders that can easy control his people within his own area and within his tribal groups.

Connie was critical of what she perceived as the message that Hermannsburg was *'everybody's community'*. It was *not* everybody's place. Western Arrernte people's place was on country, a place where the elders could maintain family authority and cohesion.

By encouraging families to live in Hermannsburg, Connie felt Western Arrernte people were going back to a situation of family and community dysfunction, which they had sought to escape from in the move to their outstations 40 years ago (Albrecht 1972, 2002; Sommerlad 1973a).

Well ... when land rights came ... that was the old people who already passed away ... they wanted to go back to their own homeland where they really belonged to. Because in the early days; from the Mission days ... the old people were brought into Hermannsburg because of church; and the land was no longer theirs because the Mission already owned the land and got ... and put all the stocks around and there was no land the Aboriginal people could claim back. When this land right came, then they felt it was free for them to go back and set up ... build up their own outstations and raise their own families ... where they belong.

'Cause like um, when we had this family problem ... this big violence happen. And no government can do anything. But we old people gotta talk together, *'How can we stop all this fighting – family fighting, and breakaway families?'* 'Cause that's where all this problem comes in. So then the elders of our people from each land got up and said, *'We gotta separate our people.'* But Hermannsburg still can be their base for clinic, for church ... like with funerals they come in to bury their people; shop ... and to get together for the meeting.

For Connie, the move back to county was how Western Arrernte families had seen a solution to the problems of drug abuse and violence that had arisen in the Hermannsburg settlement in the 1960s and 1970s.

Connection to country and family under the authority of the elders was to Connie, the way in which Western Arrernte people had already dealt with, and could still deal with, violence and dysfunction. She elaborated further.

So government just shouldn't step in and put a stamp on us and say, *'No, government gonna control your land now. We're going to tell you what to do through our policy.'* We don't want that! We want government to come and sit down and talk, and listen to people telling about how they can control all these problems that are coming into the community through our Law. (We want them to listen to) how we can try to get family to understand that they need to try to follow up from their ancestors'

traditional rights from their elders.

But we want these young people who are appointed to be ... not to be our leaders, but just to be the speakers for the community. They still have to listen to their elder. But they *not doing* this! Yeah – you tell 'em – that government – to listen! Please, spread our messages. And at the end of all this work that you have done, when you come back and talk to us again, I don't want one person to get up just because he or she was appointed, to tell us. He or she gotta think, '*He's my elder*', he gotta respect that! ²⁷

Connie believed that the only way of dealing with community dysfunction and ensuring families were safe was through Western Arrernte Law. This positioned Western Arrernte family groups on their land under the authority of family elders. The Commonwealth, on the other hand, saw a blossoming of township services as the solution to Indigenous wellbeing.

2.4 Conclusion

What do these stories about the Hermannsburg lease reveal about Western Arrernte outstation perspectives on their terms for engaging with the government? Regardless of the government in power, outstation responses to the acquisition of a lease over the Hermannsburg Township reveal a fundamental difference between Western Arrernte families and the federal government about how family wellbeing is conceptualised, enacted and negotiated. Outstation voices also challenge the

²⁷ In November 2009 an agreement was reached between Western Arrernte TOs and community members for a 40-year Housing Lease. This was tied to \$9.6 million in expenditure for 26 new houses. In March 2010 the Central Land Council conducted follow-up consultations to confirm this decision. This meeting identified that before signing off on the lease the community wanted answers to questions concerning the number of houses and the rental framework to be applied by Territory Housing. Commonwealth and NT Government representatives subsequently met with community members mid June 2010. At this meeting those attending confirmed the November yes decision but asked for the matter to be put to a whole of community vote. Undertaken a week later, 112 people voted, with 74 votes in favour of a housing lease (*Central Land Council 2010b*).

notion that government wellbeing efforts are neutral with respect to their negative impact on Aboriginal lives.

For outstation families, country is the means through which Western Arrernte identity is forged, children are protected, and relationships are conducted. Country therefore represented vastly different values to those held by the state. Driving the federal government's reform agenda was the hope that leases over Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory would foster new economic opportunities, provide greater certainty of tenure for government services, and improve the status of housing in remote desert regions. Government argued this would create a positive environment for children.

In discussing the leases, not once did Solomon, Orgki, Thatha, Elva, Janjula, Lee, Marie, Sovariel, Julia or Connie talk about the economic opportunities for outstation families that might arise from a lease over Hermannsburg. In the context of Western Arrernte constructions of land and the practicalities of the local economy, Lee saw the hope that leases would promote home ownership as an absurdity. While many acknowledged the likelihood that business interests stood to benefit, they viewed these prospects with deep suspicion and fear, anticipating future mining deals or some kind of '*Kentucky Fried*' development.

From a Western Arrernte outstation perspective, the leases attacked the very foundation upon which their children's futures, identity and security rested. Expansion of township services and improvements in housing were acknowledged as desperately needed, but family leaders feared that centralisation of services in towns would exacerbate social tensions, and undermine family cohesion and authority by drawing families into settlements away from country.

Country mattered fundamentally to Western Arrernte people. When outstation people talked about leases they consistently referred the inextricable link between family and country – a link they feared would be broken. Country provided an inalienable Law with rights and responsibilities that had to be respected on pain of death. It was a Law that protected children, educated children and kept families together. Country was home. It forged identity. It *was* their future.

With the introduction of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1976, the establishment of the five Land Trusts in 1983, and support for outstation establishment, Western Arrernte families had believed that the Commonwealth had recognised these crucial aspirations for their futures. With the leases came the realisation that the government had reneged on its pledge to recognise Aboriginal relationship with land. While outstations largely remained outside the orbit of the Commonwealth's changes to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, outstation families believed there was no longer any certainty they would continue to have tenure. Property laws were paper laws that could be thrown in the rubbish once their usefulness had expired. Without certainty over his ability to secure his family's ongoing relationship to country, Solomon saw his children as '*lost*' – they had no future. Rather than being an opportunity for Western Arrernte people, the leases represented a fundamental threat to family identity and wellbeing.

For Connie, however, the extension of the leases and the concentration of services in Hermannsburg went further, eroding traditional family authority on two fronts. Instead of fostering family cohesion through outstation programs and services, she saw leases centralising government housing and program investments in Hermannsburg, in turn undermining outstations as the means for Western Arrernte to reassert the traditional family authority and unity eroded during the Mission years. Family authority was being further undermined by the process of the lease negotiations, which she saw favouring those placed in positions of authority by the government rather than those who had traditional authority for Western Arrernte decisions about country.

Families also saw the leases reflecting the government's failure to understand local realities and ignoring their efforts to protect and educate their children. Over the years women like Orgki and Elva had used outstation environments to raise children at risk and keep them safe. Now Orgki saw herself punished for her efforts and cast as a perpetrator of child neglect. Others such as Connie and Solomon talked of local solutions, ideas and strategies to deal with the problems facing their families but felt there was no way they could bridge the '*gap*' they experienced in communicating their values, realities and ideas.

This gap was constituted in a fundamental failure on the part of the government to communicate its intentions and in the coercion families saw employed to secure their agreement to the leases. Introduced as a *fait accompli* by the Howard Government outstation families at first struggled to understand how the new leasing arrangements would work. Information was disseminated using largely inaccessible language and media, leaving outstation residents confused and deeply disturbed about how the reforms would impact on their lives.

Traditional Owners and elders wanted to have the opportunity for a direct discussion with the government but held little hope their voices and perspectives would be heard. Although the incoming Rudd Government sought to reassure Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory that they would be consulted over the negotiations to extend the leases over Aboriginal townships, these consultations failed to reassure outstation families that they had been heard. New decision making authorities were getting in the way and overriding the structures of family authority. There was little faith that the government would listen anyway. The prevailing opinion on the Tjuwanpa outstations was that the government had made up its mind. Solomon and Sovariel used the words ‘*blackmail*’ and ‘*tricks*’. They felt the government had already decided its course of action and they were powerless to negotiate a different outcome. Government would not accept ‘*no*’ as an answer. From Julia and Sovariel’s perspective, the exchange of land for services was therefore coercive. Against the force of these realities, Western Arrernte outstation people felt they were left with no choice.

The Hermannsburg lease was not an intellectual policy issue for Western Arrernte outstation families. The deep fear, mistrust, anger and confusion that characterised outstation responses to the Hermannsburg lease showed the Commonwealth’s leasing reforms went to the heart of what it meant to be a Western Arrernte person. Land held vastly different meanings and values to those held by policy makers and politicians in Canberra. Outstation engagement in the reforms was therefore characterised by a struggle to understand what implications the leases would have on the wellbeing and futures of their families. Unable to understand this, they could only ‘*wait ‘n’ see*’ what would happen next.

Chapter 3: For the Children's Sake

3.1 Introduction

At the heart of the Northern Territory Emergency Response was the Commonwealth's argument that drastic changes were required in remote Aboriginal communities to stop violence and prevent the neglect and abuse of children. Targeting government welfare transfers to Aboriginal beneficiaries in the Northern Territory, the federal government sought to control household expenditure on alcohol and drugs and put food on the table for children by introducing income management (Brough & Hockey 2007). This restricted discretionary expenditure of welfare benefits by quarantining fifty percent of all payments to food and essential items.

A month later, when the Howard Government found it could not quarantine the wages of Aboriginal workers employed under the Commonwealth's Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), the Indigenous Affairs Minister announced CDEP would close. All 6,000 CDEP workers in the Northern Territory would be transferred on to the Centrelink system, income management would be applied, and all eligible workers would be required to meet mainstream work participation requirements. CDEP, according to the Indigenous Affairs Minister, '... had become a destination for too many' (Brough & Hockey 2007).

The stories told through this chapter recount how women engaged with these reforms. As the women talk about their encounters with the changes to CDEP and the imposition of income management, what does their assessment of events tell us about their motivations, values and concerns in the context of everyday life at Tjuwanpa? How did they see CDEP and income management impacting on their attempts to secure their children's futures? The aim of this chapter is therefore to

illustrate how government programs such as CDEP were understood and utilised in the context of remote outstation lives and Western Arrernte concerns for the wellbeing of their families. Through their accounts we see outstation families engaging with and supporting change when it was seen to support or work with local aspirations and resisting change when it did not. In the blanket imposition of income management across Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, however, we also see how the Commonwealth failed to understand the ways in which remote, desert people structured their lives – a failure that had significant, unforeseen consequences for many outstation families.

In July 2007, when former Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough announced CDEP would be closed, the program had been running at Tjuwanpa for almost 20 years and had played a central role in outstation lives. It enabled people to live and work on their outstations and underpinned delivery of essential power, water and housing services to Tjuwanpa's 37 outstations. Without these vital services, life on an outstation was impossible. In November 2007, the Tjuwanpa CDEP program was one of the first in the Northern Territory to be dismantled. Eight months later in July 2008, CDEP was back – reinstated by the incoming Rudd Labor Government. While it was a 'new' CDEP, emphasising work readiness and work participation, it enabled some outstation families to regain wages that were not subject to income management.

This chapter starts with Orgki, Nungari and Connie responding with different views on whether changes to CDEP will bring about a better deal for children and young people. As the reforms unfold and income management is introduced, the impact of the reforms on family efforts to educate and nurture children on country becomes apparent. Mobility is affected. Jobs and income are threatened. Some who feel they have done their best to educate and protect their children believe they are being subject to the same treatment as those who have not. While the impacts of these changes are assessed differently, the concerns of the women remain with the wellbeing of their children in the context of Western Arrernte outstation family life.

3.2 The meaning of CDEP to outstation families

Outstation responses to news of the impending closure of CDEP in 2007 and its return some eight months later varied widely. Regardless of where people sat with respect to their opinion on whether closing CDEP was a good thing or not, at the heart of each response was a common concern about family and children's wellbeing and whether the axing of CDEP would work in support of these priorities.

3.2.1 'Maybe this is gonna be a good thing': Hopes for outstations

Nungari was delighted to hear CDEP would be gone. She believed CDEP had failed dismally. For years she had complained bitterly about CDEP. Rather than supporting Western Arrernte families to live on country by paying people wages to work on small outstation projects – as she believed was its purpose – CDEP was just bringing people into Hermannsburg.

We were trying very hard you know ... to stop the CDEP. That was in '96. We tried our best. 'Cause I used to work CDEP at Ntaria²⁸ ... and I used to say, *'Look here. Why don't you go back to your outstation if you not gonna clean your area!'*²⁹ Uwa (yes) that's what I used to say – and people are still living in Hermannsburg. 'If you want to live here, you work! The money you getting from Tjuwanpa is just sitting down money'³⁰.

'Cause every time with Tjuwanpa CDEP we used to have lotta card games ... we used to see ... they (outstation CDEP workers) are here at Hermannsburg just playing cards with their CDEP money. And they're all

²⁸ Ntaria is the Western Arrernte name for Hermannsburg.

²⁹ Yard maintenance was one of the jobs allocated as the 'work' requirement for CDEP wages in Hermannsburg.

³⁰ 'Sitting down' money is an Aboriginal English term for passive welfare, implying that work is not a requirement of the government payment received.

living here and they want houses at Hermannsburg instead of getting houses built at their outstation. I hope this gonna change.

The problem as Nungari saw it was the Tjuwanpa CDEP program did not enforce the no-work-no-pay rule. As a result, people stayed in Hermannsburg where they gambled all day instead of being on their outstations. Because people stayed in Hermannsburg there were housing pressures. Nungari believed government funding for housing was now being directed to Hermannsburg rather than the outstations. And as outstations were where Nungari believed families should be, she hoped the changes to CDEP would force people to return to their outstations so more government funding would be directed to outstation housing.

Nungari was not opposed to the development of town service. She welcomed the news that the government was intending to give greater emphasis to township investments as she had been pushing for an expansion in children's services, education, and child protection for many years.

But the people here say, 'We gonna have a good change'. Maybe this is gonna be a good thing ... maybe good life ... I don't know. Hmmm. 'Cause I dunno. They are talkin' about getting a safe house, a night patrol running, all the good things gonna be happening soon. That's why some of the oldies you know, need something to change in this community. When everything is gonna be alright when this new thing comes in...

'Cause we need changes in this community! The kids going to school, getting better educations. That's the main one. We gotta think about our kids' future ... sending them to school. And getting our teenagers to be trained ... getting more education. 'Cause some teenagers here can't even write their names! It is *really* sad. But for our young ones we just gotta think about our kids' future ... not going back. We gotta get our kids to go forward ... getting good education.

This community hasn't changed for a long time. 'Cause we ask them (government) for little things, you know ... we never got that! Like for our kids, like for swimming pool and all that – we got knocked back ... even for like, rec hall.

Nungari's primary concern, however, was to get her family back on country. She

had been trying to find a way to live on her father's country for years. With CDEP gone, she hoped new rules would be established and enforced, which would result in fewer people staying in Hermannsburg.

... but yeah, I just think about my outstation – my outstation up and running. 'Cause when I grew up I used to hear my father say, *'When you kids grow up you gotta think about the outstation ... there's a big dream time story there. Don't let somebody else take over!'* And that's why I gotta think about my outstation. It's very important, 'cause it's got dreamtime story there. We got everything there that the old people know of ... and that's why I feel like ... I feel like I want to go home.

3.2.2 'We want children on their patch': Hopes for children

Connie also thought it was well past time for things to change. A respected outstation elder, Connie had been critical of CDEP for many years. Like Nungari, her view was CDEP was supposed to help people maintain their connection to country by providing work in the outstation environment, but it was not doing this.

And what happened, with all a the leaders of the outstations, we used to get together for meetings here at Tjuwanpa. And I used to talk strongly to encourage those leaders too you know. *'You should talk to your people! Keep your people out there in the outstation. Make him work!'* My support just went flying everywhere ... yeah. And they also my young people. There's a lot of empty outstations ... they moved in here (Hermannsburg) too! So really affected the situation, all this is happening. If the government is strong enough to talk to the people and tell 'em why the outstations was given back to the Aboriginal people. Like we lived there on our outstation for 27 years now. We haven't moved. Like, even though we lost our family ... our family's burial ground is there. We remain ... and family stays and looks after both – living and the dead.

Connie desperately wanted CDEP closed so young people would come back from town to their land. She had started a small eco-tourism business as a means of employing young family members on country. She has also obtained approval for a small outstation cemetery enabling family to be buried on their homeland so their spirit could remain on country. Connie believed that in closing CDEP, the government was conveying the message that Western Arrernte people needed to

be back on their outstation land. After all, the land had been given back to Western Arrernte people by the government in recognition of their relationship to country – and that was where she wanted her family to be.

Connie was one of the very few who spoke out strongly in public gatherings. Talking about the Intervention she remained firmly in support of the government's efforts to educate and protect children. As a child she had been sent away for education in South Australia. After marrying and settling on her husband's country she had been a strong advocate for outstation education, particularly after the Lutheran Mission closed its 14 family-based, outstation schools in 1989 (Albrecht 2002). Partly as a result of her efforts, the Northern Territory Government established three outstation Remote Learning Centres, but as the number of children attending outstation facilities had slowly declined, low enrolment levels had led to closure of two of three outstation schools. The Northern Territory Department of Education was threatening closure of the third school if enrolments and attendance did not improve. This had Connie extremely worried.

Question is about how people think about taking their kids back to the outstation ... to the outstation school. At outstation we have education centre ... like school for our kids ... not just for kids from our outstation. It's for (all) outstation kids too.

That's why the kids didn't want to go to school because family kept moving away from outstation. I have seen the problem, (families) taking the kids away from school. So we've only got ... numbers low ... real low numbers at the school. We would like to see family kids coming back to school. I'm still not happy with the family that still lives in Hermannsburg!

As she was of the view that CDEP had contributed to people moving into Hermannsburg, Connie hoped the axing of CDEP would encourage families to return home, bringing their children with them. In her mind this had to happen to ensure the survival of the remaining outstation Remote Learning Centre, without which it would be impossible to bring children up on country. Getting children back on country was foremost in Connie's mind. She had done her best to get members of her family back to their outstation – away from Hermannsburg – as

her experience was once people went into town they got stuck there.

Connie hoped the government's reforms would be addressing this issue. If the new program was emphasising jobs and training, then these had to be based on outstation areas so young people's connection to country could be reinforced.

On the outstations there are really a lot of jobs that the young people can do. Like what the outstation needs like for aged care. We don't want to be put in there in town (Hermannsburg) ... but we want to stay put and aged people can be look after while we still strong enough to look after ourselves. Yeah, like we're lookin' at one group of family can look at vege gardens and other group of family can look at tourism going on ... and also stock runs that we sorta got to divide ... putting up the boundary fences, just to keep a business within that area. And there might be young people that want to come and work in the tourism area. Yeah ... we'll be happy to have the young people trained to be a tour guide or a community ranger ... but you know, we'll look at young people to where their patch is ... representing the land or their totem.

The problem for Connie, however, was that she had not heard anything about the government's plans for outstations.

Well what I've heard about these changes is ... really ... I was a bit confused. There was no outstations mentioned ... how government would be working with outstation people. What the outstation people will do. Are they still looking to go back to their outstation or not? Will the outstation people ... (will this) really affect the people living on the outstation?

Although Connie could see the potential for work, education and training on outstations she was unaware this was not the government's intention. Services were to be directed to larger Aboriginal township hubs and in the Commonwealth's agreement with the Northern Territory Government, outstation funding across the territory was to be limited to twenty million dollars a year (NTG 2008). Further, training and employment services would be provided by externally contracted Job Network providers (Brough & Hockey 2007). This was not what Connie had in mind.

Connie believed the government's promise of more jobs and more training, together with the axing of CDEP, would put an end to young people sitting in Hermannsburg doing nothing and still being paid CDEP wages. At the heart of Connie's response to the CDEP reforms was her desire to see children's education, training opportunities, jobs and service provision linked to family outstations. She saw outstation learning centres and family eco-tourism ventures as a means to provide education and employment for her grandchildren on '*their patch*' – their country. On outstations she also saw opportunities for jobs on works teams or in aged care services, where older people like her could be supported so they could '*stay put*' on the outstation and not have to move into town. She remained unaware the government did not share her view on the value of outstations to her grandchildren's futures.

3.2.3 'It's gonna drag people away from home': The impact of welfare

Orgki saw things differently to Connie and Nungari. Early in August 2007, three weeks after the Minister had announced CDEP would close, Orgki was sitting in a sunny corner underneath the bough shelter in front of the Tjuwanpa office. As she started to speak, she shook her head. All she could see was the closure of CDEP would take people away from their outstations and bring them into town.

All the things ... I guess ... tell you the truth if everything did change lotta the people from the outstations would not live on the outstations. Like for instance ... the Centrelink business ... the CDEP stopped, everybody shifted back to Hermannsburg. Some people are in town (Alice Springs) ... 'cause they think, '*Oh, that's only sittin' down money!*' you know. '*Why should we ... that's not CDEP! CDEP was for us to stay on our outstations!*' CDEP is you know ... something that keeps you at home.

If CDEP wages were replaced by Centrelink payments Orgki's view was people would stop working at home as they would no longer be required to work on their outstation. As she saw it Centrelink money was '*sit-down*' money – dole money, and on the dole people were not required to work so they could live wherever they liked. From this perspective Orgki saw Centrelink payments making it easier for

people to live away from their outstations and travel into town where they would have access to alcohol outlets.

Like on this unemployment I'll tell you now, they'll put 'em on Newstart³¹ ... they'll put everybody on Newstart. Is anybody gonna be out on community? They'll be closer to where the grog is because they'll say, *'Nah, we got no job to go to. We're only on Newstart.'* Newstart is gonna drag them further and further away from home. Newstart ... it's just like unemployment. You don't have to do nothing. That's how they look at it. That's how Aboriginal people look at it.

Well, CDEP, you sit at home and work. But people on unemployment, I've noticed ... *'I'm not on CDEP. I don't have to stay at home you know. Just on the dole, do whatever I want!'* That's gonna make it worse. They can go and sign up for unemployment in Alice Springs. Go live in Alice Springs with the families ... there's families everywhere in Alice Springs ... Town Camps there. Humpy! (Laughs) We might as well go and build a little humpy there in the Todd River or something.

Orgki had received CDEP wages for many years. Her view was CDEP gave her work on her outstation because the government had wanted to encourage Western Arrernte ties to country. As a CDEP participant she was obliged to work on her outstation in return for her CDEP wage.

Within six months of the closure of CDEP at Tjuwanpa and the transfer of workers on to the Centrelink system, Orgki believed she had been right. As far as she could see it, the loss of CDEP wages and income management were fostering the conditions for people to relocate to Alice Springs.

This management ... income management thing now ... they think, *'Oh, soon as'* ... I hear a lotta people talkin', you know. *'Soon as the money thing changed, they've all run to town!'* (Alice Springs) It's easier you know ... we've got that income management thing in town there, you know ... at Centrelink. You can go to K-mart ... we can do our shopping ... everything's cheaper there ... because on the community, as soon as that money went to Centrelink side a the story, the shops went real high –real

³¹ Centrelink beneficiaries considered able to work receive either a Newstart payment or a Youth Allowance

dear, and it's cheaper in town. So that's why every body shopped there. Prices were rising at the Hermannsburg stores³² and as Woolworths, K-Mart and Coles in Alice Springs were significantly cheaper, people elected to designate these stores for expenditure of income managed funds³³. Alice Springs had therefore become an increasingly attractive place for outstation grocery shopping.

How moving people on to the Centrelink system was going to protect children, however, Orgki just didn't know.

But how can it be better for kids!! With no money! Mothers and fathers on unemployment! Is that a better job ... or a better way of bringin' your kids up? Unemployment ... parents on unemployment! What's gonna happen then?

People'll still be gettin' Newstart 'n' everything and still they'll be buyin' grog! You know. They're not gonna put a stop to it! Close the bottle shop and things. That'll do it you know! Leave the money there ... just shut that alcohol thing ... liquor shop (in Alice Springs). Ah no. (Laughs) They're still goin! They're stoppin' CDEP ... telling everybody it's finished ... go on Newstart. Newstart ... bottleshop! Yep. Still ... it's never gonna stop.

Oh what else to say ... I reckon it's good that kids do go to school and learn. Maybe they'll help us in the long run. Need boarding school to fix that up. They learn more.

Orgki saw any association with Centrelink as welfare. Welfare meant nothing to do. Nothing to do meant going into Alice Springs and drinking. Orgki simply couldn't comprehend how a program, which would end up seeing people on the

³² Prices did rise at the Hermannsburg Top Shop at the time that income management was introduced in November 2007. This is likely to have resulted from inflationary pressures arising from escalating fuel prices at that time. New managers also took over the store after the retirement of the previous manager in October 2007. People also associated this change with the increase in prices.

³³ At the time that income management was introduced in the Northern Territory, people could only spend quarantined funds at approved community stores or at Coles, K-Mart or Woolworths' stores in regional centres. Greater flexibility over where income managed funds could be spent was not achieved until the introduction of the Basics Card in 2008.

dole and moving into Alice Springs, was going to solve any problems for Aboriginal children. What was needed was education options and closure of liquor outlets – not the closure of CDEP.

All three women felt the changes to CDEP would influence decisions about where families lived. For Orgki, the transfer of workers onto the Centrelink system promoted the view that there was no need to be on the outstation. Welfare was *sitting down* money. Being on Centrelink would therefore bring people into town and in turn exacerbate alcohol abuse. Nungari and Connie on the other hand felt CDEP had never enforced the outstation work requirement, which over the years had resulted in people moving into Hermannsburg. There, elders had little control over drinking and gambling. This had increased demand for township housing. Something had to change. Connie hoped the reforms would force people to recognise they were supposed to be at home. In hearing the government promise more services under the Intervention she dreamed of a renewed investment in outstation education, employment and training opportunities.

Although their views of how the CDEP reforms impacted on mobility differed, the three women agreed families should be living at home on their outstation country. As each woman believed the government had introduced CDEP to support Western Arrernte aspirations to live on country, views on CDEP were inextricably linked to this aspiration. The rationale for their support or opposition to the changes to CDEP was therefore whether they believed the program had achieved this end.

3.3 Unanticipated impacts on home and family

Although the closure of CDEP and the introduction of income management sought to curb expenditure on alcohol and gambling by ensuring government benefits were applied to expenditure on food and essential items, Tjuwanpa's outstation

families experienced a number of unanticipated impacts. The transfer of people onto the Centrelink system and subsequent loss of CDEP represented a crisis point for outstation services. Income management also profoundly disrupted daily life and living arrangements. For many outstation families, the loss of CDEP and the restrictions on expenditure resulting from income management impacted on their ability to live on their outstations and for some, posed significant problems for providing for the needs of their families. This fostered considerable anger and resentment on the outstations, as it undermined family living arrangements and was seen as a blanket punishment of Aboriginal people, which failed to recognise outstation efforts to care for their children and to earn a living in the marginal desert economy.

3.3.1 'What's gonna happen with Tjuwanpa gone?': CDEP and outstation services

CDEP at Tjuwanpa was more than a waged alternative to welfare. The running of the office depended on coupling together overheads from three government grants, with the CDEP budget meeting fifty percent of Tjuwanpa's administration costs. Without CDEP, Tjuwanpa did not have the funds to administer outstation water, power, roads, and housing services. With the closure of CDEP Tjuwanpa was also informed it would have to hand back to the Commonwealth all vehicles, plant and machinery purchased with CDEP funds despite these assets being essential to operate these services. The loss of CDEP therefore put at risk the operations of all essential outstation services delivered by the Resource Centre office, thus threatening the ability of families to continue to live on their outstation.

Thatha knew the loss of CDEP would force Tjuwanpa to close. She was frightened about the implications for outstation families.

Tjuwanpa it's ... I mean it's ... the whole outstation leaders they always rely on Tjuwanpa. It's been a good help to provide everything for them and it's helped people that's been living (on the outstations) all these years. I mean Tjuwanpa built a lot of things for the outstations, and they been lookin' after the outstations as well. Like housing, housing

maintenance, bores, generators ... and the roads sometimes. And like delivering things, because some outstations they haven't got a car to come in. Well, and that's why they see Tjuwanpa as the main resource for them. And that's where they still wants to ... everything to be at Tjuwanpa where Tjuwanpa can provide everything.

Even if the new MacDonnell Shire took over outstation service delivery from Tjuwanpa – and there were no plans on the table for that – Thatha felt such an arrangement would severely compromise service quality.

How long they gonna wait if they put in a form or paper or something? Form – like just say for instance if they want, like for water and all that. Are they gonna wait there for a month, without no water or power? It's gonna be hard for people to get their water running and their housing done or something. I mean ... probably maybe you'll be waiting and be the last person to get the person to come out and fix your thing. That's what I'm thinkin'.

... like now, we got everything. You go out there and do it in a day, the same day you ring up or come in and say, '*Pipe's broken down*'. You gotta waste your water waitin' for someone to come out from town for two weeks or three weeks?

Working in the office, Thatha knew loss of water or power interruptions on the outstations were common. Feral horses often broke pipes and taps in their search for water. If services were somehow shifted to the new Shire, she saw bureaucracy replacing what now required a simple phone call to the Resource Centre to get things done. She worried water repairs would subsequently take days, with the lack of water forcing families to move into Hermannsburg. If families had to wait more than a couple of hours to have a generator repaired, they could also lose a refrigerator full of food. This would mean a long, expensive trip back into Hermannsburg or Alice Springs to buy groceries. Tjuwanpa understood these needs and could mobilise the works team to respond quickly.

In addition to the risk to essential outstation water and power services, Thatha could see that with Tjuwanpa gone, outstation people would lose access to the help Tjuwanpa's Centrelink agency staff provided with everyday tasks such as phone

calls, help with forms, and assistance with government agencies.

Some of them (outstation people) are on Centrelink. I mean this is where they come to fill out their forms and then they find out about things. And that's why their main point is Tjuwanpa because they know that people's gonna do things for them. I don't know what people are gonna do. I mean, what are they going to do? I mean they're terrified already. There'll be nothing because Centrelink doesn't help ... I mean they don't know what to do if this Tjuwanpa goes.

This would affect people like Ngulpa. Lacking confidence with her English, she was fearful that without Tjuwanpa, communications and negotiations with any new service providers would be problematic.

'Cause I don't know how to ring up people to do all this. More easier for someone at Tjuwanpa to come 'cause easier to talk to people at Tjuwanpa than people in town (Alice Springs) ... and don't know their address. Main one is Tjuwanpa.

If Tjuwanpa were no longer able to provide essential services, Ngulpa worried she would have to establish relationships with a whole range of new people. Not only did she not know how to contact them, she did not have sufficient confidence in her English language capacity to talk to trades people or local government staff she didn't know. This wasn't a problem at Tjuwanpa where she knew people in the office and could rely on Western Arrente staff to help her with phone conversations involving English language speakers. Tjuwanpa also provided access to resources or vehicles for emergencies such as funerals or health needs. A critical service was help with financial management. For two decades all outstation families with CDEP workers had used Tjuwanpa to help them manage their cash flow and debts.

Thatha and Ngulpa's central concern was if CDEP did not continue beyond June 2008, outstation essential services and emergency assistance would be lost or compromised and this would jeopardise the survival of outstation settlements. Losing Tjuwanpa would effectively create conditions forcing people to move from their outstations into Hermannsburg or Alice Springs. Further, the Resource

Centre offered the comfort of known relationships. Having kin connections at the office, families knew the people who worked there and therefore felt comfortable with them. Tjuwanpa's Western Arrernte staff also understood local needs and capacities so outstation families relied on them to help with English language communications and government bureaucracies. Suddenly this too was at risk.

3.3.2 'That means I can go back to my outstation': Income management and transport

On April 30 2008, six months after Tjuwanpa CDEP workers had been moved on to the Centrelink system, the new Labor Government's Indigenous Affairs Minister announced a substantially reformed CDEP would be reintroduced (Macklin & O'Connor April 2008). As of July 2008, CDEP would be back in the 30 remote communities in the Northern Territory where the Howard Government had abolished the program in 2007. Ngulpa was one of many people elated by the news. *'That means I can go back to my outstation!'* It was a refrain heard often at the Resource Centre in the ensuing months. The return of CDEP meant Ngulpa was no longer subject to income management and she was desperate to see income management go.

On a CDEP wage Ngulpa had discretion as to how she spent her funds. She also had the ability to earn additional income on top of her CDEP wage without penalising her wage. With no quarantining applied to CDEP wages and the ability to augment CDEP wages with part-time or short-term work, vehicles could be purchased and maintained. For outstation families this was significant in terms of family mobility, as cars were essential for travel to and from the outstations. In a remote location like Tjuwanpa, the rough outstation roads were hard on tyres, batteries and suspension. Families therefore pooled their cash reserves to pay for vehicles, running costs and repairs.

In October 2007, Ngulpa had been moved off CDEP wages and registered with Centrelink. At a hasty interview with Centrelink staff she was asked how she wanted her quarantined funds managed. She had the option of accessing all of her funds at one of the two local Hermannsburg stores or splitting her funds between

the local stores and the large Alice Springs supermarkets. Not understanding how the system worked, Ngulpa had allocated a small portion of her Centrelink benefit for purchases in Hermannsburg. The remainder was to be spent at one of the supermarkets in Alice Springs. Suddenly, she found herself travelling two hours each way every week to Alice Springs to buy groceries. This represented a significant additional cost for fuel. Although the new income management system provided for Ngulpa to allocate more funds to the local store, she did not realise she could change her arrangements. For more than six months she travelled weekly into Alice Springs for her grocery needs. This, however, was only part of her dilemma.

With half her Centrelink benefits limited to expenditure on groceries in designated stores, Ngulpa's discretionary purchases were severely compromised. The thing bothering her most was her ability to pay for fuel for her car. With less discretionary cash, travel to and from the outstation was curtailed. On the Centrelink system Ngulpa's ability to pay for her television service was also compromised, as was her ability to set aside funds at Tjuwanpa for emergencies.

When we was on CDEP we had that much money. They used to pay my Austar from Tjuwanpa ... from my CDEP. Then I still have like, \$200 for food. (Before), we got something there (money at Tjuwanpa) when we need ... like for generator and for fuel. Money was there. (In the old days) We had to go and ask all the family for money.³⁴ Now it's same when this income (management) comes in ... it's same. We're battling for fuel to get back!

What Ngulpa resented most was that under the old CDEP arrangements she had

³⁴ In the early years of CDEP at Tjuwanpa, individual CDEP wages were paid collectively to outstation leaders. This meant workers like Ngulpa would have to negotiate with family authorities for any cash she might need. This situation later changed with individual workers paid their wage. Many like Ngulpa subsequently had an arrangement with Tjuwanpa to set part of this wage aside for fuel and emergencies in case they ran short before the next pay cheque. Under income management she felt she had returned to this old battleground, having to turn once again to family to get the money for fuel that she needed to get home.

had a system in place where Tjuwanpa would hold part of her wages for payment of monthly debits and emergency fuel needs. Under income management, Tjuwanpa could no longer provide assistance. As Centrelink now controlled her income, fortnightly payment were made directly to her bank account. Because she was unable to budget her finances, Ngulpa was therefore constantly running short of cash for these kinds of expenditures. This put her in a situation where she had to beg money from others in the family to buy enough fuel to get home. This problem was particularly acute during the early months of income management due to escalating fuel costs. At that time the cost of diesel fuel at the Hermannsburg bowsers approached two dollars per litre.

Repairing her car had also become a huge hurdle. Under income management the amount of discretionary cash available to each of Ngulpa's family members diminished. This meant a smaller pool of money was available to the family as a whole for vehicle expenses. In March 2008 – five months after the introduction of income management – her old Toyota's suspension had finally given out. Cars did not last long after being driven across the rocks and sand of the riverbed to get to and from her outstation. Now there was not sufficient cash to repair it. It would cost Ngulpa \$250 to tow the car from Hermannsburg to Alice Springs before the cost of parts and labour for repairs. As she could not find the money, the car was stuck at Tjuwanpa. Without the car Ngulpa could not get home. The only option for Ngulpa and her husband was to sleep on the veranda of her sister's home in Hermannsburg.

Unable to return home, Ngulpa was extremely distressed. It was not simply the fact she was now living away from her home. It also meant Ngulpa could not raise her grandchildren on country. It also meant she had to live with the noise and overcrowding in Hermannsburg.

Oh we like living at outstation 'cause it's nice and quiet ... peaceful. ' You can do everything you want. Yeah, at Hermannsburg you can't do anything. Nothing really happening! Then our kids grew up at outstation ... and now we got ... my daughter in law comes back to us with her little one, and we have one baby with us ... grandson. And plus I don't like

hangin' round all day out at Hermannsburg. 'Cause we usually grew up out bush ... me and my husband. That's why we don't like living at Hermannsburg. Just go mainly for shopping ... quick shopping and back ... just five minutes for shopping. Doesn't hang around much. And out there I'm alright you know ... do bits and pieces. And I got painting for myself.

Throughout her adult life Ngulpa had made significant compromises in order to stay on the outstation; sending her children into Alice Springs for their primary and secondary education; living without refrigeration or a reliable source of power for years, and enduring the high vehicle costs incurred traversing difficult terrain to and from the outstation to get to town when she needed to. Despite these conditions she determinedly stayed at the outstation and did not want to live anywhere else.

Ngulpa was not just angry with income management. Centrelink's decision to lift the Remote Area Exemption³⁵ created further pressures.

'Cause we can't ring up there (from the outstation). When you got appointment with Centrelink you gotta go to town! That's hard! You gotta go and see them in town. You can't talk over the phone ... you gotta go and face them. (And) if you don't do that form ... no money.

'Cause I went round to ITEC³⁶ last month. I went there. *'Oh you got a course?'*... um training – they're doing that here ... like school stuff. And I said, *'How can I come in from outstation to do training out here? It's too hard for me! You know, sometimes our car broke down ... flat tyre and ... like now – springs ! It's too hard for me to come and do training here.'*

New work participation requirements meant Ngulpa now incurred an hour's drive to lodge her Centrelink forms every two weeks at Tjuwanpa and drive in again to

³⁵ A Centrelink ruling, which exempted Aboriginal people classified as living in very remote areas from seeking work and relaxed the rules pertaining to when clients were required to submit Centrelink forms.

³⁶ The Job Network Provider assigned to Tjuwanpa

go to Centrelink and Job Network Provider interviews when required. She also had to travel two days a week to meet Centrelink requirements to participate in training. If she did not comply, her Centrelink payments would be suspended. Besides the prohibitive fuel expenses associated with travel, Ngulpa hated spending time in Hermannsburg. She felt she was already meaningfully employed with her artwork, which her mother sold in the Alice Springs mall.

Ngulpa was therefore over the moon when CDEP came back.

No problem there, anymore ... back on CDEP. 'Cause no income management. With CDEP there can help ... there's money there ... you know you can fix your car. And plus, someone from Tjuwanpa to go ... you know, and help.

The return of CDEP meant Ngulpa was no longer subject to income management. This meant Tjuwanpa could help her manage her wages as Tjuwanpa – not Centrelink – had responsibility for her wages. With CDEP overheads once again available, Tjuwanpa would also continue to operate. This enabled Ngulpa to get help from Resource Centre staff with English communications and with essential outstation services. Family members on CDEP could also pool their cash, meaning there were enough funds to fix cars. Now Ngulpa could finally get back home to her outstation.

Ngulpa, however, did not consider CDEP should be for everyone and she was emphatic about this.

But we just want to stop that (keep CDEP) for the people who are stayin' out there on outstation and comin' and getting' diesel and going back ... fuel. Not people who are stayin' in Hermannsburg and getting' it!

Like Orgki, Ngulpa firmly believed CDEP was in place to support people to live on their outstations. Those people who did not comply with this rule should not be entitled to participate in the program.

While Thatha was concerned the cessation of CDEP would eventually force people from their outstation homes and into town because of the loss of services, Ngulpa did not have to wait for this to happen. She was already stranded in

Hermannsburg. Income management had effectively curtailed the amount of disposable cash available to the family and she could not mobilise sufficient funds to repair her car and get home. She was frustrated and angry. She no longer had control over her money and if Tjuwanpa closed, also gone would be help to manage her money and deal with English language communications. On top of it all, requirements to undertake interviews and attending training under new government *Welfare to Work* policy requirements meant her travel costs had risen. Why did she need to do all this when she was already supplementing her income with her art sales? Ngulpa could not see the point of it all.

3.3.3 ‘It’s gonna be very hard’: Raising children in a contemporary world

When Orgki pictured income management and life without CDEP she imagined the days of her childhood – a time in the 1970s and 1980s before CDEP and the Resource Centre became entwined in the lives of outstation families. She remembered those years as hard times. There was no running water, electricity or permanent housing. Shoes were a luxury and clothing was always second hand from the mission store. She laughs about tying grass on her feet to avoid the hot sand of the riverbed. To get food, her grandmother walked the 14 kilometres into the store run by the Hermannsburg Mission, trading skins and artifacts for cash to augment child endowment payments. There was no permanent housing. In the 1970s, only a few bores existed on the outstations. More were drilled to ensure families had access to a permanent water supply. Now, the loss of the administrative support, which CDEP provided for outstation services, meant even outstation water supplies were under threat.

CDEP – well that’s finished! Yeah. End of September they’re sayin’ it’s going to be finished. And people are wonderin’ what is gonna happen next – where do they go from there? Most probably goin’ to go back to those old days. Who knows, ’cause I really don’t know what is happening.

Central to Orgki’s concerns about the loss of CDEP and the imposition of income

management was her concern children would not be able to maintain contact with their outstation. Unless she reverted to the harsh lifestyle of her grandparents, the loss of Tjuwanpa's outstation power and water services – together with her inability to maintain her car – would make it difficult to ensure children spent time on the land. At the same time taking children back to country was her responsibility. It was essential to her that children had a school-based *and* country-based education.

We go out camping ourselves, just the family. We sit around the fire talking to one another then we sleep real late. That's what we learned from our grandparents and that's what we tell our little ones now, '*This how we grew up. This is how we did our things,*' you know. Yeah ... and they're very good for that. And now, all the kids in town (Alice Springs), they're all at school in town, and sometimes they come back and they don't want to go back (to school), but I make 'em go back. They really like it the way we are staying at home. They don't do that in town you see. It's been goin' on and on. Like nearly every weekend we go back home and camping, and yeah, we go take the kids, teach 'em what we grew up learning from our grandparents and try to carry it on.

They cannot learn anything like that on the European side of the thing ... at school. So I think that's really good they got two ... you know ... English as a second language, and to understand more of the European side ... so they know both ways.

While Orgki strongly opposed any reforms that would see people leaving their outstations, she agreed greater efforts needed to be made to get children into school. As a small child she had been sent away to boarding school. Despite experiencing great pain and loneliness being separated from her family, she had also sent her own children away to be educated in Alice Springs.

Like for myself, I grew up in a European society you know. I found it really hard. I lost my language ... my culture...everything. I had to run away from the Lutheran cottage when I was 13. And I enrolled myself into Yirara³⁷ ... at

³⁷ The Aboriginal High School in Alice Springs

the softball grounds in Alice Springs there. I said, ' *Look, how do I go 'bout enrolling myself ... ' cause I want to be with my family.* '

My kids ... I have put them in the same position ... like in boarding school and things like that ... and my kids they can't even speak Arrernte properly. They been through Law and everything. They can hunt and things like that. When they come home for the school holidays we sit around and speak to them in Arrernte. They still have trouble speaking their first language ... second language (English) is stronger for them.

In pursuing this course Orgki saw value in a non-Aboriginal education. At the same time she also worried a great deal about her children losing their Western Arrernte language and identity. Her response was to seek a balance by having her children spend prolonged periods on the outstation during school holidays. These holidays were therefore critical to development of Western Arrernte knowledge.

At issue for Orgki in the introduction of income management, was the government's lack of recognition of her efforts to educate children both ways and why this was important. Speaking softly, Orgki reflected how she saw government actions.

That's the thing with the government. They don't recognise how Aboriginal people feel about their country! Like ... (they want) all Aboriginal people to be in (Housing) Commission houses and what not in Alice Springs. Maybe they think that's where the better education would be for the children. But yet again, there are still outstation peoples that are bringin' their kids in and out to the community (Hermannsburg) from the outstations every morning for schooling. And it doesn't be like that.

It's home! That's home. There's nowhere like home. That's where we grew up. That's where we got all our knowledge from ... bein' on our land. We went to school in Alice Springs but still came home. So there's nowhere like home. It's our grandfather's country and now it is ours, you know. He left it there for us and there's no way we'll be leavin' that country. Nah! I was told by my grandmother; ' *Don't leave home. It's up to you to look after it and the children and keep the family together.* ' Why should we live at Hermannsburg when we got home here? To not have an outstation? (She shakes her head). And where else ... where else ... where else could I go if I did not have an outstation? There's nowhere else.

Connecting children to their country was a responsibility Orgki could not abandon.

She had attempted to meet this responsibility and at the same time provide her children with a formal education in Alice Springs by using the school holidays to teach them knowledge of country. In the government's blanket decision to impose income management and close CDEP, however, her efforts went unrecognized.

From her discussions, Orgki reported other families were also worried income management would result in less money available for things kids wanted.

And now we've got kids that are goin' to school and want everything what they want you know, but that's gonna change ... it's just goin' to be the way when we grew up ... very hard. So it's gonna make a big difference with the CDEP gone for the kids you know. Well ... CDEP gone ... that's what parents have been lookin' at mainly – the kids.

Thatha agreed. If the Resource Centre closed she would no longer have a job and this terrified her. On a Centrelink benefit, she knew she would not be able to meet the demands of children living in a contemporary world. Losing her job, Thatha would also lose access to a staff house and be unable to meet repayments on her new car.

Costs you a lot of money for kids. I mean we got kids to educate too, and we just not gonna have enough money ... you know, still gotta put our kids to school and that. Some of our kids go to school (in Alice) and they want this and that for their holiday you know. Like motorbikes or something like that ... like for teenagers. I mean some people do like for their children to get everything ... to make them happy when they go to school and come back and least they got something back at home you know ... to take their mind off things. Like games ... play stations ... just to make them happy. 'Cause you don't want your kids to go sniffing petrol or you know ... drinkin' grog ... especially teenagers!

'Cause I've got two nephews who are teenagers. 'Cause they enjoy comin' back to their outstation ... they got things there ... still gotta have money to buy things like that. Like this is a new generation. We're not back in the 70's! (Laughs). Everybody wants new things ... you know all these new things bein' created and that ... just worried about that if we end up with nothing. I've got a child to support! And plus I've got my (car) loan to pay

off ... about \$20,000. I've already paid off five now. Maybe another \$20,000 in four years time ... four or five years.

Thatha's eldest child had just started kindergarten in Alice Springs. She needed to be able to sustain the cost of his education and meet repayments on her car loan. The car was essential for bringing him home on weekends. To ensure the children came back to the outstation and did not stay in town during school holidays, Thatha also knew parents had to find ways to keep them occupied. In today's world this cost money. If she lost her job she would have to meet these costs under income management. Her assessment was this was going to be impossible.

3.3.4 'They don't come out and look at people:' Protecting children on country

Despite most outstations and Hermannsburg having been declared 'dry' areas for many years, drinking and gambling had been a feature of Western Arrernte life since the time of the Mission settlement. For the children's sake, Marie generally agreed something had to be done about drinking, violence and gambling. In her early twenties with two children, she started work at the Resource Centre office soon after the birth of her second baby. She was one of the first to hear about income management and the government's plans to close CDEP.

Well I reckon it was a good ... it is a good thing that the government do these changes ... for the children's sake ... so that they'll always have food there for them. And I think people are realising that the government had enough ... all this Centrelink money getting spent on alcohol and drugs all the time. So some people are realising that! (But) They don't understand ... like ... why their money has to be income managed. And some people think it's just John Howard doing it to get at Aboriginal people. But it's not that.

Lots of people out here they got to understand, have an understanding that everything is about to change you know ... that they have to you know, to get off their backsides as well and start understanding white people too. That they just can't sit down and just gamble and get grog and drugs, and not work and be lazy. They have to understand that too. And

they have to think about their children ... their futures. They is the next generation. They have to think about their education ... for their children to get education. They have to get training and that you know, instead of their young girls having babies. They're just interested in having babies, you know, these days.

For many of those who worked, who did not drink, or those who believed they were already taking responsible care of their children, however, the reforms were seen as an unjust punishment. What rankled for Orgki was that decisions were being made with no understanding of Aboriginal lives on the ground. Paper reports substituted for a close up view of her reality. For years she had been raising other people's children when they couldn't care for them, using her outstation as a way of protecting children at risk of drugs and alcohol in Hermannsburg and Alice Springs. Now, she was to be punished in the same way as those who had neglected and abused children. She felt the injustice of this keenly.

So what else? John Howard ... Mal Brough – why are they complainin' about communities and outstations and what not? They don't even know what's goin' on at the communities! It's only paper work. Poor thing (the Tjuwanpa Manager), you know ... doin' paperwork all the time ... sendin' it to them. That's the only thing they look at. They don't come out and look at *people*. And they don't know what people are doin'! No way!

(I) Looked after how many kids? ... About eleven kids that have been abandoned by their parents ... and still ... gettin' punished for nothing you know ... gettin' punished for the things that we never did! Like abuse and things you know.

Over the years Orgki had taken care of a number of children and had also adopted one of her brother's children. Many other outstation women and men had done the same. People like Elva, Nungari, Janjula, and Rex had all taken in nieces, nephews and grandchildren or fostered children at risk, using the outstations as a means of keeping themselves or their children away from the influence of alcohol, drugs or violence in Hermannsburg or Alice Springs. Some like Elva had run outstation-based rehabilitation programs for young addicts. Orgki took deep offence at the

way the government ignored how she and others had protected children over the years. Government authorities did not recognise these efforts and she saw income management as unfairly punishing her.

Lee also felt the injustice of the changes to CDEP. It meant her job as the Centrelink agent was in jeopardy. Although she worked three full days in the office, the loss of CDEP – which funded two days of her salary – would see her lose two days wages. This would leave her with only one day of work, which realised an income significantly less than the dole. Effectively Lee had no choice but to go on Centrelink, be subject to income management, have her earnings halved, and see fifty percent of her income controlled. As Lee saw it, income management did not distinguish between Aboriginal people with different behaviours and different circumstances. Although she did not have children, Lee had a job. Despite this, she was still going to be punished in the same way as those who neglected their children or did not work. Holding the FaCSIA Fact Sheet mailed to the Tjuwanpa Centrelink office, she angrily ripped it in half.

What I think ... like the Prime Minister ... Brough is it? Mal Brough or whatever his name is. They shouldn't cancel CDEP ... because if the government thinks that some families are spending too much money on grog and not on their children they should stop the payment for the parents! But what about the good parents that is not spending anything on grog or ..? I'm not spending too much money on grog ... I'm *not*! What about the good parents that are working ... I'm not spending it on grog...

And what does that mean ... the government is concerned that Aboriginal people don't have jobs ... and that CDEP does not prepare people for work? (Laughs) I reckon that's so stupid. What about people like us ... we're hard workers. I think it goes back to the parents. The way that government is talking about us, I reckon it's *twisted*!

Lee felt keenly the unfairness of being penalised for others' behaviours. Raised by her mother's sisters, Lee had spent many of her early years living with them on their outstations. After completing high school in Alice Springs she worked in South Australia for a couple of years before eventually returning to take up a part-

time job as a Centrelink agent at the Resource Centre.

Might as well say that it's not *fair!* It (the Intervention) should be there in Alice Springs *itself!* Not in the *communities!* But then again, if parents are too busy gambling ... drinkin' grog ... bringin' grog back from town ... hmm. Oh well ... if everything is about kids, *why* it's gotta affect everybody else that *don't* have kids!

Lee could see some parents' behaviours needed to change. From her side of the fence, however, she felt she was being penalised for demonstrating the very work behaviours the government wanted Aboriginal people to conform to. For Lee, the government was applying a blanket judgement on all Aboriginal people and punishing them despite their efforts to hold down a job.

3.4 Conclusion

As the women at Tjuwanpa talked, they acknowledged the social dysfunction impacting on their lives and families. It was clear they agreed with the government's position that something more had to be done to ensure children were protected, cared for, and had greater opportunities for education. These concerns were not new to any of the women. In response they and their families before them had implemented outstation-based strategies they believed protected and educated their children. At Tjuwanpa they endeavoured to work within the constraints and opportunities available in a remote context, trying to marry their Western Arrernte obligations within the demands and requirements of life in a contemporary world. As the narratives reveal, their assessment of the impact of CDEP and income management on their ability to meet these responsibilities differed. Constant in their responses, however, were their aspirations to protect and nurture children in ways enabling them to retain their Western Arrernte identity through links to Western Arrernte country, language and family.

What was also consistent in their responses was the centrality of outstations to their efforts to care for, protect, and educate children. Orgki, Connie, Nungari and others like them, had raised or cared for children and young people who were

neglected or at risk by situating them in family environments on outstations. Outstations were a means of keeping children safe from the harm the women believed existed in Hermannsburg. They had also valued children's education highly. Outstations also played a critical role in balancing formal schooling with cultural and spiritual education on outstations – where children and adolescents could learn knowledge of country and retain Western Arrernte language. Some, like Connie, had pushed hard for Remote Learning Centres. This enabled her children and grandchildren the opportunity for primary education, which could sit alongside a traditional education on the outstation. Ngulpa and Orgki had sent their children away to boarding school or to relatives in Alice Springs – a strategy that as Orgki recounted, involved considerable risk in terms of children's identity as well as financial hardship for families. The outstations subsequently took on importance during the school holidays.

CDEP had played a critical role in these endeavours. The administrative funding it attracted had supported the delivery of essential services to the outstations. It provided staff at the Resource Centre able to assist outstation families with budgeting, mail services and interpreters who could help with English language communications. CDEP also supported means to supplement wages within the limited opportunities in the desert for part-time work or small enterprises. This underpinned the ability of families to run cars, without which outstation living was impossible. Central to the women's aspirations for CDEP was therefore the hope the program would support conditions encouraging and supporting families to live on their outstations.

On the question of whether it had achieved this, the women were divided. Connie and Nungari believed with CDEP gone, the system enabling people to live in Hermannsburg without meeting their obligation to work on their outstation would also be gone. Connie hoped the changes would bring the re-emergence of outstation work opportunities; thereby bringing young people back to country. Nungari wanted people out of Hermannsburg so government housing resources would be invested in outstations. Orgki, however, saw the loss of CDEP and the transfer of workers onto the Centrelink system, creating the conditions whereby

people would leave the outstation and head into town. This would exacerbate the very problems the government wanted to fix. Thatha agreed, but in her assessment, people would be forced off country and into town because of the loss of critical outstation services. Faced with the loss of her job, she also worried how she could keep her car and buy the things needed to encourage teenagers to stay on the outstation over the holiday period. As CDEP went and came back, the central issue for outstation women was the extent to which the changes would support or hinder their ability to raise and protect children on country.

For some of the women it was also a question of what was fair and just. If Tjuwanpa were forced to close, Thatha, Marie and Lee would lose their jobs and have their income controlled. As Lee had no children, she could only see that in losing her job she was being punished – a view widely held in Hermannsburg and on the outstations. Orgki too felt she was being punished. Despite having cared for many children over the years, compromising her children's Western Arrernte identity by sending them to boarding school, Orgki was being treated the same as those who neglected their children.

While the government saw income management and the changes to CDEP creating conditions to protect children and reposition CDEP as a work preparation program, outstation families continued to understand CDEP as a government support program through which the government acknowledged and supported their relationship to country. Caring for their children involved responsibilities to nurture their Western Arrernte knowledge and identity. In the Commonwealth's discussion of CDEP under both the Liberal and Labor Governments, this was never recognised or discussed. In fact, Commonwealth and Territory Government restrictions on outstation funding together with policies to centralise services in larger towns, sought to limit expectations of government support for outstations. What the women convey in their stories about the loss of CDEP and the introduction of income management was not disagreement with the government's concern with the protection of Aboriginal children. This they shared. What they struggled to understand was the impact of the changes on the strategies they had in place to do just that.

Chapter 4: Training and Real Jobs

4.1 Introduction

As the *Welfare to Work* reforms accompanying the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) swung into action, moving people into employment and making them job ready became government catch cries. Under the reforms, participation in a recognised work readiness program or training was made compulsory for all those in receipt of a Centrelink Newstart payment or Youth Allowance. This policy continued under the incoming Rudd Labor Government.

In this chapter outstation workers and members of their families discuss their responses to the Commonwealth's efforts to create '*real jobs*' for remote Aboriginal peoples and to develop the skills needed to help them enter the mainstream labour market. As Tjuwanpa's outstation residents reflect on their circumstances in the context of the reforms, they shed light on the considerations influencing Western Arrernte decisions about their engagement in work and training, including the conditions in these environments that encouraged their participation.

The narratives in this chapter begin with outstation responses to news of government training opportunities. CDEP workers then talk about how they feel about CDEP being cut, CDEP workers being moved on to Centrelink where income management will be applied, and all those considered capable of work required to work two days a week on a *Work for the Dole* program. Announcing '*real jobs*' would be created generated a great deal of discussion. The Commonwealth promised mainstream employment across the three tiers of government in the Northern Territory for 2,000 of the 6,000 people previously employed under CDEP. Renewed emphasis would also be placed on moving

Aboriginal people into the mainstream labour market. Under the Rudd Government, mobility payments were added to this mix of incentives in the hope they would encourage the relocation of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to areas of high labour demand.

The Commonwealth's plans for job creation and training were welcome news in Hermannsburg and on Tjuwanpa's outstations. As men and women talked, however, it became apparent that in a remote Western Arrernte context, their engagement in work and training considered the practical realities of remote desert life as well as whether these environments created social spaces in which people felt safe, comfortable and valued.

4.2 Engaging in training: Recognising language differences, sociality, skills and learning styles

Engagement in work and training was not new to people on the outstations and in Hermannsburg. Up until they relinquished their lease over Western Arrernte lands, the Lutheran missionaries had sought to build Western Arrernte capacity as productive workers, fostering skills in horticulture, leather work and domestic industries (Albrecht 2002; Austin-Broos 2009). Since the closure of the Lutheran Mission, many men and women had participated in mainstream employment, moving in and out of jobs at the Resource Centre, in Hermannsburg or on pastoral stations. Several men had also taken work in the mining sector. Through 20 years of CDEP at Tjuwanpa, training courses had also been a feature of the program, introducing skills in vehicle maintenance, driving, basic construction, horticulture, and various art forms. Most outstation men and women therefore had current or previous experience in training or work environments locally or in the region.

In 2007, Tjuwanpa managed 14 Western Arrernte staff in full or part-time employment on the Works Teams, in the office, as Centrelink agents, and in the art centre. Ten of these jobs were CDEP positions, where CDEP wages were augmented by salary payments funded through four government grants and

contracts. This arrangement effectively increased the number of people who could be employed than was catered for under Tjuwanpa's funding arrangements, while also providing a workforce able to cope with the workload inherent in servicing a dispersed population in a desert environment. Begun in 2005 as part of the Resource Centre's CDEP program, the Tjuwanpa Rangers also employed 25 male CDEP workers. These men earned additional wages called 'top-up', as a result of contract work in nearby national parks and gas fields.

As part of the NTER package of measures, the Howard Government sought to create an environment that moved remote Aboriginal people off welfare and into the mainstream economy. The Commonwealth subsequently applied new work participation requirements to remote areas intended to make people job ready and began a phased shut-down of CDEP. Beginning in November 2007, all CDEP workers at Tjuwanpa were moved on to the Centrelink system. CDEP wages were replaced by Centrelink benefits and conditions. Those in receipt of Centrelink's Youth Allowance or Newstart payments were required to register for employment or training support with a government approved Alice Springs-based Job Network Agency. Those not involved in approved training were to participate in a compulsory *Work for the Dole* program for 15 hours per week (DEWR 2007b) as a work readiness initiative.³⁸

³⁸ Tjuwanpa successfully argued that the structure of *Work for the Dole* could not be implemented in an outstation context as Departmental guidelines restricted *Work for the Dole* activities to public areas. This meant outstation people would have to travel up to an hour or more into the Resource Centre Compound two days per week. Tjuwanpa would therefore have to accommodate approximately 100 people who would be on *Work for the Dole* on any one day, as well as accommodate accompanying family members who could not be left on the outstation without a car. DEWR subsequently agreed to an alternative program of CDEP transition activities, run in a similar manner to CDEP. This enabled those on Youth Allowance and Newstart to work the required 15 hours on their outstation under Tjuwanpa's supervision, with a job Network Provider designated to identify appropriate training courses, facilitate training delivery, and identify employment opportunities.

The reforms aimed to involve participants in a work activity or training able to demonstrate skills development, which could lead to employment. Although the incoming Rudd Government reintroduced a modified CDEP program in July 2008, it continued to emphasise participation in accredited training or job readiness skills through CDEP work placements or *Work for the Dole*. Under the new program, CDEP providers also had access to funds for mentors who were to encourage Aboriginal participation in work readiness programs. Non-participation risked suspension of Centrelink benefits or loss of a place in the new program. The emphasis throughout was on developing the skills, confidence and work habits to enable people to enter the workforce and retain jobs (FaHCSIA 2008a). CDEP providers and Job Network agencies were contracted under stringent Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These set numerical targets for participation against which the success of the new initiatives would be measured.

As the narratives unfold they reflect the conditions under which Aboriginal people were prepared to engage in training and work and the extent to which these are recognised in the Commonwealth's work readiness programs. As the narratives here suggest, programs seeking to build Western Arrernte work confidence and competencies, need to recognise how English language and literacy competency interfaces with relational considerations operating within the Western Arrernte social milieu.

4.2.1 'They do it by paperwork': Literacy, language and qualifications

Reuben had been hearing government staff in Hermannsburg talk about the new work readiness opportunities emerging under the Intervention. For years he had held a job in Hermannsburg, basing himself in town so he could get to work and returning to his outstation on weekends. He welcomed the news about training, particularly if it targeted young people.

All the young persons gotta start to work – getting up early for work and all that sort of thing ... that's change. ... and there's not enough young fellas even coming here to Tjuwanpa for training up. We been talking about

that for a long time ... for that training for young people! Well that's starting to look a little bit alright.

Like Reuben, Solomon was keen to see more training. He had toyed with the idea of going north to his wife's country to get work and was also determined to see his two eldest sons in employment. At the same time he was realistic about their poor prospects. Although he had worked for many years he was frustrated by the fact that skills learned on-the-job were not going to be able to compete with recognised qualifications. Without these, Solomon knew he and his sons would find it difficult to get work anywhere outside the Hermannsburg or outstation areas.

Trainin' is the important thing. If the government is changin', need to get yourself signed up for trainin'. Gotta have a certificate in case you want to get a job in town. Certificate. You gotta go for certificate nowadays. If you haven't got it – with all these changes – you just can't walk inside the office and say, *'I want a job and I know how to do this and do that.'* They'll ask you straight out, *"You got a certificate? What school you been to?"* Once you got a certificate, might go somewhere else and get work – or to another community ... wife's family ... stay there and get a job.

(People here) They've got the opportunity to do work at the outstation. Out in the community people got lot of skills, know how to read and write – but they just don't have the paperwork (certificate). Sometimes (the government) don't get hardly any information from people. What they gotta do is go out and ask people ... talk to them. On-the-job we know what we are doing. In there (Alice Springs) they do it by paperwork. Got to read the instructions. Out here it's in your head.

Frustrating Solomon was the insistence of employers and training organisations on paper-based qualifications. This requirement ignored what he could actually do. Although Solomon used an old English dictionary when he encountered new words, he struggled to express himself on paper. Early in 2007, he had tried to get a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment in Alice Springs. His poor English literacy skills, however, meant he was unable to fulfill the course requirements. Solomon's early excitement about the course had turned to dismay as he encountered the written assessment tasks he had to perform. He knew how to do the work. He knew how to prepare the training sessions. He just could not write

down what he knew and therefore could not be assessed under course requirements. The previous year, Solomon's eldest son had also struggled with the literacy requirements in a Certificate II mechanics course at Tjuwanpa. Although he had completed Year 10 in Alice Springs his son's English literacy was poor. Overwhelmed by the course's written requirements, he had dropped out.

In Solomon's view, maintaining the involvement of young people in training was problematic in other ways. Most courses were not structured to take into account Western Arrernte learning styles. Nor did they take into account the particular demands facing Western Arrernte youth.

Young people who go into town to do a block thing – there's a lot of things in town – maybe they go in the first day and maybe they don't come back the second day! Gotta think about how long people gonna be there with you – maybe they're busy with other things.

Out on the community you can teach 'em in language. Can use English in town. Out here you gotta teach in their language. Some want to leave the car (on the outstation) for their family. It's going to be hard if only one car and kids got sick. Or like my son – he really wanna do an apprenticeship. But might find it difficult, you know, skin colour in Alice Springs.

The only thing that we can sorta like do is on-the-job training. See on the job training you get all your boys together and whose-ever training, he'll tell you this and that, get all the things together, and you just go out and do it. But it you still gotta do that little bit of readin' and writin'.

Therefore, while Solomon agreed with the Commonwealth's emphasis on English literacy, he also believed government departments should not assume his lack of certification meant he or other people lacked skills or experience. His view was that people's participation in training and the success of skills training programs also needed to recognise the particular circumstances of remote participants and the social environments influencing learning outcomes. If training was conducted in Alice Springs for example, trainees might be expected to help with family business while they were there, or experience pressures to go drinking. Solomon also knew racial discrimination, experienced by Aboriginal people when in Alice

Springs, would also impact on course participation rates. Without public transport or access to ambulance services, families also needed to manage vehicle use. Tying up a car to travel to training had to be considered against the possibility of an outstation emergency. Solomon believed some of these issues could be avoided if more local, on-the-job training was emphasised within kin groups. In these environments older family members could influence learning outcomes and encourage participation.

4.2.2 ‘You get all your boys together’: Training and family

Training on country privileged Western Arrernte learning traditions. ‘*Getting all your boys together*’, was Solomon’s way of explaining how men tended to work best in family groups, supervised by an older man. Employment patterns at Tjuwanpa, and in settings such as the Hermannsburg clinic and school, reflected these extended family networks. Old Jack elaborated on the implications of this for training programs as he kept an eye on his young sons at work on a neighbour’s car.

We need something to push us. I will be with that guy and then I’ll push them. When they know, they will do the job. But if (the trainer) he’s too tough, if he says one little word one way, they’re gone. If that fella gets cheeky³⁹, say one word ... he (the trainee) might say, ‘*I might as well walk away*’. If he’s nice ... friendly, he’ll stay.

Jack’s comment reflected common Western Arrernte practice where older men were expected to teach and encourage younger men to take on new learning. Jack believed being pushed by an older family man also avoided situations where young men might walk away to avoid a confrontation with an outside trainer because they felt humiliated if exposed to criticism in a group setting. Within the family group a younger person could feel comfortable within relationships he knew.

Lee recognised poor English literacy and numeracy were a common cause for

³⁹ *Cheeky* – to be badly behaved, rude or aggressive

shame in non-familial group encounters. Although Lee was fluent in oral and written English, she knew poor English language competencies meant training participants risked shame through feeling exposed in front of others. Lee believed training efforts would therefore only work if shame could be avoided.

Connie suggested this could be achieved by working in family groups in outstation environments.

Connie: Well we have asked ... like some leaders have asked to put up ... like an education centre ... out in the outstation ... like if people do go back and maybe if they want to learn more ... to get their literacy and numeracy again.

Lee: Away from other people so they don't get shame from that. It's more better like ... if the family get together for the literacy or numeracy or whatever they call it. Do that together as a family ... so ... one person can't get shame you know. If they are with a stranger, they don't know what they will do ... they will panic. And tease them and all that ... they will feel like that you know, *'I'm gonna get shame ... get teased at.'* The same like if these kids go to different schools. It's exactly the same. I used to be like that ... It's that shyness!

Family considerations had other influences over outstation decisions to take up work readiness opportunities. Hearing the Rudd Government intended to introduce mobility allowances to support travel away from home for work and training (FaHCSIA 2008a), Orgki and Thatha assessed the merits of this initiative against the sociality of family life. The women considered mobility certainly had advantages. Social and cultural priorities, however, had to be considered, particularly when young people were involved.

Orgki: Young ones get lonely going away from home.

Thatha: If you want people to go away it's difficult. They got football and plus when it's summer they got (men's) business. Young fellas – they's alright if they're on their outstation and they got a supervisor with them ... something might happen then (benefit from the training) ... I mean if they get support on the ground. Maybe just take family group together. Some

young ones are married and they'll be worried about their wives or husbands.

Away from home, loneliness or a jealous partner could cause individual distress, in turn affecting participation rates. The women also had concerns about meeting cultural obligations pertaining to men's business. The loss of opportunities for social interaction in local football teams would also have a significant influence over the participation rates of young men. These significant aspects of Western Arrernte sociality would influence the take up of training or work opportunities away from home.

As men and women talked, it was clear they took a pragmatic approach to training. As employers required qualifications, accredited training was supported as a way forward to employment although frustration remained over the lack of recognition of people's on-the-job competencies. Accredited training, however, would be extremely difficult to complete as the spoken and literacy requirements of courses were beyond the English language capacities of most Western Arrernte families. Poor English language competency in turn contributed to shame – an experience people sought to avoid. Shame could be elicited in unfamiliar environments – when confronted with unfamiliar trainers or training participants, or when using English. Shame elicited strong feelings impacting on individual decisions to participate in events. Further, the responses here suggest Western Arrernte people assess family responsibilities, cultural obligations, and the social norms operating within group encounters when making decisions to engage in training.

The importance of recognised qualifications was well understood at Tjuwanpa. If this was to be possible, however, the men and women in this study highlighted the need for training approaches and environments enabling them to feel safe. Programs would also need to take into account Western Arrernte cultural values and family obligations. On the ground at Tjuwanpa, people believed training would engage Western Arrernte people – particularly younger men – if programs worked through family groups under the direction of older family members. Family and outstation environments could also minimise the risk participants would be distracted or fear discrimination, two significant concerns when young

people attended training in Alice Springs. Locally based training could also deal with the practicalities of transport and accommodation.

The conditions within which Western Arrernte participants might engage in learning opportunities were largely absent within the Commonwealth's work readiness policy and its implementation on the ground. Both the Howard and Rudd Governments emphasised Aboriginal participation in training and work readiness programs. This was assessed, however, against contracted targets, ignoring the social, cultural and practical realities of outstation lives. The Commonwealth's policy and programming efforts emphasised Aboriginal engagement in training and work readiness while ignoring the conditions that might reasonably have contributed to achievement of these outcomes.

4.3 Engaging in work: Place, people and pragmatic considerations

Soon after announcing the Intervention, the Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough made a firm commitment to find 'real' jobs for 2,000 of the Territory's estimated 6,000 CDEP workers (Brough & Hockey 2007). From the Commonwealth's perspective, CDEP had replaced what should have been fully waged positions and obscured the full costs of service provision to remote areas. Axing CDEP would put a stop to this practice. In the Central Desert, the Commonwealth's analysis also showed significant labour demand and potential to create Aboriginal trade apprenticeships in Alice Springs (DEWR 2007a, 2007c). The 2,000-job target would therefore be achieved by turning CDEP jobs into salaried positions funded by government grants. In addition, mobility allowances would encourage people seek employment in regional centres. To ensure those who were fit for work were made 'job-ready', Centrelink payments were conditional on Aboriginal people meeting individual contracts, which required they participate in a work readiness program such as *Work for the Dole*.

Excitement at Tjuwanpa about the Commonwealth's commitment to the employment of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory quickly turned to

questions about the practicality of obtaining mainstream jobs in a remote desert environment. Twenty years previously, CDEP had been introduced to create work opportunities in the Tjuwanpa outstation environment. If CDEP jobs were going, what jobs would replace them? How would people find work? The figure of 2,000 jobs was therefore initially greeted with skepticism. Once it became apparent CDEP workers would become Centrelink clients, the question was then asked how being on the dole was better than being a CDEP worker? CDEP workers resented their new status as welfare beneficiaries. They were not, however, the only ones faced with the prospect of becoming welfare recipients. The loss of CDEP threatened existing jobs at the Resource Centre.

In 2008 and 2009, a boost in the Labor Government's funding for remote Aboriginal services brought new employment opportunities to Hermannsburg and the outstation region. New programs such as a community safe house were introduced and salaried positions on existing government programs were expanded. At the end of November 2007, Tjuwanpa benefited from these investments when FaHCSIA offered Tjuwanpa funding for four new essential services positions. At the same time, the Central Land Council secured eight part-time and two full-time Ranger jobs under a *Caring for Our Country* grant⁴⁰. Additional employment opportunities also arose in Hermannsburg under the new MacDonnell Shire.

Outstation families took up all new positions at Tjuwanpa and the majority of new positions in Hermannsburg. By November 2008 – five months after Tjuwanpa's CDEP had been reinstated, 33 people from 20 outstations were employed in full or part-time work. This was more than double the number of outstation people in mainstream employment prior to November 2007. By early 2009 – as government

⁴⁰ *Caring for our Country* is a national initiative of the Commonwealth Government aiming to improve environmental management and protection of Australia's natural resources. An important strategy is the management of a national reserve system through employment of Aboriginal peoples on Aboriginal land. This initiative was an Australia-wide, Rudd Government program and was not part of the package of measures introduced in the Northern Territory under the NTER.

funding brought additional jobs to Hermannsburg – 15 more people from outstation families were in employment. For outstation families these jobs were in high demand. In the following stories, Tjuwanpa residents relay their views on work and reflect on the Commonwealth’s policy changes against their realities and aspirations. As men and women spoke about these new opportunities, they reveal the motivations and considerations coming into play when outstation families consider taking up employment.

4.3.1 ‘What jobs we gonna do on outstations?’: The practicalities of finding work

Despite the Howard and Rudd Governments’ stated commitment to providing ‘real jobs’ for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, Thatha found it difficult to see where the jobs would come from. As she spoke Thatha became increasingly exasperated.

What job is that real job? Is that...I mean for a real job in the outstation? How you going to ... how you gonna ... if they just do simple things, um, like shade whatjamacallit ... bough shelter⁴¹ or something.... and from that, how they gonna get a real job? I mean it’s an *outstation*! And you can just do that outstation up or you know, just build something for the kids – like parks. I mean how you gonna get into a real job when you’re workin’ out in the outstation?

Thatha knew the work experience of the majority of outstation families was limited to working on small outstation projects funded under Tjuwanpa’s CDEP grant. Her assessment was this experience would not lead to mainstream employment. She also knew when outstation families thought about work, they imagined local jobs in Hermannsburg or employment at the Resource Centre.

Thatha wasn’t alone. After hearing about government promises of 2,000 jobs many of the older men were also skeptical about new employment opportunities emerging in the limited local labour market.

⁴¹ A bough shelter is usually an open-sided shade structure with a Spinifex roof

Reuben: Well if CDEP gonna finish here what's gonna to happen on the outstations?

Solomon: CDEP not really gonna finish. It's just that *Work for Dole* gonna come in – replacement there.

Bill: What you mean...work? 'Bout work? But how we gonna find work out there ... we got no work!

Reuben: Well what kinda work we gotta do on outstations you know? That's the number one I s'pose. How we gonna earn our wages on the outstations?

Johnson: Fixin' up all the doors, windows and that ...

Reuben: Nah ... every day of the year...

For Thatha and the men, the promise of jobs was assessed against outstation employment opportunities in the local area. They were not seeing themselves moving into regional centres for employment. As the only outstation employment was generated through outstation maintenance services or ad hoc CDEP projects. As they did not consider small outstation projects as mainstream employment, the men could not see where these full-time jobs would come from.

The government's promise of more jobs did little to excite Orgki either. Even if people were prepared to spend two to three hours travelling daily to and from work in Alice Springs, she did not believe employers in Alice Springs wanted to recruit an Aboriginal person from out bush.

Well to be honest there's no jobs available. In our community there is nothing. Do they expect people to go to Alice Springs and look for jobs? I think that's the idea. But who's gonna take them into town? How can people go in and out from here for appointments and training and whatnot ... find a job. You walk into an office.

'Oh here ... I 'm here with my resume you know ... come to ask for a job...'

'Oh, come back next week.'

Come back again ... go back...

'Oh, we've already given somebody else your job.'

You know what I mean. Job's already been taken. Yep. So who is gonna give somebody that's livin' down the creek a job. Who? Tangentyere⁴²? I don't think so. Nah ... too dirty ... *'Wash up you know ... do this, do that then come back tomorrow'* or something. There's no one that's gonna offer Aboriginal people decent job – like in government or something like that. Nobody's gonna be game enough to give us a job in Alice Springs unless you pretty good. Somebody that's gone to college, you know ... university ... come and put that piece of paper on the table and say,

'I come lookin' for a job.'

And they say ...

'Oh yeah, you're employed.'

Nobody's gonna look at our little resume that we been workin' here. They'll chuck it in the bin. That's my point anyway.

Marie and Lee also struggled to understand government thinking, seeing substantial social barriers for Western Arrernte people getting mainstream jobs in Alice Springs.

Lee: I don't know why they're changing it. If they change the CDEP we gotta just go right back to the start ... Centrelink ... and Centrelink will send them back to look for a job!

Marie: Because there's people that wanna work for their money. They ... there's not enough work available for them. They could get a job in Alice Springs ... yeah, but then they gotta have accommodation. People mainly want to work within the (local) community. Community works in the community. Because they just don't have the education to get a job in town. They got no English, or bad English. They can't speak English. Can't read English. Yeah. They don't have skills for that job ... their job ... yeah. To have a job they have to have ideas and make arrangements and that you know. Or they won't have you know ... they can't do a resume ...

⁴² Tangentyere Council is an Aboriginal organisation established to manage services to the Alice Springs town camps. It is the largest employer of Aboriginal people in the Central Desert.

they don't even know what a resume is you know. That makes it difficult for them to get a job.

Lee: They (the government) want people to get jobs in Alice Springs – so everyone will have to move there. But the people there want Indigenous people to go back to community!

Lee found it ironic the government was closing down existing jobs as a means of creating Aboriginal employment. As far as she was concerned under CDEP people already *had* jobs. By cutting CDEP the government had effectively made them unemployed. Further, by putting people on Centrelink and applying mainstream job-search requirements⁴³, outstation people would be required to look for work in Alice Springs. The two women knew this would be exceedingly difficult given language barriers and the shortage of housing rentals. In addition to these issues, Lee foresaw the risk that more bush people in town would exacerbate racial tensions.⁴⁴

Thatha foresaw other difficulties if she was forced to find work in Alice Springs. Facing the prospect of losing her job if Tjuwanpa's CDEP closed she worried about housing. While Tjuwanpa survived Thatha had access to a staff house. She did not know how she would manage if she had to find housing in Alice Springs.

I don't want to be in town ... nah ... it's too boring. It's alright there but

43 Prior to July 2007 under a ruling called the Remote Area Exemption, Centrelink had exempted Aboriginal Centrelink clients classified as living in very remote areas, from seeking work. The ruling recognised the difficulties distance would pose for people in complying with requirements. The exemption also relaxed requirements relating to when clients were required to submit Centrelink forms. Under the new arrangements, this exemption was scrapped. All Centrelink clients on Newstart or Youth Allowance were required to look for work and participate in *Work for the Dole* or an equivalent program, and to submit forms according to mainstream requirements.

44 Soon after the Intervention commenced, Alice Springs newspapers had reported that non-Aboriginal residents had been calling for Aboriginal people to go back to the bush, claiming it was out-of-town visitors who were causing escalating law and order problems in the town.

then you got family goin' in ... too much noise ... and they get you kicked out. You know what family is like...you get visitors...sometimes 20 people. When they follow you (to town) they just stay there. Then there's drinkin'... then complainin'. Here, I can keep my gate shut ... only sometimes (laughs). Sometimes I just listen. They go 'knock', 'knock' on the door and then they go (away).

While family members stayed at her house at Tjuwanpa when they needed to come into Hermannsburg from the outstations, Thatha felt she could control who came and went. This would be difficult in Alice Springs. If family needed a place to stay when they had business in town she could not refuse them. Noise, overcrowding and drinking would quickly pose a risk to her tenancy.⁴⁵

For Thatha, Orgki and Reuben, the loss of CDEP raised the question of where exactly the government's real jobs would come from, the ones paying '*... every day of the year.*' They knew there were very limited 'real' employment opportunities on remote, desert outstations. Orgki, Marie and Lee acknowledged there were jobs in Alice Springs but these were out of the reach of Western Arrernte people who had neither the qualifications, experience nor work skills to even begin the process of competing for one of these jobs. As it was impossible to travel to and from Alice Springs every day, jobs in town would mean finding accommodation. As Thatha noted, however, even if she could find cheap accommodation in Alice Springs there remained the prospect of tensions with non-Aboriginal residents or tensions within her family if she refused to help them out with a place to stay when they came to town.

⁴⁵ Alcohol had been banned under local ordinances in Hermannsburg and all but two of the outstations for many years prior to the Intervention. This did not mean that people did not drink, but with greater access to alcohol in Alice Springs, families living there were more likely to experience the consequences of binge drinking when family members came to town.

4.3.2 ‘Just spoilin’ everything up’: Incentives and work participation

In seeking to impose mainstream employment program requirements, the Commonwealth’s view was CDEP had ‘... *become a destination for too many*’ (Hockey & Brough 2007) and needed to be replaced. CDEP workers and those considered fit for employment were therefore registered with Centrelink and expected to participate in a *Work for the Dole* program to get them work ready. At Tjuwanpa, however, these actions undermined existing work arrangements, and the careful way in which outstation families had stitched together their lives and finances.

The Tjuwanpa Rangers were devastated at the prospect of being on Centrelink. Aboriginal families in the area spoke with pride about the Rangers and their achievements. Although the group had only been established in 2006, within 12 months they had won the Northern Territory’s Landcare Award. National Parks authorities had also publicly acknowledged the team’s valuable work on nearby national parks and visiting academics had begun collaborative research with the group. When news started filtering through that CDEP would be abolished and all CDEP workers would be required to go onto Centrelink payments, Ranger morale plummeted. Under the new regime the Rangers became welfare recipients. Their basic weekly take-home earnings dropped from \$490 to \$447 per fortnight.⁴⁶ They also lost ‘*top up*’ wages from contract work. Additional earnings, which had previously been permissible under CDEP, would affect the benefits paid by Centrelink. Previously, the combined income from a CDEP wage and top up salary had earned the men approximately \$800 per fortnight. This was almost twice the amount they would receive as Centrelink clients.

Soon after the closure of CDEP became news at Tjuwanpa, two of the Rangers, who had been with the group since its inception, discussed their prospects. Sitting at the table under the bough shelter, the men hung their heads.

⁴⁶ This was the approximate rate for a single adult.

Tom: With CDEP always we used to get 'top-up'. So we thought we might stick on the Tjuwanpa Rangers there ... when everything was alright ... and now it's terrible. With this Centrelink ... so you can't get 'top-up' now so...

Ngari: Make everything feel slack! Yep – no more 'top-up'. CDEP 'top-up' that we used to get means that we can spend it for car and all... and food and that. Used to be easy with work ... 'top-up' and that. Spend money for your own car, for rego and that – spare tyres. Now that Centrelink come up you (still) gotta spend money for wheels, for the tyres – and you can't put your car in the garage ... you can't get your tyre from the garage ... that cost money. That extra money you get (from 'top-up') you can spend on whatever you wanted. Clothes and that, or maybe big TV, aerial ... that kind a things.

Tom: Got a car and motorbike in the garage ... yeah, and got fines.

Ngari: Terrible. We'll have nothing in our pocket. No money for diesel to go back home. Got to have money for the car. You got to feed your car too! Might as well shift back to the creek there. Just spoilin' everything up. Work – now we can't get a 'top-up'. That's what makes you keep on workin'. It's good money. When this thing came it spoils everything. Plans – yeah ... can't go out to do Ranger work now. Spoiled the feeling for work. It's shame for us.

Without 'top-up' opportunities Ngari could no longer see the point in working. 'Top-up' money enabled him to buy things for his kids and run his car. With the car he could live on his outstation and travel into work. For Tom, earning the equivalent of a full time wage with 'top-up' income from contract work enabled him to start paying off a motorbike and handle repayment of outstanding vehicle fines.

Both men were on welfare benefits following the loss of CDEP. With fifty percent of Centrelink benefits subject to income management, the men knew that their discretionary income would no longer be adequate to meet these expenditures. Being on the dole Ngari felt shame. Orgki noted her brother was not the only one experiencing the humiliation of shame.

Especially for people that had proper jobs before you know. That's how they felt ... like from a higher income thing down to that \$200 a week you know.

She believed shame was a common feeling among those who went from CDEP onto Centrelink as they felt they could no longer provide for their families in the way they had previously. On the dole, the men also lost their status as workers.

In November 2007, when CDEP workers were transferred across to Centrelink, almost two thirds of the twenty-five Western Arrernte Rangers stopped working, refusing to comply with the two-day work rule required under Centrelink.

Thumbu: Yeah some of these other fellas they see if there is some more 'top-up' left and then they come in. If there's no 'top-up' they just don't come in.

Ngari: They'll say, 'Why we gotta work with you mob? We're on Centrelink. We're not getting paid to work!' Yeah ... and don't want to do tender work on Work for the Dole.

Thumbu and Ngari attributed the sudden drop in work participation not only to the loss of 'top-up', but also to understandings of what being on welfare meant. The men were no longer wage earners but welfare recipients. Despite the fact that the fifteen hours per week the men were required to work as part of their Centrelink obligations was the same number of hours they already worked for their CDEP wages, the men saw it as '*dole*' money – not a salary. Further, as the men risked having their Centrelink benefits reduced if they earned additional income, they saw no point in undertaking external work contracts. The drop in Ranger numbers had immediate consequences. Unable to rely on Rangers turning up for work the Tjuwanpa Ranger Coordinator was forced to cancel contracts for work in the nearby National Park.

4.3.3 'Just feel out of place': The discomfort of strangers

The closure of CDEP at Tjuwanpa also threatened existing mainstream jobs at the Resource Centre. Having had full-time work under CDEP, Thatha was extremely anxious about how she would fit in a world requiring her to leave her family, her home and her country.

Just feel out of place. I mean with all these things going...just don't know where to fit in. Yeah, it's just ... you don't know where to fit in when

everything's pullin' you or pushin' you back ... hmm. You just feel out of place with everything goin' on. It's just been a quick thing. I mean, everything's been pushed real fast. Hmm. You dunno what to do. Do you wanna get out of here? Or just ... don't know what to do.

I mean, I feel real comfortable here you know, myself. You're with the families. You know who you workin' with and you know everybody you know... in the whole community, and the people. But if you go somewhere else you just feel uncomfortable. It's just ... I mean you'll be missin' out on your family if you go somewhere else you know. But I was here and we grew up with our family ... and our grandparents left us here so that's why I just wanna stay here. Yeah.

From where she stood her future employment prospects looked bleak.

There won't be anything around here ... for a proper job. Like me ... I might be lookin' for a proper job you know! And there won't be any jobs around here 'cause we only got a small community here ... it's not really big. Like the number of people that's employed, not ten people in one job you know.... there's only enough room for one or two ... like in the health clinic 'n' that ... or the school ... 'cause they've got enough people there workin' already.

There were no full time vacancies for a woman existing in the limited labour market in Hermannsburg.

It was not only her lack of experience and qualifications that had Thatha worried about getting a job in Alice Springs. She was also concerned she would not feel comfortable in the work environments there, as everyone was a stranger. She wanted to be in a job where she was working with her own people – where she knew the situation, the family ways, the language; and where her work was acknowledged by her community.

I'm feeling real happy where I am, workin' my own family you know, with my own side. It makes me feel comfortable and you know the people who you're workin' with, who you're talking with you know. You got your language to explain to the people. Like, people are proud of us workin' as an Aboriginal here you know, with our language and our knowledge.

Language, family ... and you know what they are and you know about them. And you know about the people as well which...and everybody is family to you. I mean ... um ... workin' with other people, you know, it's not going to be real comfortable. Like people you work with (now) you feel like you fitted in – you work with others n' you feel unsafe or something.

What was also important to Thatha in her workplace was the help she got from family with childcare. Five-year old Daniel was old enough to stay with other members of the family and although she breastfed her new baby girl, Thatha could leave her at home with her sisters or cousins when she came to work. Sometimes, like other young staff with children, she would bring the baby to work with her, wheeling the pram through the sand between her house and the Resource Centre. She kept a blue mattress in a corner of her office so she could lie down with the baby to feed her and get her to sleep.

For families at Tjuwanpa who relied on Resource Centre salaries or the 'top-up' income permitted under CDEP provisions, the loss of CDEP not only threatened their financial futures, but also their emotional security. Feelings of self worth were replaced with shame, despondency and anxiety about how they would manage in the future. There were fines to pay, cars to run, kids to pay for, childcare arrangements to think about, and above all – the prospect of a future where a paid job in town jeopardised feeling secure, comfortable and safe at home with family.

In transferring CDEP participants onto Centrelink the Howard Government aimed to subject the Aboriginal population in the Northern Territory to mainstream work participation requirements and income management. Effectively, this undermined existing work arrangements in the limited desert economy by closing down provisions to augment salaries with 'top-up' and threatened the future of those with existing jobs at the Resource Centre. At Tjuwanpa, work was no longer secure or a means of earning a real wage. On Centrelink, workers felt humiliated. Faced with less earnings or the prospect of having to leave their families, workers at Tjuwanpa were extremely anxious about their futures.

4.3.4 'Something to do and something to learn': The value of work

When CDEP at Tjuwanpa stopped in November 2007 Ranger work ground to a halt. Within weeks, however, 10 of the original 25 members of the team were back at work – not only meeting their 15 hour per week Centrelink requirement but working an additional three days without pay. Among them were Ngari, Tom and Thumbu. Less than two months earlier two of these men had described participating in *Work for the Dole* as sit-down money, yet they were now meeting their 15 hour per week work participation requirement and working an additional three days on Ranger projects for no pay at all. They laughed when I asked why.

Ngari: We're still on Centrelink and we're still workin' 8 to 5.

Thumbu: Yeah, still working 8 to 5.

Ngari: We're not complainin' that we're not getting paid. Yeah ... just (getting) Centrelink money.

Tom: Least we're getting something.

Ngari: We're still waitin' for that full-time money to come.

Thumbu: It's just something that we like doing.

Number of voices: It's too boring just staying at home. Nothing to do!

The key to the group's motivation was the promise of '... *that full-time money*' coming through under the Commonwealth's *Caring for our Country* initiative. Just after CDEP closed at Tjuwanpa in November 2007, the Tjuwanpa Rangers were notified that two full-time *Caring for our Country* funded Ranger salaries had been approved. A further eight part-time positions were in the pipeline. The ten successful applicants for these positions wanted to ensure they got these jobs once funding was released. Ranger positions in the area were highly prized and the men did not want to lose the opportunity of eventually earning real wages in a real job on country. Besides which, staying at home was now boring!

Money and avoiding boredom were not, however, the only incentives. Ranger jobs had other significant benefits fitting with Aboriginal aspirations and responsibilities.

Ngari: It's special 'cause you can go anywhere.

Thumbu: Yeah you can go anywhere. Yeah, as long as you go and do things instead a stayin' in the same spot getting money for nothing. And we learning different things that we didn't know about before ... yeah. Rare lizards that we didn't even know existed in this area! Slater's skink ... we found out about those lizards yeah. We found that workin' with National Parks. Yeah ... somethin' to do.

Ngari: Something to do and something to learn. Parks and Wildlife ... Tryin' to learn to look after the country and that. And go out and do different things!

Thumbu: Yeah, just learning different things ... It makes it easier workin' with family you know. Yeah if you work with family, makes it more comfortable ... makes you do things as well. It just feels good workin' with family. Yeah. Sorta like, just come out ... just feels good. It just feels good workin' with family. Yeah, real comfortable.

Annie: But the Ranger Coordinator, he's not family.

Thumbu: But we've been working with him for a while now.

Ngari: He's like family now.

Thumbu: We're used to him ... yeah.

Ngari: How long has it been now ... 18 months? More than that – nearly two years now! He's one of us now. One of us.

The men engaged with work because they loved the work they were doing. Ranger projects enabled them to foster their knowledge of country and their relationship with it. They were learning new things; they were meeting their responsibilities for country; they were supporting their families; they were respected in the community, and they were having *fun*. Because they were working with family, they were also feeling comfortable. Having worked with the men for more than two years the Ranger Coordinator was also considered family. A job was not just employment in a work task. It had meanings and feelings and family attached to it.

4.3.5 'Family Way': The role of family in work

Family played many roles in the way outstation workers encountered employment.

An example of how family inter-related with work was seen in the FaHCSIA offer to Tjuwanpa to fund four new Aboriginal essential services positions. This commitment came as part of Commonwealth's promise to find real jobs for 2,000 of the 6,000 workers who were to come off CDEP wages (Brough & Hockey 2007).

In November 2007, the FACSIA office in Alice Springs informed Tjuwanpa that it would fund an additional four essential services positions as part of the Commonwealth's commitment to expanding Indigenous employment for CDEP participants. It gave the Manager twenty-four hours to recruit candidates and send in their names. In the Western Arrernte outstation context, the practical and cultural issues needing consideration made this timeframe impossible. Johnson, one of the senior men on the works team, was involved in the recruitment. He explained some of the complexities. His first consideration was the cultural competence needed to work on country.

Like here ... everybody here we know. If you got young fellas just want to work you gotta straighten him out. *'You gotta respect this old fella ... if you working with him. This is your aunty's country again. This is your family line, you gotta respect it. Don't go round burnin' trees⁴⁷ ... and ask where you gotta go.'*

In addition to considering work readiness and technical competence, Johnson took for granted he would have to recruit from within family groups. This could not be just any person. Working on country required knowledge of country and respect for burial sites and sacred sites. Only a man with the rights to country through his *'family line'* or spiritual knowledge could undertake work in particular areas. When the four men were selected for the new works positions at Tjuwanpa, the senior men on the Works Team had to carefully consider the fit of the recruits in terms of family and totemic associations across the five Land Trusts. They also had to assess the readiness of the younger recruits to have access to privileged knowledge appropriate to these connections. They had to be *'family way'* to be privileged with this knowledge and they would need this knowledge when they

⁴⁷ Some trees have spiritual significance.

worked on country.

Johnson also needed to consider who wanted to work and learn. Finally, he had to decide if this was someone he could trust on the job.

You need competent people to stay out there (in the desert), to follow you around and work. They gotta have confidence in themselves and their worker. 'Cause that little work what we do, it might look easy, but when you do it, it's mind blowing really if you're not knowin' what to do. It can be a dangerous job. Like muckin' around with the solar system and then just... something blow up. They need to learn to that stage where they can carry on with that fellow, with the team leader. You gotta make it interesting for them to work. And when they find it pretty hard, with that knowledge and thinkin' about it, you can let 'em slacken off.

You pick somebody ... competence you know ... some young fellas that wants to learn. You gotta pick them out. You'll pick that fella 'cause he's your nephew's son, you know. I'll take him and probably he'll learn more better ... yeah, he's family way.

In addition to kin affiliations and willingness and capacity to do the job, recruitment also needed to consider practical matters impacting on families. Recruits had to have access to a car and a current driver's license. This could not be assumed at Tjuwanpa. Many men had lost licenses or had them suspended due to non-payment of fines or driving offences. Bringing the only outstation car to work could also potentially leave other family members on the outstation without transport in the event of an emergency. As the wages offered were low, the Manager also needed to take into consideration the impact of the men's salary on any Centrelink payments their female partners might be receiving to ensure their families would not be worse off financially as a result of taking up work.

4.3.6 'Uncles push them': Family sociality

Family also played a vital role in influencing decisions to take up work. According to Ngulpa and Orgki, the uncles had played a critical role in encouraging their sons to join the Rangers team.

Ngulpa: Like for my son.... they (the uncles) really wanted him to go in with them to work (with the Rangers). He was long way from them. So they could be close workin' together.

Thatha: That's the family gettin'... putting the pressure ...

Orgki: 'Cause he's younger than the elder brothers ... he's only young one and that's why, they push the younger ones ...

Thatha: To get involved ...

Ngulpa: Pull 'em along...huh huh

Orgki: To learn what they know. Like workwise. That's how they bring in the young ones ... and teach them and make them keep goin'.

Thatha: So it's the family pushing anyway.

Ngulpa: That's right ... pushing 'em.

Thatha: The family ...

Orgki: It even happened to my son too you know. He was on marijuana, just drinkin' and all that, and the uncles, yeah ...

Thatha: Really forced him to ...

Orgki: To be where he is now, you know. He never misses out. He's gotta be out of bed before they get to the front gate of the outstation. Every morning they used to beep the horn from the gate, and stop with their foot up. And my son had to be out of bed before that car came and pulled up. Uh huh, that's true! So they (the uncles) stay with him now.

Thatha: He's not that same one that we knew before.

Ngulpa: Different ...

Orgki: He made a big change!

The uncles were also instrumental in creating a work environment in which younger men felt safe.

Orgki: Well, the way that we look at it its sorta like family – family to family. Like Solomon, he set up his own little thing at Tjuwanpa to bring in his crew. And with Tjuwanpa Rangers, it's the family as well, and they bring in their other family members. They don't go and get involved with what Solomon's doin'. And Solomon doesn't come and get involved in what

they're doin'. It's just sorta like little separate organisation sorta thing.

Thatha: Just feeling like family group ...

Orgki: They more safer ... like what we were sayin' before. They feel more safe workin' together. They can growl at one another, you know. Like my brother, as a supervisor or whatever, he can supervise his crew ...

Thatha: 'Cause that's his family, you know ...

In a kin-based team, rightful authority could be applied. The uncles in the Ranger team could tell the younger men in the family what to do without the risk the new recruits would walk away. Younger men felt safe in an environment where their roles, behaviours, and relationships with the older men were clearly structured. Kin groups could exert authority. Kin could also manage a worker's mistake in ways minimising the risk of shame, experienced when someone felt exposed or humiliated in a group context. These patterns were also evident on the Works Team, where Solomon had been able to get jobs for two of his sons and his son-in-law Lex. Work teams at Tjuwanpa therefore aligned along family lines, with recruitment considering family connectedness when new members were brought onto a team.

It was Lex's children, however, who were the driving force behind his decision to apply for one of the new jobs. Lex had two children of his own and fostered seven nieces and nephews. Two of the three youngest children were in primary school in Hermannsburg, with the older teenagers at the Aboriginal boarding school in Alice Springs. As his job meant he could afford a car, Lex's children could live with him on the outstation and travel daily into school. The car enabled him to travel the 20-kilometre dirt road from the outstation to Hermannsburg, drop the children at school in Hermannsburg on his way to work, and pick them up again in the afternoon. They no longer had to live with other family members in Hermannsburg. As he didn't believe Hermannsburg was a safe place for children, Lex was emphatic about not wanting the children living there.

Lex also wanted his children to understand the importance of work.

I took the job on because you gotta work these days. Not these days ... all the time. It's like for your family. You gotta keep going for your family.

'Cause we got a lot a kids out there ... we have to. It's all right, but you have to do something with yourself. Show your kids that you can work so that encourages them to look for work too. It's like a role model. That's what it is...it's mainly about family. You gotta show your kids that you...show them you are a role model and that can work later in life when they get older. Don't lay around and be like a bum.

Thatha expressed similar sentiments, explaining it was not till the birth of her first child in her late 20s that she seriously considered trying to find work. She wanted her son to be proud of her. Solomon, who had once been a heavy drinker, gave up alcohol and also took up full-time work when his first grandchild was born. He wanted his grandchildren to grow up respecting him.

Lex thought himself lucky to get one of the new jobs. The chance for a full-time salary meant he no longer relied on occasional 'top-up' money to augment his CDEP wage. Like the Rangers, the knowledge this was a job that was valued in the community was also a significant incentive.

I wanted to work full time instead of bein' on 'top-up' wages ... wasn't worth it. It's not really ... you got the level of your pay on CDEP wages and then you got your 'top-up'. It's not really doing full-time work ... it's not ... and here it's different. You're doing full time work...you're getting recognised properly ... like in the workforce. It's not like the workforce like when you're on CDEP... working for CDEP. You only get top up every now and then but here you're in the workforce properly.

Kin relationships and family responsibilities were thus significant considerations in the work environment at Tjuwanpa. Relationships to family and to country featured in individual and administrative decisions about employment. These aspects of suitability for a job went well beyond the assessment of technical competence or work readiness sought by the government. Recruitment took into account a man's right to be on particular areas of country and his preparedness to learn about country. These factors sat alongside assessments of his readiness to learn new skills and his willingness to be supervised by older men in the family.

Family also played a critical role in influencing decisions about taking up work. One could run the risk of being ‘*growled*’ by family, older men in the family had recognised authority to teach younger men, and could do so without shaming them for their ignorance. Obtaining a valued job could earn the respect of other family members. The presence of family in the work environment could also encourage the take up of jobs by younger members. Salaried positions meant having access to cars and housing, which in turn enabled people to control the kind of environments in which their children lived.

4.4 Conclusion

Consideration of family and country ran as the current against which outstation families responded to the loss of CDEP jobs and the promise of new work and training opportunities. Training was valued –particularly if it targeted young people or resulted in recognition of qualifications enabling workers to move to areas where other family members were located. Work brought pride and feelings of being valued by other family members and modeled desirable behaviours to children. Work gave families the means to purchase the vehicles and power supplies needed for outstation living – an environment in which families felt children were safer and in which they could better control who came and went. With cash in their pockets, men could buy a motorbike or a stereo and women could meet the demands of teenagers for the latest clothes or gadgets. More work opportunities were therefore wanted, as was accredited training to recognise skills.

Engagement in work and training, however, was conditional on environments fostering Western Arrernte relationality and sociality, or supporting Western Arrernte aspirations for their lives. Within weeks of its introduction, there was clear evidence the Centrelink work participation requirements at Hermannsburg and Tjuwanpa had failed. People simply did not turn up to work when the dole was their only incentive. Further, despite the prospect of remaining on Centrelink and being subject to income management, there was no overwhelming rush by outstation families to move into areas of high labour demand such as Alice

Springs to get work. Not one person in the area took up a mobility incentive. Outstation families did, however, take up the new ‘real’ work opportunities available locally. Ten men worked unpaid for three additional days per week over four months to position themselves for jobs coming on-stream with the Tjuwanpa Rangers. As other jobs were rolled out, outstation families positioned one or more family members in the positions being created in Hermannsburg and at Tjuwanpa.

Local employment represented a chance to associate with and learn on country, to be with family, and to communicate in the Western Arrernte language. Work in the Tjuwanpa environment also provided a known environment, in which people felt comfortable and safe in the context of known social norms and spiritual relationships to country. Individual decisions to engage in work and training therefore considered whether these environments engendered feelings of comfort, recognition and safety through familial environments, or the opportunity to foster or extend relationships with kin and country. Faced with the prospect their jobs would be lost with the closure of CDEP, Thatha and the Rangers saw the reforms unraveling the structures they had put in place to enable them to live in the remote desert context that was home. It was not just the loss of cash needed for vehicles or the problem of accommodation, but how work would impact on social and cultural relationships within which work and training had meaning.

Further, people were pragmatic about the realities of finding and holding a job in Alice Springs. There were enormous language hurdles to overcome. They would need training certificates they could not obtain. Outstation work experience would not constitute a work resume. Even if they got a job in Alice Springs, transport or cheap housing was needed. In Alice Springs people would have to also face the humiliation of racial discrimination or work alongside strangers, raising fears of shame.

Regardless of whether jobs were threatened by the loss of CDEP, whether rules were introduced penalising people for not participating in work readiness and training programs, or whether new employment opportunities presented – outstation responses highlight how engagement in work and training took into account inter-linked practical, emotional and cultural considerations. These

considerations were intrinsically linked to Western Arrernte values and social norms enabling people to feel safe, comfortable and valued.

These factors, however, played no role in the design of the Commonwealth's Indigenous employment and training reforms. Responsibility was constructed as personal responsibility to the wider Australian society, not as individual responsibility to family and country. In return for Centrelink income support, one had to engage in work or job readiness activities regardless of economic returns, social benefits, the practicalities of life in a remote setting – or one's feelings. Rather than considering the characteristics of the environments in which Western Arrernte people might feel comfortable and safe, and within which work and training had meaning, the Commonwealth emphasised the power of the market to deliver skills that would see people made job ready, and the power of sanctions – not family, to force them to participate.

Chapter 5: Standin' Up and Speakin' Out

5.1 Introduction

Although outstation families interpreted the reforms under the Northern Territory Intervention through their responsibilities for country, social relationships, and the future of their children's knowledge and identity, the values and concerns articulated in the previous chapters were voiced in private – and rarely spoken about in the public domain. Sovariel, Thatha, Solomon and Orgki often talked about coming together as an outstation group to raise their concerns with government. It was, however, a '*should*' rather than a '*could*'. Even when people did come together for community meetings most outstation participants remained silent.

This silence did not lie in their lack of interest or disengagement from the events shaping outstation lives. Outstation families privately expressed views following community meetings, which showed them thinking deeply about how the Commonwealth reforms would impact on family circumstances and their children's futures. The narratives in this chapter therefore reflect the social dynamics at play in interactions between Western Arrernte and well-meaning outsiders leading to this silence. The lens here is on outstation engagement *with* agents of the state. Drawing on narratives occurring in everyday encounters – in training workshops, work environments, interviews and meetings, this chapter reveals the normative codes at play during outstation social interactions within kin groups and those outside the family domain.

These narratives also illustrate how the Commonwealth failed to recognise the social norms prevailing in the conduct of government consultations, with

outstation families describing how the needs of Indigenous first language speakers and the norms governing the conduct of Western Arrernte social relationships were ignored. Also ignored were their concerns and interests. This had extremely significant consequence for outstation families, impacting on their capacity to participate in government programs and projects and to understand government intention. Government failure to take into account the social dynamics at play in Western Arrernte interactions also impacted on Western Arrernte rights to represent their interests to the broader world and have a meaningful voice in negotiating their futures. As seen in this chapter, the government set the agenda and terms for change and Western Arrernte families waited to see what would happen next.

5.2 ‘Everybody shoulda been here’: Recognising the need for voice

When outstation families were told of an important community meeting, often with only two or three days advance notice, a surprising number of cars would arrive at the Resource Centre. Trips to town would be postponed and workers would lay down their tools. Families gathered around the bough shelter but few spoke. Although meetings were vitally important as a means to understand what was taking place, outstation families often complained later that they did not know why they bothered to go. As the outstation accounts here illustrate, families were not indifferent to the need to represent their position.

Over the two years of this study, Solomon repeatedly talked about outstation people coming together as a united front to fight for their interests and voice their concerns.

People just gotta start talkin’ strong you know ... just talk strong and just have one power. It’s not gonna be just the people from outside come and kick you out and say, ‘*We takin’ over this place.*’ No! You gotta think – ‘*This is the land that I got for myself, for my children, for my grandkids... that is the future.*’. You gotta be careful! Otherwise you be walkin’ out that bloody gate there with a swag on your back! If you don’t do it properly,

then you're outta there! (laughs) ... that's the road there!

This thing. We gotta think about how ... more likely how we gotta start a new future. ... you gotta be strong and talk strong ... but with all a these changes it's gonna be sorta like fight ... more likely you gotta wear boxing gloves to approach 'em! The fight you gonna have is by talking ... that's all (laughs) ... that's my idea you know. That's what – all these outstation people shoulda come to these meetings ... to discuss what they got on their agenda there for their future you know. See it's just that it's gonna be pretty hard you know ... it's pretty hard!

With his family's future at stake, Solomon could see a fight ahead – a fight that would be conducted with words and needed collective action. From the beginning he felt this fight was going to be impossible to win.

Thatha was also worried about the fact no one was standing up for Tjuwanpa's future. Working in the Tjuwanpa office, Thatha understood how the loss of CDEP would impact on family financial arrangements and outstation services. Listening to day-to-day conversations as people came in to do business at the Resource Centre office, Thatha also knew families were deeply worried about the Hermannsburg lease. As more information on the details of the township lease, income management and the CDEP changes became available, Thatha wondered how outstation families could influence the course of events.

It's about time people gathered together and standing up for Tjuwanpa as well you know, instead of just gettin' scared ... just get up together and talk up for their own future if they gonna continue their lives on their outstations. Hmm. It's just people gotta wake up to themselves.

It was quite clear to Thatha the government had the upper hand. She also knew people were frightened. The only way she felt this was going to change was if people like her sat in meetings and refused to be bullied.

I don't know ... gettin' up and talkin'... maybe go wherever these things are goin' on....go to that meetings, just stand up and talk ... and be strong. I mean you can't have two (outstation) people going out there tryin' to beat about ten (government) people there ... you gotta be pretty strong

to do that kind of things. Yeah. So, just need to get strong people ...I mean people to get stronger. (Laughs) It's just that people gotta get strong ... just don't grow weak.

It's just, you know ... it's just us people to be ... I mean we gotta ... instead of you mob pushing us we gotta try 'n' stand up and push them back as well, and go and sit on their seats. (Laughs). And *rock* the joint! (Laughs). Yeah, I mean ... we can always go push me and pull me you know ... instead of just getting pushed one side, you gotta push back again. Just be – try and get in the middle.

Sovariel was a quiet man. He loved breaking in horses and was a talented rider. Sovariel could often be found painting his Dreamtime story, sitting beside his wife at the Tjuwanpa Art Centre. Although he tended to keep to himself, Sovariel felt the issue was not that people did not or would not come together. Nor did he believe families were mute on the subject of the NTER reforms. The problem he saw was people's struggle to understand what was taking place.

They don't really understand what it is ... that's coming to us. Some people thinkin', '*What's this comin' to?*' But we don't know. We need the right people to explain. It's very important we don't know what it is! I don't know, but I really like to understand what comin' towards me. I think it's good to understand what more's coming ... learn and understand what is happening. We not ready yet ... (we need) time to set up ... finding it very hard to understand.

Although he too believed outstation families needed to come together, he also saw in their silence a belief that the government wasn't listening.

The way I see it, government ... what they gonna do to hear the outstation people? They (the outstation people) won't stand up and say, '*Tjuwanpa is getting' stronger and stronger ... young people got work to do.*' ... this and that. They just sat there.

We have to work together. Are we going to ask questions about what's coming in and going out ... what's coming in and pushing out? We gotta face government when they take over. We'll have to make a meeting; a big

community meeting. Like a lot of people got their different ideas but they think; *'Why should I go and listen to people ... for no reason'*.

The problem as Sovariel saw it was twofold. The government was failing to explain the meaning of the reforms and was also not prepared to hear outstation views on what was at stake for them. Families therefore saw government meetings as pointless and this perception stymied efforts to speak with a collective outstation voice.

Time and time again during the two years of this study outstation residents and family leaders talked about the need to come together. *'Everybody shoulda been here!'* *'We shoulda all come together...'* *'You gotta be here to understand all a this!'* *'We gotta face government when they take over.'* But getting support, as Thatha, Solomon, and Sovariel pointed out, families would first need to understand government intentions, have someone able to negotiate on their behalf in English, have time to get organised, and trust they would be listened to.

5.3 Communicating message and meaning

Despite Thatha understanding the importance of having outstation representatives *'getting in the middle to rock the joint'*, Tjuwanpa's outstation families faced huge obstacles in doing so. A critical issue was the failure of the government to recognise the language needs of first language speakers.

In the Western Arrernte context English is a second, third or fourth language⁴⁸ for approximately 90 percent of the outstation and Hermannsburg population (ABS 2006b). In phone calls, conversations and encounters with strangers, outstation families risked being misunderstood. They also risked misunderstanding what was

⁴⁸ Apart from Lex on the Works team, who hailed from an Aboriginal family interstate, and one local outstation family, Western Arrernte was the first language for the outstation population. Western Arrernte people may speak or understand other Central Desert languages such as Pitjantjatjara, Luritja or Warlpiri.

said or saying the wrong thing.

For Western Arrernte, these interactions brought with them the possibility of shame. Encounters with strangers, authority figures and members of the opposite sex also give rise to the prospect of shame. Silence or withdrawal was often a logical response to the fear created by language and cultural norms in contexts where Western Arrernte people might experience shame. Family interpreters were relied on, however, they could also exacerbate the problem. Dissent and disunity merged with frustration when local interpreters attempted to communicate both ways.

As people came to community meetings and attended Centrelink or Job Network Provider interviews, Thatha, Julia, Orgki, Solomon and Lee describe some of the dynamics of everyday encounters impacting on the way outstation families communicated and represented themselves to government authorities.

5.3.1 ‘You talk, you talk, you talk!’: Encountering English

From the time the Howard Government first announced its Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory on 21 June 2007, a plethora of new words and acronyms had entered the bush. Under the ‘*Intervention*’ people heard jobs would be ‘*normalised*’ and ‘*mainstreamed*’; there would be ‘*compulsory acquisition*’ of Aboriginal land under ‘*township leases*’; people would be ‘*transitioned*’ off CDEP, and Centrelink benefits would be ‘*quarantined*’. Thatha was cranky about the government’s failure to recognise people’s difficulties with English.

That’s how people get mixed up. It’s alright for some ... but old people don’t understand. They should explain properly. And instead a explainin’ in plain English they just use the hard words. *Plain English* instead of hard words! They should use simple words n’ go back ‘n’ explain. Like some words I can’t understand myself. They don’t want a dictionary you know. ‘*What’s this word here? What does it mean?*’

If she couldn’t understand what was being said, Thatha believed it was likely many people were confused about what was happening under the Intervention. She

knew the word '*normal*' but what did it mean to '*normalise*' a job? A '*Shire*' was a new word entirely but she wasn't sure how it related to the Intervention.⁴⁹ According to Thatha, the government visitors only wanted to rush off to their next meeting or head back to Alice Springs.

An event at one of the outstations sparked a conversation between Orgki, Thatha and Ngulpa. This sheds light on some of the complexities involved for Western Arrernte in English language encounters. In this example, an electrical contractor was brought in to repair a fault on one of the outstation power poles. The family had come into the Tjuwanpa office some days earlier to report the problem. After driving the 130 kilometres or so from Alice Springs the contractor drove straight to the outstation. After examining the fuses he found no fault and returned to Alice Springs, informing the Resource Centre there was no evidence of a problem. He then invoiced the Resource Centre \$1,300 for his time and travel costs. Not knowing the local geography, he had gone to the wrong outstation. The residents from the adjacent outstation who were experiencing the problem had watched the truck go by, but did not follow the contractor to advise him he was in the wrong place. The next day the outstation family returned to the Tjuwanpa office complaining the contractor was '*rubbish*'. He didn't do anything. The contractor made a second visit at a further cost to the Resource Centre of approximately \$1,500.

Some weeks later Orgki, Ngulpa and Thatha responded to my queries about this event by illustrating Western Arrernte behaviours during encounters with people they don't know.

Ngulpa: Well ... if it was Al ... (the Tjuwanpa Works Coordinator), they would sing out for him.

Orgki: Yeah it happened to me too. Like with my brothers they stand me in front. When somebody goes out to the outstation and I'm there, and they are talkin' to that white people, they all come runnin' to me. '*Hey,*

⁴⁹ It was not until we talked some time later that Thatha became aware that there were three levels of government, not just one.

there's white fella comin' here, white fella comin'!, and they just stand me in front. Yeah, that's what it's like. They select certain people

Thatha: Like you can see Connie is always ringin' up (the Tjuwanpa office) ... and she's always talkin' for her family members.

In English language encounters, people relied on a family member like Orgki or Connie. Both women had been educated at boarding schools and had confidence communicating in English.

As the women noted, however, speaking with outsiders also depended on how well families knew the person.

Orgki: When Al first come here, he wanted family ... it was like brothers and sisters. My brothers were the first to communicate with him and now they've got that bond to speak to him in whatever language they want to speak to him. It doesn't matter. So they feel comfortable and safe.

That's why, and they look at themselves, well this is my point of view of my brothers ... like if the person has white coloured skin, then they can't speak with that person. Well to be honest, they might speak and make a mistake in their language. But like with Al, if they have to communicate with Al ...

Thatha: They're all over him!

Orgki: My brothers, they can speak English but ... shame job. They get shame to talk to strangers

If it were Al going past in the truck to the wrong outstation, the family would have had no hesitation in calling him back. Everybody knew Al. Although he did not speak Western Arrernte, for Orgki and her brothers Al was comfortable and safe – just like family.

Language differences meant individuals would not speak in public for fear of appearing standing out. Although Solomon was happy to chat with those he knew and felt comfortable with, this was not the case in public situations. There, he explained, he was reluctant to seek clarification of words and concepts he did not understand.

You can ask someone what their word means ... but privately though.

'Specially in public you can get thing ... bit shy. But round the back you can (ask), 'Excuse me, can you tell me what was that word?'

This pattern of interaction was evident at the Tjuwanpa office. When reporting a technical problem or making an appeal for help, families would organise to be represented by a family member with English language proficiency. Characteristically this person was someone with whom they felt '*comfortable and safe*'. Coming from an Aboriginal family interstate and marrying into an outstation family, part of Lex's role was to broker English language communications with work supervisors on behalf of other staff on the Works team such as Gordon. Although Gordon would happily chat to the Manager when he arrived at the office, he would ask Lex to do the talking when it came to ordering equipment or parts for vehicles.

It's more like they're broken a bit ... their English. They can talk but not really clear. They need a clear voice to speak. They're a bit frightened inside to bring it out. They're not confident in themselves. Yeah ... that's what's a big downfall out in the bush. It's ... they're not really confident when they speak ... they're frightened they might speak something different that sounds funny from their broken English. It's a bit difficult ...like with Gordon. He's too frightened ... he's too frightened to talk for himself.

If you're comfortable round that person, then you speak free ... and that person will talk free to you. He's not frightened to talk in broken English 'cause it's more comfortable for him. Like Gordon, he's not good in speaking English cause he's a bit broken, but he's comfortable around me and I can encourage them on. 'Cause when they ring up they too frightened to talk to a person who speaks English. They want talk to someone else ... like a local, 'n' let the local know 'n' the local can communicate it to the Manager.

Language differences brought the fear of not being understood when people did try to speak up. Although Julia had been sent away to live with a non-Aboriginal mission family in South Australia as a young child – and subsequently spoke

English as her first language, she still lacked confidence with English communications, particularly in front of other Aboriginal English speakers.

Sometimes you have these ... some of these half-caste people in town you know, they know a bit more than you and ... so we're a bit frightened of speaking out. Maybe the language of how to pronounce it ... how to say things ... yeah.

Julia therefore understood why some people feared speaking out. She also understood the frustration of those who had something to say but because of poor English language capacity were not understood in community meetings.

And, it's the understanding of people (who are listening). 'Cause some strong people are ... you know even though they got broken up English they do understand and speak out. But it's just for other people to understand what they say. Even with the old people, they get so frustrated of not knowing the English very well ... of wanting to bring that out to you know ... and they (outsiders) don't hear what they (older people) want to bring out.

Language differences created the possibility of a mistake and led to feelings of shame, silence or the possible frustration of being misunderstood. Speaking '*broken*' English with a stranger or making a mistake with someone in a position of authority like the Tjuwanpa Manager, risked feeling shame. Making a mistake was safe, however, if you felt comfortable with someone. Family was comfortable, or someone such as Lex or Al who were accepted as family. Speaking up therefore fell to English language speakers like Lex, Connie or Orgki who brokered communications on behalf of their family or work team.

At all of the government meetings during the two years of this study, visiting officers tended to use acronyms, complex sentence structures and new concepts, which left outstation families with little comprehension about what was taking place. Fearful of shame in the event of misunderstanding, making a mistake or being misunderstood in the presence of strangers; people were reluctant to ask questions of visitors. Silence was usually the preferred alternative, particularly when there was no time to prepare a speaker who could broker the family's views.

5.3.2 ‘Other people don’t understand what they say’:

Problems with interpreters

Use of professional interpreters would seem a logical response to Indigenous first language speaker encounters with English. Despite the complexity of the reforms taking place through 2007 and 2008, interpreters were rarely used. With only one qualified paraprofessional Western Arrernte interpreter available in the Hermannsburg area, those considered to have a good grasp of English were often asked by government officials to help – usually without notice or prior preparation.

An issue for government officials was their inexperience in using interpreters.⁵⁰ In one meeting I observed in Hermannsburg, for example, Nungari was asked by government staff to interpret just before a meeting started. She was not aware of the meeting agenda, nor was she familiar with the concepts and acronyms being used. She agreed to help only to find those leading the meeting talked without stopping. After ten minutes I suggested they give Nungari the opportunity to interpret. In response to my request they did so, with Nungari summarising in a few brief sentences what had taken place over the previous ten minutes. This done, the visitors ignored Nungari for the remainder of the meeting.

Even when local people with some fluency in English were used as interpreters, other Western Arrernte participants complained of inaccuracies. After participating in a briefing meeting about the local government reforms in Hermannsburg, Solomon came back to the Resource Centre office shaking his head.

Let me tell you about that language. You got an interpreter ... but then that person doesn’t understand and say it proper ... he doesn’t translate it proper to the English. There’s some sorta problem with understanding there. That translator doesn’t understand that word proper so there’s a little misunderstanding between the translator and the (non-Aboriginal)

⁵⁰ Having worked across much of SE Asia and the Pacific for 30 years I have extensive experience using interpreters. I have also acted as a Thai interpreter.

person doing the interview.

Solomon was not the only person to speak about the extent to which Aboriginal interpreters inaccurately translated what was said. Orgki put the problem down to a lack of interpreter training.

There's hardly been any training for interpreting. Like, to face the European side a the thing you know, you might also make a mistake. And then, maybe somebody that stands on the side of you understands what that person (the non Aboriginal person) is really talkin' about and you might take that (what they're saying) on the wrong way and ... then that's when the harassment starts. Some people might start arguin' 'n' things...

Orgki's concern was that people heard and understood English communications differently. This could cause conflict over meanings and accuracy, in turn impacting on family and community relationships.

As the Tjuwanpa Centrelink agent Lee was always in the middle of Western Arrernte-English encounters as she helped people negotiate issues with government payments, banks and other institutions. As news filtered through of income management and the transfer of CDEP workers on to the Centrelink system, Lee became extremely anxious.

The job of dealing with all these changes will fall on the interpreters ... so all of the complainin' will come to me. It's gonna fall back on us 'cause they'll (Centrelink) still be reliant on us for help, because the government won't understand what the Aboriginal person is talkin' about and the Aboriginal person won't understand what the government wants.

When income management and the transfer of CDEP workers on to the Centrelink system was introduced, Lee was subsequently faced with a myriad of requests from families for help negotiating with the department for proof of identity, new arrangements with banks to pay off loans and debts, and registration on the Centrelink system. These demands put enormous pressure on her.

Not only did the burden of explaining and facilitating these changes fall on Lee, but she also experienced the brunt of people's anger when expected Centrelink

payments did not arrive in bank accounts.

Like we tryin' to tell them (Centrelink clients) to ... you know, sign up for themselves. Teach them how to make ... you know, call Centrelink and do things for themselves for a change. That's why we're there for...tell them, *'You have to give them a call!'* But I dunno, everybody is too shame ... too shy.

And, you know just ... (income management) is makin' people wild! I got ... has one person ... let's say my uncle. (He says), *'Eh, how come my payment was less?'* I told him, *'It's not us – it's the Centrelink mob ... the government. Don't argue with us! We got nothing to do (with it).'* I just told them straight.

The issue of interpreters is therefore no easy matter. While governments have begun to recognise the need for interpreter training in the Northern Territory (NTG 2009), it is not simply a case of training more people. Interpreters themselves are not immune to the prospect of shame particularly given the possibility that they, like Julia, lack confidence in their language abilities. Further, local interpreters also risk a breakdown in important family relationships. At the Resource Centre they faced hostility or anger when seen to be communicating the wrong message or when forced to be the bearer of bad news. The experience at Tjuwanpa also indicates few government officials recognised the need to use interpreters. Nor did they understand an interpreter's need for preparation or have the skills to work with them.

5.3.3 'Shame Job': Breaching cultural norms

While English language encounters raised the prospect of shame, shame played out in other ways in Western Arrernte sociality. It was a feeling that could be experienced across any situation in which there was the risk of making a mistake. I asked some of the women to describe what shame felt like.

Orgki: Embarrassing ... sorta like embarrass yourself or being embarrassed *about* yourself ... like your inner self.

Annie: Do you feel wrong?

Orgki: Sorta like that ...

Thatha: Yeah, sorta like that. Like ...

Orgki: Not in the right position...

Thatha: Yeah, I think that's the main one.

Shame could be experienced if social or cultural norms were breached. My desire to talk with men on the Rangers team initially resulted in them avoiding me. The women explained why.

Orgki: You're a *woman*!

Thatha: That's what I was gonna say too! (Everybody laughs)

Annie: OK, so I'm a woman. What makes that difficult?

Orgki: (Laughing) They're good with blokes. Like if you did walk in they'd make the Ranger Coordinator speak to you, or if not, they'll ask you to pick Thatha up from the office. Then it'll be easy for you to talk to Thatha and Thatha to talk to them⁵¹. Aboriginal women would get shame to speak to the man.

Thatha: 'Specially if he or she is a *stranger*! When you get to know them it's a different story.

Orgki noted that transgressing either Western Arrernte or mainstream Australian cultural protocols could also be cause for shame.

And plus the way maybe some fellas are dressed. Like if they're dirty from oil or things like that and there's a government person there. Or ... like body language ... lookin' eye to eye. That's another one. You know how it is with Europeans when they talk, they have eye contact ... for looking at one another's eyes when they talk. In Aboriginal Law you're not allowed to do that. I can't even look at my mother ... young mother's eyes⁵². You know when I'm talkin' I look away. Yep. That's another one. For all

⁵¹ Despite Thatha being a woman, as the sister and aunt to a number of the men on the Ranger team, she could broker communications on my behalf.

⁵² Aboriginal kinship systems apply kin terms to collateral relatives. Under this system Ngulpa is considered Orgki and Thatha's '*young mother*' as her mother, was the younger sister of Orgki and Thatha's grandmother.

Aboriginal people we have got our cultural Laws and there's certain people we can't talk to or look at.

The Rangers fear of being inappropriately dressed for a particular social situation is not an unfamiliar feeling in the context of non-Aboriginal interactions. But Western Arrernte cultural protocols also engender shame when direct eye contact is made in the context of proscribed relationships. In showing respect for Ngulpa as her mother, Orgki avoids direct eye contact. This would be considered rude and being inappropriate behaviour, it would be cause for shame. Conversation between men and women can also be considered shameful.

Julia believed that shame associated with the risk of breaking cultural protocols influenced what Western Arrernte interpreters revealed. If she encountered privileged or embarrassing information when interpreting, Julia would have to deal with English translations in ways that avoided causing her shame.

Even the interpreters, you know, to understand what *they* say. Sometimes they might feel shame of what that person say and they turn it the other way and explain it to the non-Aboriginal person.

Everyday interactions, where mistakes or misunderstandings were possible also risked shame. Orgki explains how this is observable in meetings.

Orgki: Sometimes people are afraid of one another as well you know. Afraid that they will make that mistake. Nobody can read each other's minds. They might get afraid that, that other person might get offended ... if somebody says something outta place. So they sit quietly. Like if myself or Thatha or Mum might turn around and say something first. Then they might pick up, '*Oh, this is what you're talkin' about then.*' Then they start talkin'. They don't speak before we do. You'll notice that every meeting.

Ngulpa: They just watch 'em. That's the main one.

Silence provides time to understand what is being talked about before publicly making a statement. It helps avoid the potential to cause offence or say something others consider to be inappropriate or wrong.

Orgki: So they just watching for what the people – the strangers that just

come in, are talkin' about. So they just wait for what we have to say first and then they decide on what they have to say. So they are ashamed of the mistakes that they might make.

Thatha: They wait for the right questions too you know, then they'll think what question to answer or raise.

Orgki: Till the next person speaks up from the crowd...

Ngulpa: And then ask Orgki or Thatha, '*You talk to 'em'...* you know, like that. You have to ask 'em. '*What do they think about it? How do they feel about it? What are they thinkin'?*' Let them speak up first and then we can push them further from behind.

Fear of being wrong, being misunderstood, saying the wrong thing, causing offence, or breaking social protocols brought with it the possibility of shame. Shame was inherent in the possibility as well as the event. Public meetings, group discussions, encounters with strangers, interactions with authority figures, conversations between men and women, and English language communications potentially risked shame. Shame left people feeling uncomfortable and fearful – a feeling of being '*not in the right place*'. As Orgki and Lex explain, shame can happen any time someone makes a mistake. Shame could be avoided when people felt comfortable and safe with someone they knew, when cultural protocols could be observed, when they could express themselves without the risk of making a mistake, and when the purpose of a discussion or the position being taken was understood. Until then, it was better to stay silent, wait for understanding, avoid the encounter, or ask family to speak for you.

Coming together as a community of interest to represent an outstation position on the NTER reforms was therefore enormously problematic for Western Arrernte outstation families. English competency and the government's use of complex words and acronyms left people groping in the dark in their attempts to understand the meaning and implications of the changes. Shame was ever present in English language interactions and meetings with strangers. Using Western Arrernte interpreters was fraught with difficulties relating to their competency, the ability of government officials to use them and visitors' lack of understanding of the

relational dynamics at play. As the narratives here suggest, however, outstation families drew on relational strategies to facilitate interactions, using those they trusted and felt comfortable with to negotiate English language communications or encounters in which they felt unsafe or lacked confidence.

5.4 Voice, representation and authority

The preceding section highlights how Western Arrernte social interactions in the public domain are influenced by the interconnection between language and cultural norms for social behaviours, particularly shame and relatedness inherent in communications. This next section illustrates the role age, gender, social standing, interest, capacity, and cultural or spiritual authority play during group interactions. The accounts here reflect Western Arrernte sensitivities regarding who can participate in discussion on particular issues, how they do so in a group context, and who can represent a community of interest. For outstation families, speaking up and speaking out took into account Western Arrernte norms governing rightful social behaviour.

5.4.1 ‘No time to think about it’: The rush to get things done

Not only did visitors need to communicate in plain English and take the time to explain new concepts, Thatha believed they had no manners. Following a government initiated meeting, she put herself in their place and explained how she would go about discussions with the community.

Talk to people first. Introduce yourself ... ‘I do this and that. This is what I’m here for. I’m passing a message on ... this is gonna happen.’ Make yourself comfortable first by talkin’ to people, not just chuckin’ everything at them. You gotta have someone like you – sittin’ down and talkin’ before you can understand. They (government) just wanna talk real quick then get outta there. Government needs to come more often. Need to say it over ‘n’ over – not just bang! Instead, you need to go round the whole community ‘n’ ask what do they think.

It seemed to Thatha outsiders just walked in and start talking. She wanted people to establish a relationship with her, sit with her, share stories about themselves and get to know her before going on to explain their purpose and invite a response. From Thatha's perspective an ongoing process of discussion was needed so she could feel comfortable with the person she was expected to relate to, but this could not be achieved if all the government wanted to do was hold a meeting and then rush off.

Solomon agreed. He believed the way government meetings were conducted left families with little understanding about what had taken place.

At each meeting that you go to – like me – at the end of the meeting you gotta talk amongst each other and ask each other what they understand. Some people will say, *'Yes, I understood at bit'*, but other people might just shrug their shoulder and say, *'I don't know'*. See if a person (an outsider) comes for one day and you didn't get all the information that you want, then in the afternoon he's gone, you'll ask yourself, *'What did I learn from that person?'*

Thatha suggested that meeting facilitators needed to accommodate Western Arrernte cultural sensitivities and speech protocols during community discussions. Recounting an incident from a community meeting introducing income management and the transfer of CDEP participants on to the Centrelink system, Thatha spoke with pity about a male elder who found himself shamed in front of the entire group. He had spoken loudly about issues that were not part of the meeting's purpose.

Poor thing. Old Jacob must have felt real bad if he didn't really know what goin' on. I reckon he was thinkin', *'Are they takin over the land?'* They should've let that bloke talk and just listened. Shouldn't of give him an answer straight out. Then (after a while) you need to give them the right answer. Whatever the question is you have to try to explain to the person. Like after the meeting, go up to the person and talk it over again so he can understand. Lot of people there (at the meeting) so just go up to him and explain properly.

Thatha believed the focused nature of government meetings did not allow for the nature of Western Arrernte talk and discussion.

Despite the efforts of government staff to get their message across, the meetings underneath the bough shelter at Tjuwanpa were inadequate to deal with the complexities and language of the reforms. These meetings also failed abysmally to take into account Western Arrernte sociality and cultural norms. The rush to move on ignored Western Arrernte needs to establish relationships over time, enabling people to feel comfortable enough to ask questions and engage in discussion. Fixed agendas also precluded talk on other matters people believed were important. Meetings just left outstation families experiencing uncertainty, frustration or shame.

5.4.2 'You gotta talk amongst each other': Preparing and presenting a position

Outstations were not silent or indifferent to what was taking place. As Orgki noted, family groups would often meet privately to discuss issues concerning them.

Orgki: Like if you were talkin' to Sovariel on his own, he'll still come back and tell one of us. He'll say, *'We'll organise a meeting so we can talk together.'* Then we can talk to whoever's coming. Before that visitor comes to the community the word is already spread. Not written. Not down on a piece of paper. Then we organise things at the office then. If there's a meeting on, can the landowners or whatever get together and have a meeting. It's like putting in an AGM but in our own private way you know.

The hasty conduct of government meetings, however, left families with no time to prepare their views before they were expected to put them forward. As Solomon observed following yet another meeting of government talk and Aboriginal silence;

Each people got a mind of their own. They gotta organise and have a meeting and organise a speaker for them if they go and talk to

government. A real good person that can understand and speak ... can speak on behalf of the family or for the whole community, you know. You gotta get a speaker there, but not unless you sorta like share (a position) ... to speak.

You gotta get a speaker – gotta get... or need to know what you gonna say to government ... what you gonna ask. Then when you come back you gotta think what language you gonna use to explain to the people.

Solomon acknowledged here that nominating a speaker was critical. In doing so, however, preparing the speaker would not be easy. Families would have to meet together beforehand, reach a consensus on the position they were going to take, and agree on who would represent them. This would mean families needed to ‘share’ a position within their family and across different clan groups. The speaker would also need to be able to find ways to communicate the outcome from the meeting with different clan groups in a way they understood. All of this would take time, particularly when multiple family groups were involved.

Solomon believed it would also take courage.

See if that government mob come you gotta get yourself prepared! You not gonna just walk in there say good day, hello, shake hands and then just agree to it. No! You gotta talk the talk. You gotta think before. You not gonna go in blind. You gotta get yourself organised and think about how you gonna approach that person. Especially in big meetings you gonna shake ... get tongue twisted. You gotta think what you’re gonna say before you walk through the door. If you are at the door and you don’t prepare you won’t know what to say.

Faced with the prospect of using English, particularly in the presence of powerful government authority figures that for the most part are strangers, Solomon pointed out the speaker not only had to represent a shared position, but also had to carefully prepare in advance what he or she wanted to say. Without time to prepare, his tongue might get ‘twisted’.

Any outstation representative also had to be persuasive. They had to be able to ensure the government would hear a Western Arrente perspective. Without this Solomon believed the government visitors would write up whatever they wanted.

You gotta make them understand your side a the story there too. Otherwise if you don't make them understand your side a the story – which they don't really understand...I mean if they don't really want to listen to you, they just go back and do a draft themselves.

Without the ability to prepare a position in advance and without a representative that could command government attention, Solomon felt government staff would make up their own version of events. There was also the potential for misrepresentation of Western Arrernte agreements. This made Solomon extremely cautious about expressing himself in meetings.

See, gotta be really careful what you say to people. He or she (outsiders) might come and preach to you, and you might think that's a real good thing you see ... but she mightn't be local here ... doesn't understand much. Some people might just come and not tell you what's really going on. They might come and tell you about something ... and you say, 'Yeah'.

But see, then they (local people) get caught. The other person will write it down on a piece of paper there. Then they go back and talk about it and then agree. And you might then see your name on a piece of paper and then you'll say, 'But I didn't agree to that one.' But that other person just put it in there.

Yep, (you) just gotta keep coming back and communicate with all these people. Get the right answer. If they communicates properly, or understand properly, then you got it. Otherwise, if you come back and don't communicate properly, you might say, 'Yeah I understand', and then you write that thing down and then you publish it. That's why you gotta be really careful to make people understand what they said when you put it down on that piece of paper. It's pretty hard eh.

The difficulty for Solomon and Thatha was the government meeting processes at Tjuwanpa did not give people the chance to reflect on what had taken place, to check their understandings about what was said, and to raise other matters they were concerned about. During the period of this study, government meetings were called with as little as two or three days notice. Most people arrived without any

idea of what the meeting was about having got word only that the Manager considered it was important they attend. Within the '*rush, rush, rush*' of government business there was no time to build and nurture relationships within which, Western Arrernte people might begin to feel comfortable with the visitors. Under pressure and without time to prepare, nobody wanted to ask a question that might show they had misunderstood what was taking place. Nobody wanted to make a mistake and experience the shame of Old Jacob.

If the government wanted a dialogue Thatha and Solomon believed multiple visits were needed through which relationships could be built. Without the time for dialogue, Western Arrernte families could not understand the details and implications of the reforms. Nor could outsiders understand local realities. Time was also critical to people's ability to reach a position and find someone able to represent their interests. There was a lot at stake. As Solomon makes clear, in not understanding what they were agreeing to, people risked consenting to positions, which they in fact did not hold.

5.4.3 'Talkin' out proper way': Expressing oneself

Thatha often talked about the need for Aboriginal people to speak out about the Intervention and the impact it was having on their lives. One day I asked her how she would go about doing this. She thought carefully before replying.

First I'll go out to the elder people and get their informations first. So they can make me bit stronger you know ... and then stand up for it. Yeah. And just try. Huh huh. 'Cause they have more better ideas. We're just younger ... 'cause I'm just young anyway comparing from the elder ones. Because they got very strong ... I mean they been strong. That's where you can get power from – the leaders.

Although Thatha was in her early 30s her youth did not preclude her from speaking up in public gatherings. Nor did her gender. I had seen several young women in the office speak out forcefully in the presence of senior family members. Thatha's view, however, was if her position or opinion was to have support and legitimacy, she would need to canvas the views of family elders. The elders' support was needed if she was to have authority to speak.

Orgki confirmed age did not preclude anyone from participating in discussions.

Orgki: Some young people are interested in listening in meetings or things. So it's just about interest. Some might think ... *'It's you mob's meeting, older people's meeting...'* something like that so younger ones walk out.

Thatha: They'll leave it for the elder ones. It's just about interest. They might just sit there and listen and learn.

While Orgki indicated that everyone is free to share their views, cultural 'avoidance' protocols temper the way discussions are conducted.

Annie: So what happens if you don't agree with what that person is saying (in a meeting) – like someone like one of the TO⁵³s or Connie is saying something you don't feel comfortable with?

Orgki: I just tell 'em straight out, but not look them in the eye. Like Charlie is my ... like (my) son's father-in-law ... Aboriginal cultural (way). So I don't make (eye) contact. But meeting time we call each other by Law. *'It's my time to talk now. This is what they're trying to say.'* And then he sits there quiet and listens to what I have to say and then it's like goin' 50/50. It's just cultural ways that you can talk to certain people or you can't.

She also noted how elders might use their authority to enable the perspectives of younger people to be heard. This is similar to the role played by non-Aboriginal facilitators, who may manage group discussions and create space for less articulate or experienced voices.

Like when we start talkin' and Connie⁵⁴ is there, and if I'm sayin' something right, she might turn to the other side to the person who is trying to argue, and she'll tell that other person, *'No, you shut up and sit down and listen to her because she's sayin' it right.'* She'll be the one who makes that decision about whether I speak on or whether I sit down. So it's both ways. The younger people will look at the elders ... and sometimes the elders will look at us. 'Cause it's us that is takin' it to the future. It's our ideas that's

⁵³ Traditional Owner

⁵⁴ In her mid 60s Connie is approximately the age of Orgki's mother.

gotta roll the ball.

The right to participate is also governed by rights to knowledge. As Orgki explained, in Western Arrernte society men and women's business is clearly distinguished when spiritual matters are discussed

We can make decisions for women. Men, they make their own decision. We separate. The men talk to the men and the women talk to the women. And then if the men don't want the women to be there the women have to go!

Family concerns and matters of country, however, involve everyone in the family.

Orgki: If it's a family thing then we talk about it together. Yep. We decide both ways. The younger one has to be there and we get the parents to talk to him or her and we sort it out from there.

Thatha: Leases is the TO and family groups ... and plus the community ... everybody.

Ngulpa: Family group is important!

Orgki: That's the way we grew up lookin' at things anyway. We look at our elders and TOs and family members. We never go past them before makin' a decision if it's on their land we go to them first. But we haven't got a grandmother so there's only us that gotta make that decision. We decided between the brothers and sisters. Even though uncle is the TO for that area, he listens to us because we're the ones that are lookin' after the place and livin' there.

While Orgki stated that her uncle has authority over country as the Traditional Owner, any discussion preceding decisions about land involved the whole family or clan. Similarly family matters or issues affecting family members are decided at the family level. This had been the case when Orgki and Ngulpa's family had decided that the uncles would deal with their sons' drug use by encouraging them into the Ranger program. Discussion of spiritual matters may involve men and women equally. Where sacred matters relating to men's or women's stories and ceremony are discussed, however, these matters are dealt with separately.

5.4.4 'You don't speak for me': Authority to represent

Authority to make decisions on behalf of family, however, rests with those who are considered to have the rightful knowledge and status to make decisions. In Chapter 2, Connie highlighted the distinction between a speaker and those with authority to make decisions when she talked about the issue of the involvement of the federal government's Indigenous Community Engagement Officer in negotiations over the Hermannsburg lease. This was a locally recruited position, created to assist with communications between the Commonwealth's non-Indigenous Community Business Managers and town residents. Connie was aghast, however, at the government's decision to involve a man in discussions about country, who she considered did not have the right authority. *'But we want these young people who are appointed to be ... not to be our leaders, but just to be the speakers for the community. They still have to listen to their elder.'* But they not doing this!' In this instance, where a decision about country was at stake, Connie believed the involvement of the Indigenous Engagement Officer in the lease negotiations undermined traditional authority. As pointed out in Chapter 2, while the Commonwealth was intent on bridging the communication gap with Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory through the appointment of Indigenous Engagement Officers, at the local level their involvement in the lease negotiations over Hermannsburg was seen as a fundamental transgression of local authority structures. The Engagement Officers were seen to be engaging in matters concerning country they had no right to represent.

This was not the only time during the Intervention when outstation families challenged who had the right to speak for them. During the early months of the NTER, the then Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough appointed a number of Aboriginal advisors. On hearing a Western Arrernte woman, who was related to some outstation and Hermannsburg families, had been appointed, Solomon was highly indignant. He stated emphatically, *'She doesn't speak for me!'* He made clear representation of his interests – particularly to senior decision makers in government, had to have his support. As Minister Brough's Western Arrernte Advisor had had no discussions with clan groups prior to taking up the position, the Advisor in no way spoke for Solomon and his family.

Julia recognised the need for a Western Arrernte voice – someone competent in government decision-making environment and supported across clan groups to represent the interests of Western Arrernte people. She recognised this would require different family and clan groups to collaborate. Getting this collaboration was not going to be easy.

It's about time – it shoulda happened long time ago (that outstations and Hermannsburg came together). But too many people had strong heads and ... and um, I think they just didn't like ... Aboriginal people didn't like each other because of ... land wise and ... family wise. I don't know but ... we kept on sayin, '*Come on you mob. We don't (want) any fights you know*'. That's what government want to see is Aboriginal fighting among each other so they can just step in. Look what's happened to the Intervention there you know ... so it's sorta similar.

Nungari and her husband Janjula complained bitterly about this aspect of Western Arrernte sociality, which had played out on the previous Hermannsburg Community Council.

Nungari: Council wasn't strong enough to get those outstation people back to their outstation. Some people ... it's only a few that are bringing in grog from their outstation ... but Council wasn't not tough enough to make rules. Well I dunno. Well, the Council's just families.

Janjula: Just only the family side.

Because a particular township-based clan was dominant on the Community Council, Nungari believed the Council had been unable to exert the authority needed to get outstation families to move out of Hermannsburg and return to live on their outstations. Not related to this clan, Nungari therefore also lacked influence on the Hermannsburg Council and consequently, could not get their support for her priorities for programs and services in the area.

Nungari: 'Cause they're all on Graham's side. 'Cause I've tried my best! I'm just ... just one on Council. It's only me. 'Cause all of them are family side. 'Cause I speak up. Like whose ever wants that emergency thing (women's safe-house). But the Council won't support to build that

emergency. I speak up ... because you know we want things like that to happen in our community. Instead a people putting thumb on us all the time. 'Cause it's been happening for a long time. We wanted old time house (aged care facility) and that didn't happen. If I'm asking for something good you know, they're all on the umm ... 'cause they are all in the (same) family group.

Julia was keen to have Aboriginal representation in the broader political world outside of Tjuwanpa and Hermannsburg. With authority and leadership vested in clan structures, however, she saw problems in achieving this.

I just don't want for who ever is going into that Shire, I just don't want for them to be a 'yes', 'yes' man for them – but to speak out for our people and tell 'em whose land it is! My cousin would be real good ... maybe myself ... like sort of older ones that understands more – not the younger ones you know. Gotta have knowledge. Um ... Graham maybe, but ... yeah Graham don't speak so much to the people. I mean he's got a very good understanding ... but ... (we need) people that goes and talks to people and say, *'You know, this is what I heard.'* 'Cause I'm *always* going and saying to different people and saying, *'Did you hear about this?'* I like that person to come back and have a sorta like ... a community meeting or something like that. '

Of concern to Julia was the way externally nominated or selected Western Arrernte leaders would not communicate information to those who did not share kinship ties. At the same time she saw an opportunity to advocate for Western Arrernte interests and cultural ways of doing business in the arrival of the new local government structure. She felt a strong, knowledgeable person was needed, however, someone who could stand up and talk strongly on behalf of Aboriginal people as well as translate the government agenda to the community. These leaders would need to have the knowledge and ability to fight on behalf of Western Arrernte people, and the capacity to consult locally.

As she talked she reflected on the struggle these leaders faced to gain legitimacy on the ground.

I know you get the rejections from your own people ... but at least you're there you know, and you can see their (non-Aboriginal) ways of working to go back to your own people. Even though they might reject you but they do that because they might be wanting to show ... I don't know how you say it ... to show ... like even though you're working with a non-Aboriginal person and getting their ideas, and you telling your own people, the people are saying ... *'Nah, you're going the wrong way about it! When you climbed up that stairs you listened too much to them now'*. That's what the people down here say. *'You're not with us anymore ... you don't look back'*.

But they *do* look back! People don't see that. They *do* look back and they have ... I don't know ... they got their ways to understand us. But our people see them as, *'Oh, you're one of them now!'* They don't even realise that they (the Aboriginal representative) have to work with them (non-Aboriginal) to recognise us!

Julia was proud when Aboriginal leaders like Charlie Perkins and the Aboriginal politicians in the Northern Territory engaged in the political arena. At the same time, Aboriginal leaders faced rejection when trying to explain a government policy position. They were perceived as being proponents of non-Aboriginal ways and this was not acceptable.

Representation of Western Arrernte interests therefore differs markedly from non-Aboriginal engagement in the public domain. Gender, age and position of authority play a role in *how* discussions proceed. *Who* is to participate, as Orgki noted, is restricted to kin if the matter at hand is one associated with country or family matters and men and women separate in discussion of important spiritual matters. Any person may be selected to speak or represent if they are seen as having the capacity to get a message across. Those representing matters that may impact on family, however, only have authority when family elders lend their support or permission. These critical distinctions impact on the way in which Western Arrernte families are engaging underneath bough shelters or in meeting rooms across the Central Desert. While governments perceive Aboriginal leaders having a role in representing Aboriginal interests to governments and conveying government policy at the grassroots level, Julia and Nungari's reflections indicate that outstation people did not see leadership in this way. Representation and

leadership was tied to family interests and country identity, not to Western Arrernte language or Aboriginal race.

5.5 ‘What’s the use a talkin?’ The possibility of influence

The Commonwealth instigated two further measures to improve government relationships with Aboriginal residents in townships targeted under the NTER. First was the appointment of Government Business Managers (FaCSIA 2007a), who were to facilitate and report on the implementation of NTER measures in prescribed communities. A year later, the role had been broadened to:

‘... provide the key liaison and consultation point in communities, including communicating the NTER measures at the local level and engaging with acknowledged and respected elders and working collaboratively with other Australian and NT Government agency representatives on the ground’ (FaHCSIA 2008b p.2).

Second was the appointment of local Indigenous Engagement Officers. Their role was to support the Government Business Manager in liaising and engaging with communities in the planning and implementation of government programs (Macklin 2009). Although Solomon and Julia wanted a speaker to represent them, they explained that having a competent person to represent Western Arrernte interests was not enough.

5.5.1 ‘We wanna be heard too’: What chance to influence?

Speaking up would mean non-Aboriginal outsiders needed to understand Western Arrernte priorities and be trusted by them. Local interests and concerns could only be represented if the government wanted to *hear* what outstation families had to say. Outstation families therefore wanted confidence they would be heard and their interests taken into account. When Thatha, Julia, Solomon, and Lee spoke of how they perceived government communications and intentions, however, their

narratives suggest trust was in short supply. Like Sovariel – who in Chapter 2 said, ‘*Government got a lot of tricks*’, their narratives suggest they did not believe the government was prepared to listen to or understand Western Arrernte priorities.

Looking out towards the northern ranges from the shade of the veranda where she sat, Julia was doubtful that even a strong Western Arrernte leader would be heard.

Even if one of them has a very strong voice to say ... ‘cause, it seemed to be ... it seemed to be coming over and over again ... ‘*Oh, teach the Aboriginals again! Teach the Aboriginals again!*’ You know. But we wanna be heard too! Even though we been teached, or even though we been taught, you know, we wanna be heard too ... of our sides of the story. I mean *other* countries ... you know ... a lot of the world – they’re up there ... they’re the bosses of their country you know. Why can’t we ... you know ... be spoken and heard too, you know?

Julia felt the frustration of dealing with a world that saw Aboriginal people only as lacking. They were to be ‘*taached*’, or told what to do like small children. Not being heard, Julia believed that people just gave up.

Yeah. I mean even though there might be difficult times, or laziness or you know ... but it’s because of ... the ribbon’s been cut in the middle all of the time for us see. We been put down a lot you know. And that’s why people (say), ‘*What’s the use climbing up again!*’ you know. They giving up! Giving up all the time instead of fighting and keep going...yeah. They just don’t worry. ‘*What’s the use a talkin? What’s the use a talking to white-fellas?*’ Non-Aboriginal people you know. They don’t listen to us. They don’t want us. Or whatever we say they take it for themselves. And that’s the way I look at it.

In her encounters with non-Aboriginal people Julia anticipated racism, dishonesty or disrespect.

It’s hard to listen and tricky to listen. Like when *you* talk, we gotta try and listen to the words of you mobs. Not the harder words or the louder words, but the underneath ones ... yeah. ‘Cause that underneath ones got a lot of meaning. Maybe racism ... maybe um, you know ... maybe putting you down a bit you know ... yeah. And you can see. The only thing that sometimes you can see is the body language. Even though they speak

out, but the body language tells they're *gammon*.⁵⁵ 'You're *gammon sayin'* that ...

Thatha mistrusted government people too, believing they tried to make people feel good while maintaining hidden agendas.

Some of the things they say they say just to make people feel better but underneath they're not honest. Just things tucked in underneath. They swear by the bible but they're not being really honest with people.

As for Lee, the government visitors just made up their own stories. They were '*workers that been sent from different countries*'; visitors who came to Aboriginal country, asking questions, raising expectations, seeing what they wanted to see, and then leaving.

Like people from the cities comin' to a remote area ... an Aboriginal country might as well say. And they just say their little things and they go back to the city again. Get a little bit of information from the remote area and go back and make it ... and turn it into their own little stories. Just something about the city people. They ask for things then go back with a different story.

Solomon believed local people could find many of the solutions to the issues they faced. Like Julia, however, he had little faith that outstations would be heard.

There is a solution there but before that to come out it will be pretty hard for people to say it. They gotta think *how* they gonna say it! But you still gotta come back to that wall. There is a solution but it's gotta pass through to that man (in government) and we don't know what he's gonna say.

Each individual people they got their own solution, but sometimes they shy to say in public. If they are in a smaller group might say something.

⁵⁵ Making something up. Not being honest or not telling the truth — lying.

Sometimes it's hard to talk to these people to get that solution outta them. Sometimes they say in language, but they ... you gotta translated it back into English and then you get it wrong. People got the solution but do we get it out of them? Gotta have a real good translator to make you (the outsider) understand. You know, people got the solution there but they don't say it.

Solomon might have an idea or solution. He might have the agreement of his family. He might even talk or find a speaker to represent him. In the end, however, he believed communications with outsiders were empty of understanding.

As a result, Solomon often felt he was getting nowhere and was cynical about the extent to which outsiders could meaningfully engage with Aboriginal people.

It's like you're drawin' a circle there ... it still comes back to you. Your voice is goin' around in circles. No matter how hard you are tryin' to push yourself and make 'em understand the things that you tryin' to do – which they don't; they still ask you the same question next day again.

The only way that white man can communicate with a black fella is if they make a good BBQ or invite them over for something – a cuppa tea or for a drink. That's the only communication they got. *'Oh yeah, he's gonna shout us something very good.'* Well that's the only communication they (outsiders) know. But communicating with each other by words is different. You not gonna make that (Aboriginal) person understand ... or you're really not going to make that person communicate with you. The only thing he's goin' to communicate with you is that you *got* something. He's gonna think somewhere down the track when he sees you again, *'What did you really ask me over for?'* People don't really understand that communication there.

Ultimately Solomon believed that communications could not be forced. He had little trust that outsiders would understand his concerns or hear what he had to say. A BBQ or *'cuppa tea'* was offered following meetings as an incentive to participate and gesture of good will. From his perspective these measures had little meaning and he viewed them with suspicion. They could not substitute for the kind of dialogue he wanted, where he could be listened to and have his position understood.

Long-term relationships could be different. Julia compared her experience of

outsiders against those who took the time getting to know people and how they lived.

Well um, I mean looking at the (Tjuwanpa) Manager. Well to me she ... I class her as an Aboriginal you know. She's been with us ... she knows bits and pieces of our language and knows the way we work and say and do things. I mean I'm sure looking at you – you know bits and pieces too yourself don't you? I mean you know what we want well, you know how we work... you know.

People from outside ... they just come and they just take the first word that you say. And whereas with the Manager, she lived with us and knows our ways, and knows our way of thinking. And she ... she's classed like an Aboriginal because she thinks like us and that's how, through the Resource Centre, there is a lot of things been successful now. Whereas the other managers before, were only there to benefit themselves from our speaking. And they put in those hard words, so all we can say is, "Yes, yes..."

Solomon, Julia, Sovariel and Lee had little trust the government would hear what they had to say about their futures or the way in which they were affected by different reforms. They saw a one-sided engagement, one where it was always the role of Aboriginal peoples to be taught something, not a two-way discussion. They anticipated racism, dishonesty and a distortion of Aboriginal views to fit with government's agenda. Solomon believed that there were solutions to the issues and problems that he and others faced. At the same time there were no means available to him or to others to either communicate or influence change. Instead of a relationship with someone he trusted, all he experienced were the same questions, going round in circles, with a BBQ substituted for the dialogue he wanted to have.

5.5.2 'Just gotta wait and see': Contingency

The day after Prime Minister Howard visited Hermannsburg in August 2007, Elva decided that in the end, '*... we'll just have to wait and see this ... the changes ... what the changes is gonna be.*' As news of the various reforms came in Sovariel continued to sit quietly. He went to meetings but never spoke. He had plans for his

outstation – a small vegetable garden, a better corral for the feral horses he caught and broke in, and maybe the rehabilitation of the old tin shed so his children could return from Hermannsburg to live on the outstation. These plans – like Sovariel, were sitting and waiting.

No matter what we'll still be here! Until there's nothing left ... nothing more to be taking out. 'Cause I've got to learn to understand what the system comes. It's very important. That's why I gotta learn to listen quietly ... to understand that what's coming ... what's happening.

Sovariel had to wait. He knew change was coming. He knew that life would change. But until he could see what was coming there was nothing he could do.

Hmmm. Just gotta wait and see exactly what's the changes! We not in it yet. We still not in to these changes eh? Still comin'. We not even comfortable yet. People still askin' questions ... pointing fingers on each other! Some people might be angry or ... don't want change to come to help them. But changes can make people different too. Change their way of life and attitudes. They can't stay all their life the way they live now. They gotta change! They all gotta change. We just gotta wait 'n' see how the changes are, and get to know and learn ... the change is not gonna stop.

I don't know about the government – they got the answers. Shires or Council got the answer to that! I don't. What is comin' we just gotta wait and see ... on the back of all the people that come out here. You know Centrelink was here ... and the Intervention people mentioned about that Intervention kinda thing. And people all just wait and see ... *'Hey, these people come in here! We gotta wait and see – all them Centrelink mob'*. So that was different. That was their changes – Centrelink and CDEP transition changes.

And now they have come and make a change in that one (with government bringing CDEP back), and withdrew the other system now! Now people got to be ready for the other (new CDEP) system. Eh?? (Laughs) But I think it's ... you know ... first people gotta explain, *'This is what is coming in through Tjuwanpa, and you gotta see these people that is coming'*. We just gotta wait 'n' see now.

Sovariel was pragmatic about change. Change was inevitable but for him it was also unpredictable and uncontrollable. It came *'on the back of all the people that*

came out here', associated with changes to CDEP, income management and the new local government Shires. How Sovariel would respond to change was contingent on what the government would do next. As the government wasn't explaining this to him he could only wait to see what might unfold. Time and time again other people would end their conversations with the phrase, *'Let's just wait 'n' see'*. Action was not possible in the absence of knowledge.

Outstation families had little expectation that Western Arrernte people would be heard. People might come and listen, but as Lee and Solomon put it, government people would go back to their own country where they would draft up *'their own little story'*. They were therefore unsure what would pass through to the *'man in government'*. Sovariel too felt only government had the answers to what lay ahead. CDEP had gone and come back. Income management had been introduced. A new Shire had arrived. He saw change was inevitable. Life had changed. He would just have to listen carefully and wait until he understood what the changes would mean for the future of his outstation and his family before deciding how he would respond. Like many others, he would wait and see. His position and response to the changes were contingent on understanding what was at stake.

5.6 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter challenge assumptions and processes inherent in the design and conduct of the government's public engagement processes. Aboriginal participants in this study had the right to speak under Australia's democratic system of government and international human rights obligations. As their stories show, however, processes of public engagement instigated by the state were grossly inadequate in terms of enabling outstation families to achieve even a basic understanding of government's intentions. Not only was the language used during the Intervention largely incomprehensible to most Western Arrernte speakers, the government also failed to understand and accommodate the social rules of engagement inherent in Western Arrernte talk, representation and decision-making. Sadly, the narratives also reveal a fundamental lack of trust in

government. Even if people could understand and be heard, outstation families had little trust that what they had to say would be heard and responded to.

Men and women shared the view that outstation families should be coming together. Indeed people did come together. People discussed the NTER reforms privately in their kin groups. If given sufficient notice, they would readily turn up to government initiated community meetings. People wanted to understand what was coming so they could prepare. Although families questioned those they knew in the Tjuwanpa office and voiced their worries and fears in private, very few people spoke during the community meetings called by government agencies. Meetings underneath the bough shelter saw most people remain silent.

Silence was not disinterest. Fear of shame coloured outstation interactions in the public domain. When speaking up in unfamiliar situations, in public gatherings, with strangers, or where English language was required, there was always the risk of shame. The risk lay in making a mistake – with language, in understanding, in being misunderstood, in transgressing cultural norms, or in unintentionally offending someone. Describing the experience of shame, Orgki, Thatha and Lex described it as something that left people feeling frightened, exposed and out of place. It happened in spaces where people felt uncomfortable in the company of strangers or when in unfamiliar social environments. Simply seeing a stranger with white skin approaching was sufficient for some to seek to avoid having to interact.

To avoid shame, one option was to remain quiet. Another was to draw on known and trusted relationships to help negotiate an encounter. Shame could also be avoided if one understood the purpose of the discussion or could talk within the cultural processes governing Western Arrernte talk. This enabled people to feel comfortable and safe. In the absence of these conditions most people did not speak. As Julia noted, however, while silence might provide a safe space it ultimately left people feeling frustrated and without a voice.

Beyond the role that emotions played in influencing the conduct of talk, participation in the public domain was also characterised by differences between Western Arrernte and non-Aboriginal ways of handling talk, representation and

decision-making. Speaking up had to do with a person's perceived abilities, knowledge, interest and English language competency. Age and gender played a role in the secret and the sacred business of men and women but had little to do with one's role in public discussions. Western Arrernte discussion was conducted through consensual family processes or within contexts where others were known and trusted. Here relationships mattered. Representation also remained rooted in responsibilities and authority that were first and foremost within family. Representation also drew on people considered to have the knowledge and capacities needed to put forward a case. To do so, however, required authority of the kin group. In the Western Arrernte context, therefore, representation in public forums was linked to family interests and the ability of the speaker to represent an agreed family position.

When the Commonwealth and Territory Governments sought to promote modes of Aboriginal representation ignoring Western Arrernte social obligations, the result was rejection by outstation families. Solomon was clear; Minister Brough's Western Arrernte Advisor did not speak for him. Julia talked of the rejection of Aboriginal leaders bringing government perspectives back to their communities. Western Arrernte families did not conduct talk in this way. Under the Intervention, Western Arrernte elders also believed the legitimacy of family and the elders had begun to be eroded. To outstation eyes, this meant the government was no longer valuing traditional authority. It was shifting authority to those appointed by the government.

Outstation voices were clear about what was needed if Aboriginal people were going to be able to engage with the government in the public domain. Communications needed to recognise the difficulties associated with English language communications. Plain English and well-trained interpreters were needed. Government staff themselves also needed skills in using interpreters and an understanding of their needs and the risks they faced. Interpreters, however, were no substitute for processes that enabled people to hear, reflect, ask questions, and consider what was at stake in the context of their family groups and in relationships within which they felt comfortable and safe.

The critical issue Solomon identified was the need for processes that enabled families to come together to prepare their thoughts and find someone able to represent their interests. To do this, families needed sufficient time to consult with each other and prepare positions so they could communicate to the government the issues at hand for Western Arrernte families. If families were to be able to clarify what they had understood in government forums or seek additional information, they needed ongoing opportunities, not one-off events. Time was also essential for identifying someone able to represent family and clan interests and with the right qualities to speak on behalf of the group. To speak, family representatives would need permission to speak out as well as the capacity to consult with a broad range of family groups.

Solomon, Sovariel, Lee and Julia, however, felt that even with these measures in place, the central issue for Western Arrernte people was their inability to trust the government would hear and respond to what Aboriginal people had to say. Fundamentally for Solomon, the issue with communications came down to preparedness on the part of non-Aboriginal people to take Western Arrernte priorities into consideration. In the end, others like Sovariel believed that change was inevitable. Solomon knew, however, change was determined by, '*that man*' in the government. The government would make whatever decision it was that needed to be made. It would be up to the government to reveal what the BBQ or the meeting underneath the bough shelter was all about. In the end all that Western Arrernte people could do was '*wait 'n' see*' what would happen next.

Chapter 6: Being Well Being Western Arrernte

'In short, Australian society and the state have been perennially disinclined to address Aboriginal inequality in the context of continuing cultural difference – a difficult and also expensive enterprise. Rather, the proposal has been that if inequality is to be addressed, it can only be addressed by obliterating difference' (Austin-Broos 2011 p.12).

6.1 Introduction

Outstation families repeatedly interpreted the Commonwealth's efforts to restructure economic conditions and protect children in remote Northern Territory Aboriginal communities against how the changes impacted on their ability to maintain their Western Arrernte identity and social order. In this chapter I use anthropological, sociological and historical literature to bring a deeper understanding of the cultural aspirations shaping the lives of Tjuwanpa's outstation families and other Aboriginal peoples living in remote Australia. This enables a deeper understanding of the values inherent in outstation resident's responses to the Hermannsburg township lease and *Welfare to Work* reforms.

The literature in this chapter elaborates how the outstation narratives speak to the centrality of the inter-connectedness between Western Arrernte people, place and identity. Throughout their encounters with the Hermannsburg lease, income management and the *Welfare to Work* reforms, outstation families understood and assessed the changes against how they would enhance or jeopardise the *means* through which families fostered and maintained their Western Arrernte identity and social relationships. Here the maintenance of outstation people's association with country and with each other played an interconnected role, with these

relationships pursued within a moral and spiritual order governing social life and family responsibilities. Concerns about the disruption to this order lay at the heart of the Tjuwanpa outstation responses to the changes introduced under the banner of the Intervention, and lay at the core of their decisions, understandings, questions, and actions. This chapter thus speaks to the motivations and aspirations underpinning Western Arrernte outstation *engagement* around the measures introduced in remote Aboriginal communities.

Setting outstation narratives against the anthropological literature I start with a brief overview of the link between country and identity. As the anthropological literature makes clear, it is identity vested in country – and the Law embodied in country, which sets the normative framework for future aspirations, personal responsibilities, and kin-based social relationships between people. In this chapter I therefore show how outstation accounts describe efforts to secure children's identity through on-going place-based associations, and how people's concerns about the reforms centred on how change would impact on their efforts to continue association with these places of *being*. I then reflect on the moral order governing Western Arrernte social relations, and elaborate on how men and women saw the processes used by the Commonwealth to introduce the leasing reforms undermining Western Arrernte family authority. As Jack and Solomon saw it, Western Arrernte Law and property law were coming into conflict. Finally I look at the centrality of *relatedness* in people's assessment of the viability of employment and training options. Relatedness is a pattern of enactment of relationships in Aboriginal social life where people seek harmony in interactions with significant others (Myers 1979, 1991).

A considerable body of literature documents these features of Aboriginal society, including historical accounts revealing how Western Arrernte aspirations and a desire to re-energise family life underpinned the Hermannsburg outstation movement. In referencing the literature in this chapter I therefore draw primarily on authors who have documented central and western desert cultures in Central Australia. Dianne Austin-Broos is an anthropologist who has focused on Western Arrernte contemporary life and identity. Paul Albrecht grew up in Hermannsburg

as the son of the Lutheran pastor Friedrich Albrecht, spoke Western Arrernte fluently, and has maintained an intimate association with Western Arrernte people throughout his life. Sociologist Kenneth Liberman has studied social interactions and processes of talk and decision making among the Pitjantjarra and Ngaanyatjarra peoples of the Western Desert. Anthropologist Fred Myers wrote on the structure of social relations of the Pintupi who live northwest of Western Arrernte lands.

6.2 Understanding how outstation families *feel* about country and each other

In Chapter 2 Orgki laments the introduction of the township leases. *‘They don’t recognise how Aboriginal people feel about their country!’* Exasperated and anxious, she expressed the fear that in holding a lease over Hermannsburg, the Commonwealth has reneged on its agreement to return traditional lands to Aboriginal peoples under the 1976 Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA). With this change she believed the government no longer recognised her or the meaning country held for Aboriginal peoples. Like Solomon, Jack and many others, Orgki was uncertain about her future and her association with her country. She feared nothing would be left for her children and grandchildren. Thatha felt her grandparent’s energy would be lost. As families responded to the news of the compulsory acquisition of Hermannsburg and engaged in negotiations of an extension to the five-year township lease, they talked with fear and anxiety about what the changes mean for their identity, social structure, and the future wellbeing of their families. These accounts tell us that for Tjuwanpa’s outstation families, their sense of feeling comfortable and safe in their world was secured within a Western Arrernte moral and social order enacted through kinship relations and ongoing association with country.

The maintenance of Western Arrernte society and identity was also at stake as people recounted how they understood the changes to CDEP, the introduction of income management, and news of new jobs and training opportunities. For some,

income management meant the loss of money from wages and CDEP *top-up*. This situation threatened people's ability to own and run cars. In the absence of other means of transportation in remote areas, cars were essential. They enabled families to access outstation country and maintain kinship relationships across vast desert areas. Connie and Nungari hoped the changes to CDEP would finally bring families back to their outstations. All believed, however, that CDEP had impacted in some way on family connectedness to country and the social norms governing Western Arrernte behaviour.

6.2.1 Country as being: Identity under fire

Typically referred to as country, places of association in the physical landscape forge Aboriginal people, totemic entities and ancestral spirits as one. For Western Arrernte people country constitutes the self. Separation from country is therefore seen as an erosion of Western Arrernte identity. Over many years scholars have written of the unique and abiding relationship between Indigenous peoples and country (Berndt & Berndt 1967; Elkin 1974; Rose 1996; Stanner 2009; Stockton 1995; Strehlow 1968; Swain 1993). While these writers have described the relationship between the cultural landscape and Indigenous social organisation in different ways, all reflect the centrality of Aboriginal Law set within totemic associations, which imbue country with meaning, and shape Indigenous identity and social organisation. Jack highlighted the centrality of place in everyday Western Arrernte life when he likened his country to Centrelink benefits, which enabled him to survive in the poor desert economy. For Western Arrernte and other Aboriginal peoples living in remote Australia, identity and country are inseparable.

Wilkins' (2002) exposition on Arrernte usage of the word 'place' highlights how the semantics of place reflects an Arrernte conceptualisation of locality, which is markedly different from the way in which place is conceived in the English language. Non-Indigenous Australians see place existing as a spatial relation. A place occupies space. In the Arandic form of *pmere*, place is described not only as a geographic area but depending on its usage, is also of entity – of *being*. Albrecht

contrasts non-Aboriginal and Western Arrernte perceptions of place, where, ‘... relationship with land can be described as an I – ‘It’ relationship, theirs is an I – ‘Thou’ relationship’ (1997 p.96). Western Arrernte identity is thus derivative of place. People and country are part of the same spirit. Land is a living, feeling entity (Bessarab 2008). Place is thus humanised and conscious. People,

‘ ... speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy’ (Rose 1996 p.7).

Central to Western Arrernte ontology and identity are the activities of spirit beings shaping the environment. These beings emerge and return to sacred, totemic places, their presence visible in elements of the landscape (Albrecht 2000; Stanner 2009; Strehlow 1968). Dreaming⁵⁶ stories recount the journeys and activities of the ancestral spirits in the process of creating the landscape and social order, locating these events and the social order they speak to eternally in place (Stanner 2009). The landscape is thus the work of these ancestral beings, their eternal dwelling place, and the embodiment of the laws governing social behaviour. Swain uses the term ‘*dream place*’ (1993 p.14) to better capture this centrality of place in Aboriginal ontology. Rites of ceremony, conception, and sacred objects associated with place invoke and allow totemic identities ongoing presence. This aspect of Aboriginal belief enables the past, present and future to coexist (Berndt & Berndt 1967; Elkin 1974; Stanner 2009; Swain 1993). Events are subsequently held in place. Place, not time, is how events are reconstructed (Swain 1993).

Western Arrernte being resides in places where totemic entities are ever present – passing via places in the landscape into human form at conception and reforming in the landscape at death (Austin-Broos 2009; Berndt & Berndt 1967; Strehlow 1968). Identity is thus constitutive of place. As Myers succinctly explains it;

‘One can claim identification with any place with which one’s close relatives

⁵⁶ A term taken from the Arrernte word *Altjirnga*, which means, ‘...*eternal, uncreated, springing out of itself*’ (Strehlow 1968 p.614).

are identified. A fundamental link in the chain is a person's identification with his conception Dreaming and its place. He or she is, after all, its incarnation' (Myers 1991 p.130).

Many Aboriginal peoples hold the belief that the spirit of place enters the child at the time of conception.⁵⁷ Children therefore take on the totemic identity of the place of conception as well as other conception identities derived through place-based genealogical ties. Death, 'is a return of place-being to place ... life is an outgrowth of a location, and that when a life ends its essence returns to its place' (Swain 1993 p.45). Jack thus sees the past in the present when he walks his country; his grandfather is alive in the trees and the landscape.

For Connie, having a cemetery on her outstation ensured the return of her family to their place of being. This secured ongoing ancestral presence in the landscape and created enduring sentiments of emotional connectedness to place (Myers 1979). Her attempts to find education and employment opportunities for younger family members on her outstation, and the emphasis given by others such as Solomon, Elva, Orgki and Ngulpa to raising children on outstations and spending time on outstations during school holidays, are the contemporary means through which they sought to connect their children and grandchildren to identities and ancestral spirits constituted in the landscape. Western Arrernte '*country*' thus represents places where people share their being (Memmott & Long 2002). Country constitutes their survival (Albrecht 2002). For Western Arrernte, people life is therefore enduringly of place, in place, and with place (Albrecht 2000).

The Commonwealth determined the Hermannsburg lease only excised a specific area of land incorporating the township and its surrounds and did not incorporate the majority of outstation settlements. This is not how the lease was understood

⁵⁷ Austin-Broos (2009) discusses in considerable detail the changes in the role that conception plays in Western Arrernte identity as a result of settlement. While she believes that the place of conception remains a consideration in the formation of Western Arrernte totemic identity, its importance has been considerably diminished as a consequence of settlement.

from a Western Arrernte perspective. Hermannsburg did not exist independently of the land, ranges and river surrounding the township. It did not exist separately to the people who were connected to each other through time in these features of the landscape. Country was not bounded space. It was not a market commodity. It was an extension of who they were. To excise a part of it was akin to amputating a part of themselves. It is therefore understandable that outstation families responded to the Hermannsburg lease with anxiety, fear, perplexity and mistrust.

When talking about the lease over Hermannsburg, outstation accounts reflected deep fears regarding the power of the state to change the Western Arrernte social order. In the compulsory takeover of Hermannsburg in 2007, they saw the Commonwealth changing its position on recognition of Aboriginal identity and Law. In their view the changeability of Australian law placed relationship and identity to all Western Arrernte country in jeopardy. People spoke of finding themselves homeless, without a future, and their children '*all lost*'. Rather than securing a viable future for their children, the government was '*taking everything away*'.

6.2.2 Country, cash and centralisation: The meaning of CDEP

With association with country and knowledge of country integral to securing identity, it is not surprising Western Arrernte assessments of the *Welfare to Work* reforms were also concerned with their impact on the contemporary means families used to achieve these ends. Federal and Territory Government support for outstation services and employment programs, which had enabled Western Arrernte to maintain outstation residence, had always been understood as government recognition of a Western Arrernte social and spiritual order. Families therefore saw the changes to CDEP, or the introduction of income management, through the lens of what it meant to their efforts to maintain ongoing association with their outstations. Family mobility, for example, emerged as a serious problem as a consequence of people's inability to meet car expenses and repayments on vehicle loans. Ngulpa's immediate response to the return of CDEP in 2008 was,

'That means I can go home to my outstation'. Her primary concern lay in the value of what her car enabled her to do and to be. With it she could be at home with her family, a feature Myers also notes in relation to the ways cars are the means to enhance Pintupi relatedness (1991).

Connie and Nungari on the other hand, held the belief that in reforming CDEP, the government was finally dealing with the problem of people moving into Hermannsburg and not being on their outstation. They hoped the changes to CDEP would see more jobs, housing, and services centred on outstations. Eighteen months later Connie therefore responded with dismay to the news the Commonwealth would centralise housing construction and community services in Hermannsburg. She feared investments in the township would again draw people away from country. Country was where family could deal with *'all this fighting – family fighting and breakaway families'*. CDEP was therefore interpreted as the means through which the Commonwealth's measures supported or undermined Western Arrernte connection to the places where family authority had meaning and purpose.

Interestingly, the new jobs opening under the expansion of services in Hermannsburg and at Tjuwanpa during 2008 and 2009 saw outstation people within commuting distance quickly taking up these positions. The Tjuwanpa Rangers worked an additional three days per week without pay for four months to secure ten salaried positions funded under a new *Caring for Country* grant. Jobs meant they avoided income management and earned real wages. Real wages brought pride, an income enabling families to run vehicles and an ability to continue to live on their outstations. Employment as a Ranger also provided opportunities to work on country, thereby building practical and spiritual knowledge.

Regardless of whether people supported or opposed the *Welfare to Work* reforms, at the heart of their responses were concerns about how the changes would impact on the means available to them to continue to associate with outstations as places where family wellbeing was secured. Outstation families did not understand CDEP as simply an Aboriginal employment program. People wanted work, or

training that would lead to jobs, although they were also pragmatic about their prospects given the constraints of English language capacities, education, qualifications, and the limited local labour market. In the outstation milieu, however, CDEP work was primarily constructed as a means to maintain values of connectedness with family and country. This assessment is reflected in Austin-Broos' analysis of the enduring influence of relatedness in contemporary Western Arrernte engagement in work and training (2006). Similarly, outstation families assessed the introduction of income management against its impact on these values.

Far from abrogating responsibilities for their children, Western Arrernte families made clear they are vitally concerned about their children's welfare. Throughout outstation accounts in the earlier chapters people spoke of deep anxieties about children's safety and family wellbeing. Outstations, however, played a vital role in securing this. Outstations were seen to protect children and old people from the dangers and disruption encountered in Hermannsburg. Family cohesion was linked to outstation life, and families made substantial efforts to secure children's relatedness to family and country by taking advantage of the educational, housing and work opportunities provided on outstations. The Hermannsburg lease and the *Welfare to Work* measures were therefore assessed against people's perceptions of how these changes would enhance or diminish their association with outstation country. It was country through which relatedness was fostered, children kept safe, and identity and authority enhanced.

6.2.3 Country as Commodity: The challenge to Western Arrernte Law and authority

People spoke of the proposed lease over the Hermannsburg Township as abrogating an enduring Law. This Law held them responsible for looking after country. Jack and Janjula contrasted the timelessness of Western Arrernte codes of responsibilities represented in the landscape, against paper titles that could be thrown in the rubbish – here one day and discarded the next. In a Western Arrernte worldview their responsibility and the authorities for country were constituted in

Aboriginal Law, not title conferred under Australian law or passed on through a legal will.

Western Arrernte Law represents, 'hierarchy as nurturance, as "looking after"' (Myers 1991 p.22). The Law is thus as a moral imperative to continue the orderly, enduring, social functioning of the world. As men did not constitute it, the Law could not be changed by human action (Myers 1979). From a Western Arrernte perspective the vesting of land rights or decision-making in any person or body who did not have right authority and knowledge based on Western Arrernte Law was not permissible. Albrecht notes that to do so, 'is seen as a major infringement of the traditional landowners rights, possibly resulting in the application of the death penalty' (Albrecht 2002 p.82). In light of this construction of social responsibilities, Janjula's fear of death as a consideration in the Hermannsburg lease negotiations is understandable. He was deeply concerned that in agreeing to the lease he was handing over authority to the government. In doing so, there was the risk the Commonwealth's authorities might not look after country, thereby transgressing Western Arrernte Law. If this happened Janjula would be held to account – not the government. It was with this understanding in mind that Lee and Solomon were incredulous at the idea that an Aboriginal person would consent to transfer ownership of their land in order to obtain a housing loan. Western Arrernte Law thus shaped the construction of social responsibilities, not Australian property laws or economic rationalism. As Janjula makes clear, under Western Arrernte Law the consequences of abrogating these responsibilities were life-threatening.

In Western Arrernte society, as in many Australian Aboriginal societies, authority is vested in those who are considered to hold knowledge of country. This is acquired through the practice of maintaining place through correct knowledge and behaviour (Memmott & Long 2002). 'Whether a person is Aborigine or White, or of dual Aboriginal/White descent, is considered irrelevant. Crucial is whether the person knows the "law" or not' (Albrecht 1997 p.95). Claims to speak for country are therefore claims to authority derived from knowledge of country and its entities. It is this knowledge that enables people to take care of place. This can

only be acquired through an ongoing connectedness of people to place and with each other. Law thus seeks to protect place as a manifestation of maintaining the social order (Myers 1991).

At the heart of Connie and Julia's distress regarding the Hermannsburg lease was their view that the process of negotiation undermined traditional authority. Julia was extremely upset that Traditional Owner consent and consideration of Western Arrernte worldviews were not sought when the Howard Government compulsorily acquired Hermannsburg. Although the incoming Labor Government involved Traditional Owners in the 2009 consultations concerning the extension of the Hermannsburg lease, Connie was deeply distressed by the involvement of a Commonwealth appointed Western Arrernte Indigenous Engagement Officer and the Central Land Council. Her view was these people were co-opting authority they had no right to under Western Arrernte Law – an action she saw with dismay as replacing traditional family authority with that of government appointees or external authorities. Connie's concerns appear to have been widespread, reflected in the 2009 Hermannsburg petition opposing the involvement of the Central Land Council in the township lease negotiations (Ravens 2009, June 5).

Outstation concerns about disruption to social authority as a consequence of the lease negotiations mirrors Western Arrernte fears some 30 years earlier. At that time, the Western Arrernte fought against legislative provisions for a single Land Trust over the Mission Lease as originally proscribed under the 1976 Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA). Their argument was that a single Land Trust would enable some Western Arrernte family groups to speak on behalf of areas of land over which they had no authority (Albrecht 2002). This would in turn undermine the autonomy of each clan and the integrity of Western Arrernte social organisation within which land ownership is embedded.⁵⁸

Connie and Sovariel made it very clear they did not want government control over

⁵⁸ Appendix 3, which outlines the history of the Western Arrernte homelands movement, contains a more detailed account of the cultural and political drivers underpinning the return of Western Arrernte to their ancestral lands.

the land. Although the incoming Labor Government consulted with Western Arrernte people over the Hermannsburg township lease extension, against the power of government '*tricks*', Sovariel believed his '*no*' to the proposed extension of the lease, would still be presented by the government as his '*yes*'. Julia saw the exchange of land for services as coercive. Here, as Ellis remarks, government consultations concerning Aboriginal land became a situation where, 'the 'powerful' consult with the 'powerless' and having done so, do as they will' (1994 p.18).

The anthropological and historical literature clearly illustrates how outstation accounts reflect an enduring Western Arrernte conception of place as a source of identity and moral order. This moral order is vested in the Law, which lays down moral responsibilities for taking care of people and places. People's struggle to understand the new township leasing arrangements, the loss of CDEP and income management thus featured concerns about rightful behaviour, rightful authority and the consequences of decisions that could jeopardise Western Arrernte identity.

6.2.4 Everyone is family: The centrality of relatedness in social life

Throughout this study people defined their experience of the NTER reforms in emotional constructs. These were described as feeling comfortable and safe, occurring in the context of appropriate kin relationships, the rightful exercise of authority, and kin-based association with country. Outstation resident's responses to the NTER were therefore not only shaped by Western Arrernte identity vested in country as places of being, but also by the norms governing social relationships. The literature I draw on here illustrates how the actions and emotions of Western Arrernte and other desert peoples are determined by normative codes of conduct set in a moral order of how life should be lived.

Understanding Western Arrernte identity as kin-based helps us to understand the emphasis given throughout the narratives to consideration of family when people spoke about the NTER reforms. In these accounts emotions of comfort, safety, and shame were expressed forms of judgement about how people felt about themselves

in relation to a shared identity and relationships with significant others.

Across Aboriginal Australia, anthropologists have used the term ‘relatedness’ to describe the defining feature of social interaction in Aboriginal life. These accounts emphasise the dominant influence of kinship systems, derived from affiliation with country, on Indigenous social structures (Berndt & Berndt 1967; Elkin 1974; Hiatt 1986; Stanner 2009). Swain (1993) explains the importance of the inter-relatedness of Australia’s Indigenous peoples as derived from the inability of an individual or group to hold exclusive social, political and economic rights to any area. ‘The immediate result is relationship ... (where) holding the country weaves lands and their people into an interdependent network’ (p.51).

In his study of the Western Desert Pintupi, Myers (1979, 1991) elaborates on the importance of relationships to significant others as the primary goal of Pintupi social life. At the centre of these associations are kin networks or as Myers names this, ‘one countrymen’ (1991 p.90), who are those with whom one shares place, knowledge of place, and co-operation. Austin-Broos (2009) also describes Western Arrernte kinship in similar terms; seeing Western Arrernte identity derived from patrilineal and matrilineal totemic identity, but also incorporating other identities across the Central and Western Desert regions.⁵⁹ Western Arrernte kin therefore represents all those who share privileged knowledge and social relationships invested in place. Within each of these desert groups, kinship is therefore a relationship between oneself, others, objects and places derived through people who share the knowledge and resources of place.

Everyday life is centred on the sustenance and maintenance of these relationships. In describing the nature of Pintupi sociality Myers uses the term *relatedness* to describe the emphasis on, ‘extending one’s ties with others outward, on being able to lay claims by others, on showing sympathy and a willingness to negotiate’ (1991 p.22). *Relatedness* is demonstrated through normative behaviours that form part of everyday social life. Put another way, relatedness reflects how social norms

⁵⁹ Totemic identities derived from conception beliefs as well as knowledge of other identities derived from relationships across regions associated with foraging rights.

governing what is considered respectful behaviour are enacted. The aim is always to foster relationships with important others. Appropriate behaviours elicit emotional responses to kin such as shame, grief, compassion, happiness or homesickness.

At Tjuwanpa the importance of relationships, expressed as emotional responses to events or environments, was particularly evident in day-to-day working arrangements. In her job at the Tjuwanpa office Thatha felt, '*... real happy where I am, workin' my own family you know, with my own side*', contrasting this with work environments in Alice Springs where she would feel unsafe and uncomfortable. For young Thumbu, '*.... it makes it easier workin' with family you know ... makes it more comfortable ... makes you do things as well*'. Although Lex and Al were not Western Arrernte, the men on the essential services team they were able to relate to them because the Western Arrernte workers felt comfortable with them. Similarly, the Rangers expressed their relationship with their Coordinator in terms of feeling comfortable because he was '*like family*'. From Lee's perspective, training was best conducted on outstations where people could avoid shame in a family-based learning environment. Emotions thus expressed an appropriate ordering of social relationships vested in kinship networks (Myers 1991).

As relatedness operates through networks of kin associations – or *walytja*, a Western Desert idea of a network of family, Myers observes that those who are not *walytja* are outside, different or other (1991 p.109). This elicits emotional responses. Myers also describes how strangers 'are likely to be feared or considered dangerous' (1979 p.352), while people express worry or feelings of loneliness being separated from, 'places and people among which and with whom one grew up and where one feels safe and comfortable' (1991 p.119). For Aboriginal peoples in Central Australia therefore, place-based relationships set parameters for concepts of the self; a self constituted through networks of social relationships and expressed through emotions signifying responses to what is considered rightful behaviour.

Contemporary accounts of Western Arrernte social organisation have highlighted

the impact of relatedness on the Lutheran Mission and state efforts to improve Western Arrernte wellbeing. Having been born and raised in Hermannsburg, Paul Albrecht draws on his life experience when describing how kinship permeated Western Arrernte social organisation and everyday life (Albrecht 1972). In his analysis of the failure of the Hermannsburg Mission's efforts during the 1960s and early 1970s to promote community governance (Albrecht 1972, 2002),⁶⁰ Albrecht believes the problems experienced by the Community Councils lay in the assumption that council members could represent and have authority over all members of the Hermannsburg community. Analysing the failure of the Council to adhere to decisions and enforce its authority over community resource allocations and staffing, Albrecht believed the issue lay in the way clan affiliations and authority were derived from Law vested in genealogical totemic authority and spiritual knowledge. This gave clans political autonomy in relation to other clans (Sommerlad 1973b). Loyalty and responsibility was therefore prioritised to kinship networks over individual demands or requirements introduced by outside agents or governance structures. Myers also notes this feature of kinship in his study of the Pintupi (1991). Western Arrernte behaviour was subsequently modified according to kin needs and expectations, not Community Council rules or decisions.

In this social milieu, Albrecht (1972) maintains clan affiliations set conditions for work, social intercourse and political negotiations. Satisfaction and reward came from satisfying the norms of social relationship within kin groups and not from external material incentives, contract conditions or externally imposed institutional requirements. Noting the problematic of this in the context of contemporary life thirty years ago, Albrecht argued that Western Arrernte, '... do not seek to change a dysfunctional partial structure, fearing any change will rob them of the support of the group: without the group they feel they cannot survive' (1972 p.227).

While Austin-Broos is primarily concerned with examining the impact of history

⁶⁰ Details of regarding the Lutheran Mission's experience of self-governance in Hermannsburg can be found in Appendix 3.

and contemporary state policy on the changing nature of Western Arrernte ontology and social relations, she maintains Western Arrernte being continues to be made via relationship with kin networks. Although her analysis focuses on the transformation of Western Arrernte knowledge systems and the management of social relatedness as a consequence of the Lutheran Mission, the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the administration of CDEP⁶¹; Austin-Broos maintains; ‘the role of kin relatedness in defining subjects, social context, and the strategies of daily life has remained crucial’ (2009 p.132). This is seen in the growth of self through acts of relatedness such as the sharing of food, the giving of attention, the ability to disburse or demand resources, and participation in ceremonies or events such as funerals or sports days. The Western Arrernte self therefore continues to be forged and maintained in geographically located kin relatedness.

Austin-Broos (2006) pays particular attention to state efforts to engage Western Arrernte in the labour market. As accounts in Chapters 3 and 4 revolve around outstation responses to *Welfare to Work* reforms, Austin-Broos’ insights are particularly salient here. In her analysis of work she sees Western Arrernte applying cultural constructs of relatedness. Welfare payments, CDEP wages and employment salaries are circulated as a means to enhance relatedness over the accumulation of resources for production or future consumption. Workplaces are sites for exchanges, demands and service provisions that are characteristic of Western Arrernte caring or looking after kin. Austin-Broos therefore points out that recruitment of relatives to work teams makes the, ‘workplace a kin-specific

⁶¹ Austin-Broos argues that Mission life and the state have combined to undermine other forms of Western Arrernte identity and relatedness. The Mission settlement reduced opportunities for visiting associated with foraging rights, thereby narrowing opportunities to forge broader regional relationships. Identity based on conception beliefs was also weakened as children conceived in the Mission settlement assumed a common totemic identity linked to Hermannsburg. She also argues that as ALRA privileged bounded patrilineal estates, patrilineal kin relatedness has taken precedence over other kinds of relatedness. This has been exacerbated by CDEP, which she maintains has privileged clan affiliations over extended networks of relationships.

site' (2006 p.7). Similarly Austin-Broos sees relatedness influencing the take-up of training opportunities. She therefore sees traditional modes of social relations transposed to new circumstances made available by the state.

At the same time, Austin-Broos argues that in employing these strategies, the Western the Arrernte remain isolated on the margins of the market economy. Mobility away from kin as a necessity of economic participation in remote areas is therefore constrained as, 'such mobility would individuate people in a manner that is foreign' (Austin-Broos 2001 p.197), divorcing them from kin relatedness and leaving them alone in the world.

At the Tjuwanpa office during the period of the study, enactment of relatedness was reflected in the everyday work environment and training. Kinship associations underpinned the structure of Tjuwanpa's work groups and determined who was appointed to new positions. In explaining the process for recruiting four new men to the essential services team, Jackson stressed how family relatedness was critical. Knowledge of country, concern for how family would feel having a new man on country, and the ability of the new recruit to relate *'family way'* featured as key considerations in selecting who would be suitable for the new essential services jobs. Kin associations also predominated in other essential services teams and the Tjuwanpa Rangers team. Salaried employment was also conceptualised within place-based, kin environments. Outstations or country-based jobs were thus identified as the ideal workplace. Thatha's assessment of the Howard Government's promise to find 2,000 'real' jobs to replace 6,000 positions lost under the axing of CDEP was there were no such jobs on outstations. This view was shared by a number of the senior men who responded to this promise with, *'Well what kinda work we gotta do on outstations you know? That's the number one I s'pose'*. Work was thus conceptualised and organised within a place-based, kin-based social order.

Training opportunities opening up under the NTER were also assessed in terms of how they would operate in the context of relationships with kin networks. Solomon's response to plans for technical training highlighted potential difficulties encountered if training were to be conducted in Alice Springs. In the

city, family demands, family responsibilities and racism could derail the participation of young men. Like Jack and Lee, he saw learning best facilitated in family-based environments. This strategy avoided the risks associated with encounters with strangers and town environments, and reinforced a traditional role for family as teachers of new skills. Similarly, Thatha considered demands on relatedness – operating through spiritual ceremonial obligations, sporting affiliations and spousal relationships – would deter people from taking up mobility allowances, which aimed to encourage people in remote areas to relocate for work.

Relatedness also influenced decisions about work choices in other ways. Facing the prospect of finding work in Alice Springs if Tjuwanpa was forced to close its doors, Thatha feared the prospect of having to accommodate family visits to Alice Springs. There she would be unable to control their behaviour or demands. She saw this feature of relatedness inevitably undermining any tenancy or work arrangements. Tjuwanpa on the other hand, offered her some control over family demands to be accommodated in her staff house. In the office she also worked in the comfort of known kin relations. *'You know what they are and you know about them.'* She was also able to foster relatedness through her work in the Resource Centre office where she assisted family when they needed assistance. In return she could expect support from her family to take care of her children.

The Commonwealth's NTER policy for Aboriginal townships and *Welfare to Work*, including the Labor Government's reforms to CDEP, ignored the influence of relatedness on Western Arrernte employment aspirations and people's ability to feel comfortable and safe in work and training environments. Announcing the demise of CDEP in July 2007, the Commonwealth was concerned with 'normalising Indigenous communities, providing opportunities to create real economies and job opportunities in Aboriginal townships' (Brough & Hockey 2007). The central feature of the Labor Government's response in remote areas of the Northern Territory since late 2007, has been to continue to apply policy and resources to work readiness (FaHCSIA 2011; Macklin & O'Connor 2008). Training, mentoring, work experience, and mobility payments are coupled with cuts to welfare payments for non-compliance with work participation

requirements. In these policy directions, work is constructed as an individual enterprise for which Indigenous people must take personal responsibility. To enhance the prospect that individuals do so, the state invests resources to improve skills deficits. Failure to comply with state requirements for work or training is considered a lack of personal responsibility, to be remedied by removing welfare payments or CDEP wages.

Structured in this way, work is divorced from the conditions within which outstation people in this study created meaning and enacted identity through relatedness in their work environments. At its heart, these policy directions aim to reform Aboriginal society from its kin determinants and reshape people as individuals in the marketplace (Altman 2007). Engaging Western Arrernte people from this base is likely to prove fruitless. From the perspective of Western Arrernte people in this study, work was not an end in itself but a means to enhancing relatedness to place and kinship networks. Engagement with work and training was therefore assessed against how such opportunities might contribute to pursuing valued ends such as knowledge of country, the education of children on outstations, or the ability to enhance relatedness with kinship groups. Engagement in work and training opportunities was also determined according to assessments of how these environments took into account practicalities arising from observance of relatedness according to Western Arrernte social norms.

6.3 Conclusion

In the compulsory acquisition of Hermannsburg, the later negotiations over the township lease extension, the introduction of income management, and the reforms to CDEP, participants in this study consistently spoke through their aspirations for family futures on country. While the Commonwealth sought to create conditions fostering economic opportunities in remote Aboriginal Australia, outstation families responded to the reforms and engaged with the opportunities on offer in ways that reflected the primacy of relatedness to place and to each other. These values were integral to their being, identity and social order, and through

which men and women pursued the safety and wellbeing of their families. Their narratives also make clear that the Law, which governs the Western Arrernte spiritual and social order, was at stake as a consequence of the Howard Government's Intervention policies and programs and their continuation under the Rudd Labor Government.

Outstation accounts and the sociological, anthropological and historical literature, show relatedness as central to a Western Arrernte conception of wellbeing. Western Arrernte wellbeing was secured through association with place and between people, not as individual income earners operating in the absence of relational concerns and responsibilities. Moving away from place and the relationships invested in place would – as Solomon expressed when considering the possibility of his son moving to Alice Springs for work – leave a person '*all lost*'. Income, work and government programs were therefore responded to in terms of whether they worked in support of Western Arrernte aspirations and values for identity and relationships.

From this understanding of the world, outstation families did not view the Hermannsburg township lease as an opportunity for future economic security. External control of the town was a threat to family autonomy, cohesion, authority and responsibilities. Fears were voiced about what this would mean for children's identity and connectedness to country. Similarly, income management and CDEP reforms were interpreted through the lens of a kin-based social order. For some families, they were seen as undermining family connectedness through outstation living. For others, they heralded the potential for family salvation by turning the tide on people's preference for settlement in Hermannsburg. While Western Arrernte outstation families welcomed work, business and training opportunities, their accounts also show their engagement in these opportunities was conditional on there being conditions and opportunities to foster relatedness with place and each other.

The literature highlights how relatedness to people and place is central to the lives of many remote Aboriginal peoples. To *be well* was to be Western Arrernte through association with country. To *act well* was to enact Western Arrernte

relatedness. When operating in harmony, both features of Western Arrernte being enabled people to feel comfortable and safe – *to feel well*. As the study shows, these features of wellbeing emerged in everyday encounters and communications with kinship networks linked to place-based associations. Outstation people's 'engagement' in state efforts to secure a better life was determined by whether families saw state programs and rules enhancing their wellbeing as a Western Arrernte person.

Bardi and Indjarbandi woman Dawn Bessarab argues the loss of autonomy and disruption to spiritual and social practice is directly linked to the loss of Aboriginal identity – a loss profoundly impacting on the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities, families and individuals (2008). The outstation accounts reflected in this study certainly reflect this position. Changes in CDEP, land ownership and welfare arrangements brought forth responses couched in emotions that spoke to threats or hopes for Western Arrernte identity and values. Bessarab takes the view that non-Indigenous Australia must understand that Aboriginal peoples embody different worldviews. In doing so, service design and service providers need to move beyond their focus on the material, physical and financial to recognise the link between Aboriginal spirituality, Aboriginal social life and Aboriginal wellbeing.

Emerging from this study and the literature outlined in this chapter, however, are the dilemmas arising in remote Australia from the collision of different worldviews. The values of country and kin are believed to hold Western Arrernte on the edges of market society (Austin-Broos 2009). Statistics mark remote Aboriginal communities as failures in terms of achieving health, education and employment outcomes (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009). Evidence of Aboriginal violence, child abuse and neglect in remote communities cannot be ignored (Sutton 2009; Wild & Anderson 2007). At the same time, Western Arrernte accounts in this study show country and kin are intrinsic to everyday life, as it is through the lens of country and kin that outstation families see their futures, pursue family wellbeing and secure children's safety.

If the state is to engage Aboriginal people in efforts to secure their wellbeing, the Tjuwanpa outstation accounts tell us governments cannot do so in the absence of Aboriginal people's own aspirations for their futures. On Tjuwanpa's outstations and in remote Aboriginal communities across Australia's heartland, these networks of associations remain at the heart of how ordinary men and women see their futures and conduct their interactions with the world.

Chapter 7: The Social Dynamics of Engagement

'It is impossible to come to a competent understanding of the problems of interaction in central Australia without recognizing the importance which the structural aspects of intercultural discourse have in providing for and constraining communication in ordinary settings' (Lieberman 1985 p.172).

7.1 Introduction

Throughout the narratives Western Arrernte social norms were always at play, shaping the nature of discourse and participation in everyday events and social encounters. The focus in this chapter is therefore on the social dynamics revealed through participant's stories. Here relatedness – the need to maintain and foster relationships with important others – played a significant role in moderating Western Arrernte engagement in the social milieus in which work, training, and meetings took place.

As the analysis of linguists, sociologists and anthropologists presented in this chapter illustrate, the conditions influencing outstation participation in work and training, as well as their engagement with state officials in negotiations regarding their futures, reflected particular social norms governing the conduct of speech and behaviour within many remote Aboriginal groups. English language encounters and public meeting spaces interact in particular ways with this feature of Aboriginal sociality and as I argue here, this impacts profoundly on Aboriginal people's ability to be heard, to understand and to be understood. It also has a critical influence on their decisions to engage in the work and training environments in which the state expects them to participate. As the outstation narratives in the earlier chapters highlight, Western Arrernte engagement in work,

training, and public meetings was not a dispassionate encounter. *Feeling well* was associated with rightful patterns of social interaction and as such, was intrinsically linked to *acting well*. Feelings associated with actions subsequently had a profound influence over how outstation families engaged *with* government officials and other outsiders.

I begin this discussion by reflecting on how the Commonwealth's reliance on English language communications influenced conceptual understandings and interpretations of the township leases and *Welfare to Work* reforms. Western Arrernte English language competencies also shaped the nature of social interactions and the ability of outstation families to represent themselves in public forums. As a growing number of studies in Aboriginal Australia show, the needs of Indigenous first language speakers are poorly recognised in mainstream institutional settings with consequences for wellbeing, justice, and Aboriginal relationships with each other.

A substantial issue for outstation residents was that their use of English in encounters with strangers was constrained by shame. Outstation accounts also referenced shame in other daily events where it moderated Western Arrernte relationships and behaviours in the work environment, training workshops, in the classroom, and during community discussions. Drawing on anthropological accounts and studies in institutional settings, I show how shame is a prevailing feature of relatedness in remote desert groups, which arises as a feature of respectful behaviour associated with the maintenance of congenial relations (Lieberman 1985; Myers 1979, 1991). Shame was therefore a significant consideration for Western Arrernte families, moderating English language encounters, their day-to-day interactions, and their communications in the public domain.

Outstation accounts also emphasise the conditions under which they might meaningfully have held discussions with government representatives about efforts to secure their wellbeing. I illustrate how the nature of talk, listening and silence – together with body language and spatial positioning observed in community meetings and group discussions – are ways in which respect, relatedness and the

maintenance of social harmony are sought. The processes of discourse in the public domain therefore reflect Western Arrernte considerations governing appropriate social behaviour.

Finally I discuss Western Arrernte processes for decision-making. Here I highlight the complexities outstation families faced when expected by government authorities to represent their views in public gatherings. There was significant frustration evident in outstation accounts concerning their ability to mobilize an effective voice and find people able to represent it. As the literature shows, the kin-based consensual processes used to maintain relationships and accord respect have little space in consultations with time-poor government officials needing quick answers.

7.2 Understanding English

During encounters with the myriad of government officials visiting Tjuwanpa, and in the vast body of paperwork and electronic communications, which characterised delivery of the NTER, outstation families were asked to understand the Commonwealth's intentions and requirements in English. This profoundly influenced outstation engagement in public discussions and their ability to gain a conceptual understanding of the events taking place. With visiting officials and senders of paperwork assuming English communications were understood, most Western Arrernte families relied on other English speaking family members to help them understand what was taking place, creating problems for all concerned.

7.2.1 'What was that word?' Managing the language of the NTER

Across the introduction of the township leases and the *Welfare to Work* reforms introduced under the NTER, participant accounts show how outstation residents grappled with the language of the Intervention and its meanings. Thatha was not the only person who expressed exasperation with English language communications as the NTER unrolled. Solomon struggled with the word lease

‘... *the part deep inside*’. He had heard the word but was desperately trying to understand its conceptual framing in the context of a township lease over Hermannsburg.

Thatha’s exasperated plea for ‘*Plain English...!*’ reflect a finding common to studies in legal and health settings. These studies show the issues Aboriginal clients face as they encounter the English language communications of government authorities and service providers, are poorly recognised (Cooke 2009; Eades 2007, 2008, 2009; Lowell 2001a; Trudgen 2000). All of these studies found detrimental impacts on Aboriginal health, education and justice outcomes, when service providers and officials failed to recognise language differences. At Tjuwanpa, this lack of recognition of the needs of Indigenous first language speakers presented substantial challenges to people’s ability to participate in work and government training programs and to negotiate with government representatives on matters concerning their everyday lives and futures. As Solomon’s attempt to obtain his Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment shows, English proficiency requirements thwarted people’s efforts to gain professional recognition for their skills and experience. Julia spoke of the frustration of older people, unable to make themselves understood in the public meetings taking place in Hermannsburg to discuss the township leases. Not understanding the Centrelink official, Ngulpa travelled long distances to Alice Springs for groceries she could have purchased in Hermannsburg. Difficulties understanding spoken and written English also meant income support payments were delayed for three to four months for up to seventy Western Arrernte Centrelink clients in the Tjuwanpa area (Kennedy 2008). For outstation families, their identity, income and financial independence were all at stake as a consequence of the reforms. These were underpinned by legal agreements and institutional procedures, which outstation families were expected to understand and agree to without the language capacity to do so. There was little recognition on the part of governments, however, that language differences mattered.

In remote areas of Australia, poor English fluency and literacy presents formidable barriers to Aboriginal engagement in services and community consultations.

Aboriginal people living remotely are five times more likely to misunderstand or be misunderstood by non-indigenous service providers than Indigenous people in non-remote areas (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009 p.11.31) Among the Western Arrernte outstation population, only 12.3 percent of outstation people speak English at home (ABS 2006b).⁶² As the majority of adult outstation residents under 45 were educated at remote outstation schools established by the Lutheran Mission or at the Hermannsburg primary school, English language acquisition has had little reinforcement in day-to-day discourse. The acquisition of English literacy is also poor, reflecting the influence of the Western Arrernte language, social relations and cultural practices upon which literacy practice in remote Indigenous communities is embedded (Kral 2000, 2009).

English, however, was the language through which the Commonwealth communicated the NTER reforms. English was also used to negotiate Centrelink, work participation and township leasing agreements impacting on Western Arrernte incomes, land and aspirations. Throughout the period of the study not once was a professionally qualified Western Arrernte interpreter used during meetings or government interviews at Tjuwanpa. Visiting officials simply assumed people had the means to voice their questions, concerns and understandings of the reforms. As people revealed at Tjuwanpa, they did not.

Studies examining the complexities of Indigenous discourse in courtrooms, classrooms, health facilities, land negotiations – and more recently the NTER – indicate that the difficulties outstation families spoke about when communicating in English with government officials and strangers are widespread (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2011; Cooke 2009; Eades 2007, 2008, 2009; Gray 2000; Lowell 2001a; Lowell & Devlin 1998; Taylor, K. 2010; Trudgen 2000). Studies in health and legal settings show Indigenous first language speakers

⁶² These figures may be erroneous. I am only aware of one outstation family member that speaks English as her first language although she does not consider she speaks English as a native English speaker. She also speaks Western Arrernte fluently.

struggle with the meaning of English words and their contextual reference point. These studies also highlight widespread ignorance of non-Indigenous professionals to the needs of Indigenous first language speakers and the serious implications this has for Indigenous welfare and the effectiveness of government services

Common to these studies are two findings. Firstly, Aboriginal comprehension of English terms used in legal and health settings is exceedingly poor (ARDS 2008). Secondly, officials and service providers assume Aboriginal English is the same as Australian English. This distorts the meanings Aboriginal speakers attempt to convey and silences them, with the result that Aboriginal people are significantly disadvantaged, often with extremely serious consequences (ARDS 2008; Cooke 2009; Eades 2009; Taylor, K. 2010). Government officials and professional staff frequently fail to recognise these difficulties, assuming Aboriginal people understand what is being said. Government reports indicate this is a continuing problem in remote communities in the Northern Territory (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2011). During these exchanges, participants from both groups often do not realise that miscommunication has occurred (Lowell 2001b). The need for interpreter assistance therefore frequently remains unrecognised (ARDS 2008; Cass et al. 2002; Cooke 2009; Taylor, K. 2010).

7.2.2 Interpreters and relatedness

This lack of recognition was evident at Tjuwanpa when visiting teams assumed interpreters were not required, or people like Nungari – who spoke English with some fluency – could be pulled aside at a moment's notice and asked to interpret. Two studies illustrate how this is common practice in institutional settings where family, Aboriginal health staff or Aboriginal staff from vastly different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are often expected to facilitate English language encounters (Cass et al. 2002; Lowell 2001b). This was common practice at Tjuwanpa. Those with poor English proficiency, such as Orgki's brother Ngari, relied on family members who were reasonably competent in English to broker communications with authority figures, strangers and institutions.

When Julia, Orgki and Solomon related their experience with local, Western Arrernte interpreters they expressed concern about the accuracy of translations from English, particularly when complex language and unfamiliar concepts were part of the dialogue. They also expressed frustration with the ability of local interpreters to communicate the nuances of meaning Western Arrernte speakers wanted conveyed. As Cooke notes, ‘the provision of interpreters does not necessarily take the problem away’ (2009 p.34). This complexity, which is encountered when interpreting between Aboriginal languages and English, has been noted in legal and health settings (ARDS 2008; Cooke 2009; Gray 2000; Lowell 2001b; Taylor, K. 2010).

Effectively communicating specialist language and conceptual meanings requires the ability to meet three linguistic challenges. Firstly, those interpreting must have command of an English vocabulary extending across a range of specialist topic areas. This is particularly challenging when many English words have no Aboriginal counterpart (ARDS 2008). This situation was exacerbated at Tjuwanpa by extensive use of acronyms in the government’s written and spoken communications. Secondly, Aboriginal interpreters must have sufficient fluency in English to be able to communicate the meaning an Indigenous first language speaker is attempting to convey. Thirdly, the interpreter must understand the conceptual reference point of the English speaker, without which they cannot convey meaning to their Western Arrernte audience. This has remained a critical issue in health and legal settings (ARDS 2008; Cass et al. 2002; Cooke 2009).

Conceptual understandings, however, sat at the heart of housing, leasing and work participation agreements that outstation people were expected to agree to. It fell on Tjuwanpa’s Resource Centre staff to relay and interpret to their broader kinship networks what became an avalanche of policy directives and Centrelink paperwork. With only one paraprofessional interpreter in Hermannsburg, Tjuwanpa families relied on English speakers in their family networks to interpret for them. As the narratives highlight, it was the nature of relationships between speakers – rather than whether or not they were English speakers or Aboriginal – influencing people’s communications with each other and the level of anxiety

people experienced in English language encounters. Those negotiating with Tjuwanpa managers or officialdom therefore tended to be English-speaking kin or close associates that people felt comfortable and safe with.

In the context of the NTER reforms, however, Western Arrernte family members had neither the language proficiency to communicate the changes nor a conceptual understanding of what the aims and institutional arrangements for these matters were. There were significant consequences for family relationships as a result. The impact of the lack of qualified interpreters lasted well beyond the settling of the dust after the visitors' cars had left. As Orgki reflected, '*...that's when the harassment starts*'. In the context of the importance of maintaining relatedness, using kin to interpret could be problematic. It was not only the accuracy of translations that was an issue. Julia noted how family interpreters experienced the brunt of people's emotions when communicating information that family members felt was inappropriate to their circumstances. As the messengers for the Commonwealth Government's communications, Western Arrernte staff at the Resource Centre office faced criticism of their competency, or the anger of family members, when the message they interpreted was unacceptable. This placed them in stressful situations compromising family relations. This was particularly evident during the first months following the introduction of income management. Consequently, Tjuwanpa's Western Arrernte CDEP and Centrelink staff experienced enormous stress. They bore the burden of explaining an increasingly complex and confusing set of *Welfare to Work* requirements to residents, which they themselves struggled to understand. As Tjuwanpa staff later recounted, their role as interpreters often meant they became the target of family frustration and anger when problems with Centrelink payments resulted in delays receiving benefits. Cooke (2009) notes similar problems in court settings, where families can blame Aboriginal interpreters for unpopular court outcomes. Interpreting complex and unpopular government changes and regulations thus placed an onerous burden on Tjuwanpa's staff and disrupted important kin relationships.

Studies in health and legal settings as well as the Commonwealth's own reporting, point to the very poor recognition by governments and bureaucracies of the needs

of Indigenous first language speakers, as well as the impact the failure to recognise these needs has on Aboriginal welfare and wellbeing. Less well documented in these studies are two issues that were evident at Tjuwanpa. First is the detrimental impact on important Aboriginal social relationships, resulting from the reliance of Aboriginal people on kin to communicate complex bureaucratic requirements and the meanings inherent in government intentions. Second, is the influence English language has over Aboriginal participation in government programs, negotiations, and community consultations.

At issue here are the impacts that difficulties with English language communications have on the capability of remote Aboriginal people to engage in government programs. English language requirements in interviews, and in work and training environments, can deter participation, stymie the acquisition of technical qualifications and have detrimental consequences for individuals when they fail to meet bureaucratic requirements. In the absence of professional interpreters and the government's failure to recognise the needs of Indigenous first language speakers, Aboriginal family members must negotiate English communications through the sensitive terrain of kin relationships and conceptual misunderstandings. As this study shows, this affects the ability of Western Arrernte people to understand the government's aims for their futures, their ability to represent their interests in the public domain and consequently, their capability to influence government decisions.

7.3 Relatedness and the Conduct of Talk

Engagement in education, training, work environments and public meetings were not dispassionate encounters for outstation residents. These were all spaces within which outstation families sought the continuance of relatedness and avoided encounters that might have compromised people's position in relation to important others. The narratives reveal important elements of the talking processes. As I discuss here, these processes are part of Western Arrernte sociality, employed to facilitate relatedness and maintain social harmony.

Emotions are a prevailing feature in outstation resident accounts of their interactions with outsiders during the first two years of the Intervention. These were expressed as feeling comfortable and safe, the counterpoint of which, was feeling '*shame*'. The narratives reveal that using English as a means to seek clarification or engage in a dialogue was constrained by shame. Shame was frequently expressed as a feeling that arose in the context of English language encounters. As English remains the dominant language in work, training or community meetings, the possibility of shame is ever present. Listening and silence were also common features of outstation discourse. As explored here, these features of interaction are important social mechanisms through which people hold themselves in relation to important others.

7.3.1 'They might feel shame': Discourse and emotions

People referred to feelings of comfort and safety again and again in outstation accounts. People described feeling comfortable and safe when the terrain of trusted relationships and futures operated within known Western Arrernte values and social norms. In contrast, feelings of being unsafe or uncomfortable were expressed in the realm of operating or behaving outside the known social order. Some understanding of the dynamics of shame and the role it plays in moderating Aboriginal interactions provides important insights into talk, silence and Western Arrernte behaviour seen when outstation residents engaged with outsiders. Shame moderates Western Arrernte social behaviour with the aim of maintaining respectful sociality.

Described often in outstation accounts as 'shame' or 'shyness', this emotion caused discomfort or embarrassment, with frequent references in outstation accounts to feeling wrong. Fear of shame could leave people tongue-tied. As Orgki described it, shame was a feeling of being, '*not in the right place*'. In work environments, the classroom, the Manager's office or meetings; when encountering strangers, elders, members of the opposite sex or '*avoidance*'

relationships ⁶³; or when speaking on the phone, outstation residents often talked about the ever-presence of shame. In interactions requiring English people frequently referred to the fear of shame.

At Tjuwanpa, people often recounted how shame was to be avoided. This was achieved by having someone else speak on your behalf as Orgki Connie, Lex or Lee did when family members encountered strangers or authority figures. Recourse to silence was an alternative, most often observable in public meetings or interviews when well-meaning officials would ask a question. A third possibility existed. Exiting a room when visitors arrived or standing well back during public meetings put people, such as Solomon, out of range of contact where the possibility of shame could be avoided altogether.

Shame could also be avoided by knowing; knowing the topic under consideration, the language being communicated, the rules of the game, or the behavioural codes expected with the person with whom one was communicating. In knowing the agenda being put forward at a meeting people could avoid appearing ignorant or foolish. In knowing the family position on a matter under discussion, one could potentially present a view confident of their support. In knowing, one had time to prepare for an encounter in a second language. In knowing their relationship to another, each person also knew the social protocols associated with rightful behaviour. Knowing therefore mitigated the risk that one might experience shame by breaking socially accepted codes of conduct.

Harkins' (1990) exploration of shame in the Aboriginal classroom distinguishes getting shame – when encountering strangers or the unfamiliar; feeling shame – when under the gaze of kin or in the presence of totemic representations, and shame as embarrassment – as when people feel exposed to praise, acclaim or sanction in the public view. Anthropologists working with Aboriginal peoples have identified shame as a significant feature within Aboriginal socialisation

⁶³ Avoidance relationships refer to particular kin or skin relationships, which require an Aboriginal person to avoid directly speaking with or having contact with another. It is a mark of respectful behaviour.

processes, describing its role in moderating relations between men and women, and its impact on structuring social interactions and emotional responses (Cowlshaw 1982; Hiatt 1978; Liberman 1985; Myers 1991). From early childhood, ridicule is used to engender shame as a means of imposing conformity to social norms (Berndt & Berndt 1967; Cowlshaw 1982; Myers 1991). As people move into adulthood, the possibility of shame prevails across multiple circumstances: at play in the intricacies of Aboriginal classificatory systems defining kinship relations in remote Australia (Bauman 2002). Shame also features as a prelude to, rationale for, or aftermath of aggression or perceived wrongdoing (Burbank 1994).

Exploring the experience of Aboriginal adolescents as they encountered South Australia's welfare and criminal justice systems, Hutchings reveals the power of shame over youth behaviours during court hearings. In her study, she also shows the failure of bureaucrats to understand Aboriginal constructions of shame and the role played by court officials in engendering it. Hutchings theorises that shame in Aboriginal societies, 'structures and pervades all social interaction' (1995 p.15), influencing not only the conduct of Aboriginal sociality among Aboriginal kin groups and communities, but also the conduct of their interface with state systems. Harkins makes the point, however, that while shame is related to:

‘... a sense of propriety accompanied by a desire to avoid doing things that would be seen by others as bad (it) is quite compatible with high self-esteem and a sense of oneself as a person who knows and does the right thing’ (1990 p.300).

Liberman and Myers see shame as a powerful mechanism through which Aboriginal congeniality and consensus are maintained in pursuit of group harmony and relatedness (Liberman 1985; Myers 1979, 1991). Liberman notes that shame allows the self to diminish in the presence of others. It moderates interaction in the group so that conspicuous assertions, which might cause disagreements or public insults, are avoided. It is a form of politeness demonstrating good character, requiring one look away. ‘Shame and embarrassment are institutions which demonstrate to others that one does not have a conceited view of oneself’

(Lieberman 1985 p.27), thus placing the self in relationship with the group.

Myers' study of emotions in the lives of the Western Desert Pintupi broadens the notion of shame, by setting it in the context of its counterpart – respect or compassion for others. He elaborates on these twin responses as key features shaping Pintupi identity and sociality.

'Kunta as “shame” and *kunta* as “respect” present two sides of the same coin. Showing respect for someone by consulting that person's wishes, by not overstepping one's bounds, or by “shyness” in stating claims, avoids embarrassment. “Respect” (or “shyness”) is often expressed by a hesitation to speak out. Conversely, disrespect – such as refusing a person directly, without excuses – is “embarrassing” (Myers 1991 p.123).

Myers therefore positions shame as part of Pintupi ideology constituted in emotions, which model appropriate moral behaviour as personal restraint. Shame is therefore constituted in cooperative relatedness with significant others (Myers 1979).

Shame is also associated with discussion of sexual matters. Myers notes that, ‘Sexual relations are supposed to be private matters, not observed by others’ (1991, p. 122), and describes how any reference to sexual matters is studiously avoided in Pintupi society. This goes so far as to include the use of ‘*avoidance*’ language when describing a man's mother or father in law. He notes further that ‘Sexual relations are apparently regarded as having great potential for creating disorder in the public realm’ (p.123). This may account for the silence throughout the narratives on the question of child sexual abuse. Discussion of sexual matters would have brought the private affairs of the family into the public domain. Julia is the only person to speak directly on the subject of child sex abuse when she challenges the Hermannsburg lease negotiations saying, ‘It (the Intervention) went away from child abuse...’ Although women like Elva spoke about the sexual abuse of young girls by taxi drivers when trying to get home to their Alice Springs town camp, and others spoke about some families neglecting their children, shame is likely to have prevented further elaboration on this topic during conversations

with outstation residents. From these comments, however, it is clear that people came to understand that the Intervention was in some way associated with child neglect and abuse. In their discussions, however, people like Orgki did not elaborate on the issue of child abuse beyond venting her outrage at being punished for something she had never done. Albrecht (1994) and Coombs (1978) have also commented on the Western Arrernte tradition of keeping family affairs private, describing how this feature of Western Arrernte sociality undermined attempts by the Lutheran Mission in Hermannsburg to establish the Town Council as a means to impose control over drinking and petrol sniffing.

Recent studies portray the influence of shame in contemporary Aboriginal lives. Taylor (2010) found poor English skills of Aboriginal patients in the Central Desert, coupled with the lack of competency of medical staff in inter-cultural communications, induced shame during health interventions. This compromised the effectiveness of treatment as patients avoided further interactions with health care providers. Baumann talks of shame as a feature of everyday existence of people living in the Katherine region of the Northern Territory, where Aboriginal groups from diverse linguistic and geographic backgrounds often find themselves in contact with others whose subsection identity⁶⁴ they are unable to identify. She notes, 'The shame invoked when attention is drawn to the fact that someone may not be appropriately located in the social order is the biggest shame of all' (2002 p.216). Given the prospect of shame if unable to appropriately place themselves in relation to others Baumann suggests that people have modified the use of subsections in everyday life, reflecting the power of shame in changing patterns of Aboriginal sociality.

Shame in Aboriginal societies is therefore more than a *feeling* of shyness or embarrassment. It accompanies respect and sits with embarrassment when one is

⁶⁴ Subsections act as an identity marker. These place all people within in a classificatory kin system of one of eight named terms. Knowing one's identity within the system enables one to know one's obligations and responsibilities, thereby enabling the individual to avoid the shame that transgression of these norms would bring.

exposed to public view or engaged in behaviours outside normative boundaries. It also accompanies encounters with the unfamiliar. Hiatt notes that for Warlpiri the word for fear and shame are the same, suggesting these emotions are related to feeling the need to retreat from a situation (1978). Shame therefore sits in the desire to avoid wrongdoing, stand out, or make a mistake. It is therefore a moral feature of respectful relatedness and sociality rather than being associated with having done something wrong. As such, shame acts as a powerful motivating force in Central Desert sociality.

Shame anticipates rightful behaviour and avoids situations where the self is exposed, cultural norms might be transgressed, or there is the possibility someone may be offended. This risk is exacerbated in English language encounters where there is the risk of making a mistake, of misunderstanding or being misunderstood. Public meetings often present the possibility for feeling shame when facilitators seek immediate answers to questions. If a person directly responds to a question, there is the risk they could breach accepted consensual processes or appear to show disrespect for kin-based authority. At Tjuwanpa, visiting government officials used questions to the group at large when seeking people's input. These processes failed to take into account the cultural norms governing Western Arrernte social behaviour, exposing individuals to potential emotional distress. Most often, however, what could be observed was silence. People sought to avoid shame by saying nothing.

Given the role shame plays in everyday life, it was not surprising that shame prevailed as a feature of Western Arrernte outstation engagement in their encounters with the representatives of the state during the Intervention. It also shaped people's decisions about their participation in government services and programs. In public meetings, everyday work and training environments or encounters with strangers, shame was invoked as a means to maintain relatedness. One did not have to *be* shamed – it was the anticipation of shame that moderated behaviour. Outstation responses to strangers, to authority, to unfamiliarity, to public encounters, and in interactions with each other were therefore nuanced and responsive to the potential for shame. Shame, the desire to avoid shame, or

responses to feeling shame, were therefore outstation ways within which people acted respectfully to maintain congenial relationships according to a Western Arrernte moral code.

7.3.2 Fostering relatedness through talk, silence, and body language

Solomon and Thatha were frustrated by the haste of government meetings. It was extremely important to them to have time to digest what they heard, the opportunity to clarify further what they understood, and then time to discuss matters with their families. Meetings and interviews, as Thatha noted however, were hurried affairs. Government staff disappeared once their business was finished. As the literature indicates here, the processes used at Tjuwanpa by government visitors for the conduct of talk, meant outstation families had little room to exercise a voice through which they might have been able to enhance their understanding of government's requirements or to put their views forward.

Government teams conveying information about income management and CDEP reforms were invariably busy people. Community meetings at Tjuwanpa and Hermannsburg focused on the business at hand, beginning and finishing with an eye on the clock. Long oral presentations featured. When silences followed questions, presenters filled the space by reiterating questions or quickly resumed speaking. Government teams organising income management arrangements and transitioning CDEP workers onto the Centrelink system at Tjuwanpa were similarly hurried, forced to conduct rapid-fire interviews as they registered hundreds of people on to the Centrelink system in less than four weeks. Under the Rudd Government, consultations with remote communities in the Northern Territory on the future of the NTER and CDEP continued this pattern. In 2008, different teams arrived armed with long lists of questions requiring complex answers, which they sought to obtain in meetings of two to three hours (FaHCSIA 2008c; Macklin 2008c).

Despite his deep concerns about the leases, Solomon was unable to ask questions about words or concepts he did not understand because he was fearful this might

diminish him in front of others. Sociolinguistic analyses of legal proceedings and patient-doctor interactions indicate that questioning very often presents problems for Indigenous people in structured encounters with officialdom (Cooke 2001, 2009; Eades 2007, 2009; Gray 2000). Liberman (1985) notes that in Western Desert society it is considered impolite to ask direct questions without some kind of congenial relationship. Eades also points out that the questioning processes predominating during interviews and meetings at Tjuwanpa are alien to traditional Indigenous forms of discourse (Eades 2009). Research in courts and health settings indicates that for many Indigenous peoples, this approach elicits responses framed by a desire to please (Cooke 2009; Eades 2008, 2009; Gray 2000). Liberman (1980a) terms this feature of Aboriginal sociality '*gratuitous concurrence*', arising from the need to maintain ongoing congeniality. Solomon notes the consequences of this when he says, '*They might come and tell you about something ... and you say, 'yeah' ... and you might then see your name on a piece of paper and then you'll say, "But I didn't agree to that one!"*'"

Questioning processes also prevent the emergence of accounts. When faced with questions, accounts are stripped to facts to be supplied by the individual according to institutional rules, agendas and timetables leaving Aboriginal respondents silent.

In many Indigenous societies, however, talk embodies a consensual building of a position, which seeks to maintain harmonious group relations (Liberman 1985; Myers 1986; Williams 1985). Solomon highlighted this when he spoke about his need for processes through which an agreement could be reached within his family group. His concern was that if government representatives asked for their opinion, outstation families needed to have sufficient time to understand, discuss, and reach a position about what they were hearing before framing a response.

Western Arrernte communications also encompass body language and nuances of speech indicating respect. These kinds of communication are important means of maintaining social harmony. Orgki talked about avoiding directly looking at the eyes of one of her relative's eyes during conversations or meetings. She would also take care to do this during group discussions, particularly when taking a

different position to others. This was a sign she was being respectful (Eades 2009). Liberman suggests that by avoiding eye contact, people can preserve harmony when they may have a different point of view (1980c). He also notes it is frequently a feature of gratuitous concurrence employed to maintain sociality (1980a). As Orgki observed, non-Aboriginal visitors to Tjuwanpa did not observe this protocol. This caused silent discomfort for Western Arrernte participants in meetings and interviews or contributed to situations where people avoided direct encounters.

Spatial positioning also accords respect. During community meetings at Tjuwanpa people grouped themselves in deference to the position of elders or the authority of visiting teams. Others physically positioned themselves to accommodate avoidance protocols, the breaking of which would be deemed disrespectful (Von Sturmer 1981). Many would therefore sit at some distance from the proceedings. Failing to recognise these sensitivities government visitors arrived without microphones or speakers, leaving those on the outer perimeter of the meeting unable to hear the proceedings.

The silence of outstation participants was a typical feature of meetings held underneath the bough shelter and in the Tjuwanpa office. The chatter of non-Aboriginal speakers filled this space. These silences were neither resistance, ignorance, insolence, recalcitrance nor disinterest but an important form of Aboriginal sociality. People employed silence as a means of acquainting themselves with the newcomer; to feel comfortable in a new social situation; or to think or show respect (Eades 2007; Liberman 1985). Silence also represents respectful behaviour determined by rights over who can know, hear or speak about a particular matter (Rose 2001). Silence can be used to protect the self from feeling diminished, 'and is used to signal that a request or a question is out of place' (Austin-Broos 2009 p.164).

At Tjuwanpa, silence provided time to absorb what was happening and could be assured by avoiding direct face-to-face contact while staying within earshot of conversations. Alternatively, as Orgki explained, silence might mean listening while another spoke, waiting for permission to speak or indicate a respectful way

of managing avoidance protocols. Or as Thatha pointed out, silence might also mean '*They might just sit there and listen and learn.*' Liberman (1980c) notes that silence is an important feature of relatedness, employed to give people time to assess the situation at hand and within which a local order of proceedings establishes itself. At Tjuwanpa non-Aboriginal speakers rushed to fill such silences. Some suggest this feature of intercultural communications arises from non-Aboriginal perceptions that something must be wrong, and in the process leaves Aboriginal speakers feeling pressured and uncomfortable (Eades 2007; Trudgen 2000).

Thatha and Solomon sought communications processes that would accord with Western Arrernte sensibilities. Thatha's view was that meeting processes needed to reflect a relational approach involving, '*...making yourself comfortable first by talkin' to people, not just chuckin' everything at them*'. She would establish a connection with the group and spend time getting to know them. When the appropriate time came, she would begin her discussion. For Thatha building relationships also involved an iterative process of repeated visits where '*... you need to go round the whole community n ask what do they think.*' Anthropological accounts note that respectful conduct for newcomers involves a gradual entry into the group (Liberman 1980c, 1985; Myers 1991). People's arrival is not heralded by greetings or introductions. Visitors maintain a respectful distance until they are acknowledged and invited into the group. Meeting for the first time, people establish how they are related to one another. Important matters for discussion are not approached immediately or directly (Von Sturmer 1981).

In endeavouring to relay information about the leases and *Welfare to Work* reforms to outstation residents, government visitors rushed to communicate their agenda, relying on meeting and interview protocols, which ignored or were ignorant of the social complexities these processes presented from a Western Arrernte worldview. Meetings and interviews therefore failed to accommodate the importance given by outstation families to the behaviours associated with maintaining relatedness. This meant that interviews, community meetings, and the well-meaning BBQ held at the end of the meeting underneath the bough shelter

achieved little for outstation families in terms of creating an environment in which they might understand events taking place.

7.4 Relatedness in representation, decision-making, and authority

Throughout the narratives, Western Arrernte people talked about rightful processes for the conduct of talk. They emphasised how communications are modified by the need to maintain harmonious relationships. This harmony is also sought in the ways in which Tjuwanpa's outstation families reach decisions and represent themselves. There are tensions for Western Arrernte families when expected by outsiders to readily disclose a position or opinion in a public forum; or when asked to act as community representatives or decision makers at the interface with government agencies. Representation, authority and decision-making all take place with the aim of maintaining relatedness, while the leadership and governance expected within mainstream Australian democratic practice struggles to accommodate these dynamics.

While many people expressed Thatha's view that they should '*... just get up together and talk up for their own futures if they gonna continue their lives on their outstations*', this did not happen at Tjuwanpa. The Rudd Government's attempt to seek Aboriginal views through the appointment of a local Indigenous Engagement Officer was met with anger and rejection at Tjuwanpa. There was a similar response to the Howard Government's appointment of a Western Arrernte Indigenous Advisor during the early days of the Intervention. The narratives about the Hermannsburg lease negotiations provide insights into the social norms governing Western Arrernte decision-making, authority and representation, highlighting some of the processual tensions inherent in decision-making across kin and clan groups.

The norms governing Western Arrernte decision-making processes were compounded by problems with English language communications and the nature of talk in Western Arrernte society. The failure of government authorities to

recognise these features of Western Arrernte life effectively left outstation families without a voice that might have represented their interests. The mismatch between the Commonwealth's approaches to consultation and negotiation processes during the early years of the NTER are mirrored in historical accounts relating to the Lutheran Mission's attempt to establish community-wide, self-governing councils in Hermannsburg during the 1960s and 70s. The literature detailing the events from this time provides insights into how authority and representation in the Western Arrernte context function within kin affiliations. Anthropological accounts and recent studies focusing on Aboriginal community governance illustrate how these features of social interaction also prevail in other contexts.

7.4.1 Family authority and autonomy in the Hermannsburg outstation movement

Documentation of the Hermannsburg Mission's attempts to establish Western Arrernte self-governance forty years ago suggests Western Arrernte concerns over family authority and cohesion played an extremely significant role in the Hermannsburg outstation movement. Although Aboriginal families in Hermannsburg wanted to return to their traditional country to maintain their spiritual connections to the land, families also sought to avoid the social tensions and challenges to traditional authority associated with the Mission settlement (Albrecht 1994; Coombs, Herbert C 1978; Downing 1988; Sommerlad 1973a). Outstations enabled individual clan groups to pursue greater family autonomy. This had been restricted in Hermannsburg under the influence of a small group of leaders affiliated with one of the five Western Arrernte clan groups. This clan was assuming authority, and control over resources and employment under the Mission's new governance system.⁶⁵

Mission authorities began to study the nature of Western Arrernte governance and

⁶⁵ A more detailed account of the Hermannsburg outstation movement, and the factors, which influenced the return of Western Arrernte to their homelands, can be found at Appendix 3.

authority following a review of the Hermannsburg Town Council (Sommerlad 1973a). The Council, established by the Mission with the intent of creating an environment in which Aboriginal residents could determine and manage their own priorities, became a dismal failure within two years of its establishment. Sommerlad's review found many of the issues related to how Western Arrernte norms prioritised social responsibilities to kin-based clan groups.

The key factor undermining the Council was the assumption Council members could exercise authority and influence over all Western Arrernte in the Mission and ensure they abided by Council decisions (Coombs, Herbert C 1978). Council responsibilities to manage law and order issues, however, impinged on the tradition of keeping family affairs private. It was therefore considered shameful to discuss family matters in a public setting where other families were present. As many of the matters before the Council concerned the behaviours or actions of individuals who were not kin affiliates, Council members were seen as having no authority over those who were not family. The assumption that an independently constituted Council would assume responsibility for decisions affecting the whole community was therefore at odds with Western Arrernte clan-based authority and responsibility structures. There was subsequently no adherence to Council decisions on these or other matters (Albrecht 1994), a problem noted later by Myers with respect to the operations of the Papunya Community Council (Myers 1991). Kin relatedness also restricted communication of Council decisions, as Council members were responsible to kin associates and not the broader community. Julia pointed out that this remained the case during the period of the study, noting the head of the Hermannsburg Council did not communicate across clan groups.

Although the Mission had sought to establish a representative mechanism through which community governance could be exercised, Western Arrernte clans had handled the clash of cultural mechanisms for the exercise of authority in an innovative manner. Families members nominated to council were only affiliated to particular clans by marriage. In the Western Arrernte social order, people with this status lacked recognised authority. Clan groups therefore nominated Council

members precisely because they lacked authority to act. At the same time, kinship obligations required them to act in the interest of kin relations, thus ensuring families represented on the council had opportunities to access vehicles, jobs and other resources (Downing 1988). This strategy effectively maintained the Western Arrernte status quo. Matters relating to family remained within the family domain, family authority remained immune to council decisions, and family interests prevailed in the sharing of information and resources. Traditional modes of authority and relatedness therefore remained intact.

Based on this analysis of its experience with self-governance in Hermannsburg, the Mission attempted to re-establish its relationship with Western Arrernte people (Albrecht 2002). Albrecht's account shows the Mission committed to support a church reflecting its Aboriginal congregation in terms of Western Arrernte social structures and processes for decision-making. Mission authorities subsequently decided to vest control in the hands of traditional family authority structures. In doing so the Mission recognised five distinct clan groups and family authorities with respect to land, social structures and customary rituals. It was this decision that underpinned Mission support for the decentralisation of Hermannsburg and its argument for the establishment of five Land Trusts representative of the five totemic landscapes and clan groups existing on the Mission lease.

The Mission's decision re-energised and gave external recognition to kin-based authority. As totemic authority embedded in country underpinned the Western Arrernte social order, clans quickly took advantage of the funding and logistical support from the Mission and federal government for a return to country. Within two years of the Mission's review and decision to work within traditional social structures, the Hermannsburg outstation movement was well underway. Western Arrernte families quickly moved back to their traditional lands hoping to rebuild family cohesion and authority undermined by the Mission settlement. By 1975 the population of Hermannsburg had dwindled from a population of some 650 to between 100 to 150 people (Albrecht 2002; Stoll, Ziersch & Schmaal 1979).

It is from this understanding that outstation accounts in this study depicted

government support for outstation residence and CDEP as formal recognition of the importance of Western Arrernte land-based forms of family authority. This was why Connie – who as a young woman had been party to these events – was dismayed about the process for the negotiations of the Hermannsburg lease. It also explains her response to Tjuwanpa's poorly supervised CDEP program. Both initiatives undermined the family authority and cohesion, which Western Arrernte elders almost forty years earlier had been determined to rebuild.

While people like Solomon, Julia and Thatha understood the need for representative voice across the Tjuwanpa outstation region during the NTER, this history explains why they faced considerable difficulties. Outstation autonomy and authority existed within kinship networks, not within externally constituted affiliations such as the Tjuwanpa Board of Management, the Hermannsburg Town Council or the Central Land Council.

7.4.2 Consensus, authority and representation

The consensual, kin-based processes required for representative decision-making in this social space, as well as the social dynamics involved in speaking on behalf of others, were ignored by those implementing the Intervention and by policy makers in the Howard and Rudd Governments. This made it impossible for any outstation person to voice their questions, priorities or concerns. The narratives make clear that people wanted opportunities to understand, discuss and have a say regarding the events taking place. The *process* of talk, however, was extremely important to outstation families. As suggested by the literature, Aboriginal decision-making, authority and representation take place with the aim of maintaining and extending relatedness. The nature of public consultation processes, the speed of the reform processes and the lack of government interest in negotiating with its Aboriginal constituency in the Northern Territory, however, provided no means for these processes to take place, effectively leaving outstation families voiceless.

While the focus of anthropological interest in Aboriginal decision-making over the past 30 years has centred on its application to the determination of Indigenous land

interests, Liberman's study, set amongst the Ngaanyatjarra of the Western Desert, illuminates the process of decision-making in everyday life (Liberman 1985). Governed by the need to maintain relatedness, Liberman describes Aboriginal decision-making as a consensual process, designed to maintain harmony amongst members of the group. Played out in the public domain of Ngaanyatjarra sociality, talk avoids overt criticism, embarrassing others, and the imposition of ideas, thus avoiding aggressive or argumentative behaviour that might create confrontation and subsequently disrupt social relations. Describing the interactions of the group as a cyclical, consensual process of deliberation – with each person contributing to a collaborative process of building a congenial solution – Liberman illustrates how a gathering comes to a position of agreement. Unpleasant matters are avoided. Listening is part of thinking. This contrasts with non-Aboriginal forms of interaction that value individual points of view. Brokers may be used to present an idea, which if taken up by the group, can be the means through which the person wishing to pursue a course of action gains permission to speak. Silence may therefore represent deference or sensitivity to the dynamics at play in the group, or as other writers suggest, may reflect the lack of authority to speak in relation to privileged knowledge (Baines 2001; Rose 2001). Reaching a decision can thus take considerable time as people seek to maintain harmonious relationships through which differences and discussions can be concluded.

Unlike earlier anthropological accounts (Strehlow 1968) that vested authority and decision-making in male elders owing to their spiritual knowledge, Liberman suggests that age, gender and country determine processual matters rather than being the locus of authority for decisions. Decisions are '*received*' as a group process rather than individually determined (Liberman 1980b p.53), as Orgki suggests when talking about how any decisions about outstation country will be decided. Elders help to resolve conflict and set direction for discussion, exemplified by Orgki's description of how Connie facilitated group discussions. Age is a mark of authority whereby decisions are authenticated. Thatha notes this when she says that if she were to conduct local consultations, she would ask her elders first. Respect is accorded to perceived character. Everyone is free, however, to participate in the work of the group. 'Anyone may participate in the direction,

but not ‘anyone’ as an individual personality – ‘anyone’ as an anonymous member of the gathering’ (Lieberman 1985 p. 75). Authority is thus derivative of the group. Reference to collective authority maintains the individual as discreet and respectful of others while simultaneously allowing individual autonomy. ‘Ngaanyatjarra will not speak for others, considering that to be an unwarranted extension of one’s own personality; correspondingly, they resent having been spoken for’ (Lieberman 1985 p.25). This was the reason for Solomon’s hostile reaction to news of the appointment of former Minister Brough’s Western Arrernte advisor.

Based on his work with the Pintupi, Myers similarly sees the central aim for Pintupi decision-making as being the sustaining of relations, and suggests that authority and agreements are therefore context dependent rather than rule-based (Myers 1986, 1991). Observing behaviour and analysing speech in community meetings, Myers maintains that talk in these contexts is concerned with the maintenance of relationships rather than determining political action. He states that unless there is a fundamental change in Pintupi ontology, the sociality of Pintupi being effectively precludes their participation in non-Aboriginal political forums and decision-making as:

‘... the immediacy of current relations so dominates Pintupi social life that the production of an enduring structure that transcends the immediate and present is a cultural problem for the Pintupi and other Aboriginal people’ (Myers 1991 p.17).

Williams also concludes that Aboriginal decision-making is consensual with a decision reached when there is an absence of dissent or opposition (Williams 1985, 1995). Like Lieberman, she notes the importance of time for Yolngu people, as positions need to be put and considered within clan groups before a decision is taken. Time may also be needed when consensus is not reached in the short term, as people may need to put the matter in abeyance until a more consensual position becomes evident. Unlike Lieberman, who stresses the importance of maintaining congeniality in group discourse, Williams suggests that disputing is ‘an expected element of ordinary social process in Aboriginal societies’ (1995 p.112) rather

than evidence of chronic social disruption. Further Williams contends that the issue of Aboriginal decision-making does not lie within the problematic of Aboriginal culture but with non-Aboriginal authorities, who misunderstand the roles different people play as messengers, spokespersons and leaders in the decision-making process. She maintains that there is ‘nothing ‘invisible or even mysterious’ in Aboriginal decision making’ (1985 p.40). What exists is a failure of authorities to understand the *how* of Aboriginal decision-making. This enables the state to continue to manage its Aboriginal minority.

Recent studies undertaken as part of the Indigenous Community Governance Project examined the practice of Indigenous decision-making across regional and remote Australia (Hunt et al. 2008; Hunt & Smith 2007). The Hunt and Smith studies address the question of what constitutes appropriate forms of Indigenous governance in contemporary Australia. Their findings confirm the centrality of relationships and consensus, and the egalitarian and interconnected relationships between kinship affiliations, groups and organisations. These features underpin the authority and subsequent effectiveness of Indigenous leadership across different Indigenous governance arrangements. Hunt and Smith also note the complexity of Indigenous leadership as ‘characterised by being socially dispersed, hierarchical, and context specific (with ceremonial, organisational, familial, residential, age and gender dimensions)’ (Hunt & Smith 2006 p.30). Echoing Williams’ comments made more than twenty years earlier, they also observe how non-Indigenous authorities create problems in communities by their failure to understand how Indigenous leadership is exercised, and note the risk of distorting local authority by privileging community members proficient in English. Indeed it would appear from Connie’s account that this situation had already emerged in Hermannsburg as a consequence of the appointment of the Commonwealth’s appointment of an Indigenous Engagement Officer.

The complexity of the terrain associated with contemporary Indigenous decision-making has also recently come into focus in the Indigenous Mediation and Facilitation Project (Bauman 2006a). Bauman’s research highlights the need to recognise that decision-making often takes place in the context of vexed

relationships within groups and networks, and between Indigenous groups and a plethora of government agencies. Bauman's study showed that achieving consensus in this environment requires expertise in the resolution and mediation of disputes, which often stand outside the matter under consideration. She observes that if these matters are not resolved, they compromise the ability of Indigenous groups to reach an agreed position or decision. Bauman's study also highlights how government pressure to see decisions made and enacted, potentially exacerbates tensions within kinship groups and communities of interest.

The literature here suggests that the tensions people experienced at Tjuwanpa when they were expected to disclose a position in public or asked to act as a representative for others, can be understood to derive from social norms governing appropriate behaviour designed to maintain relatedness. Talk embodies consensual processes, with authority for a particular position derived once there is agreement within the group. While spiritual authority is accorded to those holding totemic knowledge, decision-making is a kin-based group process involving those concerned with a particular matter. In enacting decisions, obligations to kin affiliations predominate, meaning communications and responsibilities are to kin, not area-wide groupings. Historical accounts show how these features of Western Arrernte society prevailed over the Mission's efforts to initiate new community-based governance structures in Hermannsburg and underpinned the Tjuwanpa outstation movement. At this time, outstation settlement became the means to achieve a re-establishment of a clan-based social order.

As government officials sought to engage Western Arrernte in discussions regarding the Hermannsburg lease and to implement plans seeking to bring remote Aboriginal people into the mainstream workforce, outstation families were effectively silenced. Hasty meetings – together with government expectations that people would speak as individuals or act as community-representatives – offered no recourse to outstation families to voice their concerns. Processes and time were needed that respected relatedness and enabled families to consult with family authorities, reach a position with each other, and appoint an appropriate representative before engaging in discussions with outsiders.

In response to their uncertainty about the future, Western Arrernte families employed a familiar catch phrase, '*... we'll just have to wait 'n' see ...*'. While some might see this as a statement of powerlessness, it is also a statement about how positions are reached. Decisions are contingent as people wait until facts are established, others' positions are known and consensus about what is to be done emerges (Lieberman 1985; Williams 1985). Others suggest that contingency enables Aboriginal people to maintain flexibility so as to maximise opportunities that might arise to strengthen one's social relationships (Heil & Macdonald 2008). Thus to '*wait 'n' see*' speaks to considerations of relatedness and understanding before taking action.

7.5 Conclusion

As outstation residents revealed, features of relatedness shaped their communications and decisions during the NTER and moderated their encounters in unknown social terrains. Feeling comfortable and safe by avoiding shame, were the corresponding emotions that characterised the conditions families sought in their engagement with representatives of the state. The literature on communications in the intercultural domain has long documented how English language communications and norms governing social behaviour impact on the nature of Aboriginal interactions and their understanding of events. Despite this knowledge being available, the language and processes used in government meetings and interviews during the period of the study effectively left people like Solomon, '*in a dark corner lookin' for the light*'.

The complexity of language used in printed communications and by NTER officials during meetings and interviews, the predominance of alien questioning processes, and the failure to use professional interpreters, reflects a pervasive ignorance on the part of Australian government institutions with regard to the English capacities of Indigenous first language speakers. In assuming English language fluency, the Commonwealth assumed outstation families shared a conceptual understanding of the complex meanings, which sat behind the leasing

proposals, income management and changes to CDEP. As Sovariel recounted two years after the Intervention began, he neither understood why the township lease was necessary nor did he agree with it. With Western Arrernte voices effectively silenced as a consequence of the language and processes employed by the Commonwealth to communicate its intentions and requirements, outstation residents had no ability to meaningfully negotiate or make known their circumstances.

As the findings from Tjuwanpa suggest, the need to maintain relatedness was evident in everyday Western Arrernte speech patterns, behavioural codes and decision-making processes. Ignored in government consultation processes, communications styles, and rushed schedules, however, were the normative processes governing Western Arrernte sociality. The language and processes used in the inter-cultural domain repeatedly placed Tjuwanpa residents in situations involving the emotional discomfort of shame. In meetings or during encounters with unknown outsiders where English language and answers to questions were required – silence, reliance on kin, polite concurrence or avoidance were often used to maintain social harmony or avoid situations where people might feel the ‘*out of place*’ experience of shame.

Concerns about social harmony were also evident as a consequence of outstation encounters with government representatives. Interpreters frequently faced anger and rejection when the message they conveyed was misunderstood or unpalatable. Formal bureaucratic liaison arrangements disrupted the family authority underpinning social life. Questioning and limited interactions during time-constrained meetings undermined the consensual processes through which families reached agreements and positions in negotiations. Although the narratives in this study and the literature reflect the many meanings of silence – respect, a waiting to understand the correct order of proceedings or the meaning of events, a chance to learn – government visitors had little time for silence. The constant rush to achieve government business left no possibility for a relationship to develop, for a consensus to emerge, or for a considered position to be put forward.

The literature points to the need for governments to recognise that Aboriginal

engagement does not take place on a level playing-field. In work, training and meeting environments, English language, modes of questioning, rushed schedules, the consultation processes employed by the government, and the expectation that relationships can be forged at a BBQ – all present substantial barriers to the ability of Aboriginal individuals and families to meaningfully participate in government discussions and programs. For Tjuwanpa's outstation families, there was a need to know more, to have an opportunity to hear another's perspective, and to understand what opportunities or consequences might emerge from the NTER reforms. The difficulty at Tjuwanpa was that the *means*, through which the facts could be known, meaning understood, opportunities assessed and consensus reached and communicated to the government, were sorely lacking.

The Commonwealth and Territory Governments have called for greater engagement with Indigenous peoples. There is little evidence in this study, however, that policy makers, program planners, and service providers understood or accommodated mechanisms and processes, which might have enabled Tjuwanpa outstation families to meaningfully engage in consultations and decisions about their futures. Perhaps the government never intended to achieve this end. As Cass (2002) notes, power is at play in how communications are conducted in the Aboriginal domain. Eades (2007) study also reveals the power to manipulate discourse and cautions against assuming that efforts to improve intercultural competency will necessarily lead to improving outcomes. This situation is illustrated in a critique of the 2009 consultations with communities in the Northern Territory concerning the future of the NTER (Nicholson et al. 2009). Independent transcripts and video footage of these consultations depict a very different picture to the sympathetic consultation processes and findings in support of the Intervention presented in official government reports (FaHCSIA 2009; Macklin & Snowden 2009).

Outstation families believed the government had no desire to listen to what they had to say. Julia's frustration over always being '*taached*' and never listened to was palpable. Others talked of the impossibility of being able to negotiate outcomes beyond reaching agreement on a pre-existing agenda. As Lee and

Solomon note, government visitors come, listen, then go home and ‘*turn it into their own little stories*’. Sovariel was more forthright. He saw government manipulating communications; with” *a lot of tricks*’. Solomon, Sovariel and Lee were all cognisant of the fact that the powerful told the story of Western Arrernte lives and also determined what was best for their futures.

Chapter 8: Culture, Voice and Wellbeing Capabilities

'... it is up to the society to determine what, if anything, it wants to do to preserve old forms of living, perhaps even at significant economic cost. Ways of life can be preserved if a society decides to do just that, and it is a question of balancing the costs of such preservation with the values that the society attaches to the objects and the lifestyle preserved. There is, of course, no ready formula for this cost-benefit analysis, but what is crucial for a rational assessment of such choices is the ability of the people to participate in public discussions on the subject' (Sen 1999a p.241).

8.1 Introduction

The central questions for this study asked, *how did Western Arrernte outstation families understand and respond to key NTER measures?* and, *what does this tell us about the conditions underpinning remote Aboriginal peoples engagement in government wellbeing efforts?* Set against the background of three NTER reforms, the narratives in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 suggest that outstation families engaged with the reforms within a culturally defined, holistic construction of what it means to be well, feel well, and act well. This determined how people understood and responded to Commonwealth policy initiatives, their preparedness to engage in its programs, and their ability to engage in discussions about their futures. Underpinning the engagement of Tjuwanpa's outstation families in the Hermannsburg lease negotiations, the *Welfare to Work* reforms and income management, were Western Arrernte values, which shaped a Western Arrernte sense of wellbeing. These values rested in a spiritual, social and moral order, which shaped outstation resident's understandings of the Commonwealth's reforms, their decisions about the nature of their involvement in the government's programs, and their preparedness to engage in relationships with unknown visitors.

The nature of their '*engagement*' was thus determined by local, cultural understandings of whether state actions enabled Western Arrernte people to freely pursue aspirations and identity; to act in accordance with social norms and spiritual responsibilities, and the extent to which residents were able to feel comfortable, safe and free from shame in interactions with others. Material resources, access to services, training and work, and the ability to participate in public meetings mattered *if* these opportunities provided the means for people to function in ways that enabled them to meet cultural and spiritual responsibilities, and to operate within Western Arrernte norms governing social relations.

In this chapter I propose that the responses of Tjuwanpa's families reflected pursuit of choices associated with valued priorities and behaviours situated in a multi-dimensional, heterogeneous framing of wellbeing (White 2010; White & Pettit 2004). Indigenous decisions to engage in state wellbeing opportunities are therefore not constituted solely in the material conditions of individual lives. Drawing on the capability approach put forward by Amartya Sen (1992, 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2009), I position Indigenous engagement as a state of being, reflecting whether government wellbeing opportunities offer substantive freedoms to pursue life as it is valued within remote communities. This positions Indigenous engagement within an Indigenous framing of wellbeing located in an Indigenous spiritual, relational, and moral order.

If Western Arrernte choices and decisions about their engagement with the state are reflective of heterogeneous wellbeing choices that are socially and culturally located, I also argue here that the capability of ordinary Indigenous citizens to engage in discourse in the public domain becomes extremely important. Participatory forms of deliberation can make known how culture interacts with Indigenous wellbeing choices (Alkire 2004; Appadurai 2004; Rao & Walton 2004). Deliberation can bring knowledge of local conditions and environments to decision-making and improve program effectiveness (Osmani 2008). Importantly, deliberation provides Indigenous citizens and governments the means to subject cultural aspirations and wellbeing priorities, to reason (Alkire 2008; Bohman 1997; Sen 2009).

The third question posed for this study asked, *does Commonwealth policy and practice reflect the conditions that would facilitate Aboriginal engagement in state wellbeing programs and with those responsible for their implementation?* In this chapter I examine Indigenous policy in terms of how the Commonwealth positions Indigenous engagement. I reflect here on the adequacy of engagement as articulated in *Closing the Gap* policy, drawing on this study's findings and case studies in Indigenous Australia and internationally to argue that engagement requires specific attention to appropriately resourced, participatory modes of critical deliberation if improved wellbeing outcomes for poor and marginalised groups are to be realised. For this to happen, policy must prioritise the capability of remote Aboriginal peoples to engage in reasoned discussion about their futures and recognise the conditions that permit this to happen.

As the findings from this study show, the capability of Tjuwanpa's outstation families to engage in discourse in the public domain was severely constrained by the nature of government communications and the consultation processes used for service planning and delivery to remote communities. These failed to accommodate language differences and the social norms governing speech, decision-making and representation. At the same time those on Tjuwanpa's outstations wanted a voice, which had meaning and influence. The engagement of remote Aboriginal peoples therefore necessitates not only recognition of the heterogeneity of wellbeing choices, but also the presence of appropriate cultural processes that support people's capability to deliberate these choices. It is only through the freedom to speak without 'shame' that aspirations can become known, information shared, choices deliberated, and the means to pursue Indigenous wellbeing can be negotiated.

8.2 The role of culture in wellbeing

When people at Tjuwanpa spoke about the Commonwealth's reforms they consistently referenced an holistic, culturally constructed understanding of what it means to be well. Outstation families' engagement in state economic reforms

pursued valued ways of being, feeling and acting, reflecting Western Arrernte cultural beliefs, priorities and aspirations for the maintenance of relatedness. Based on the findings from this study I therefore argue that Aboriginal people are considering the maintenance of relatedness when making choices about the take-up of external government assistance. Their stories consistently reflected choices, which are concerned with their own wellbeing in the context of relatedness as well as the wellbeing of others. The position of outstation families reflects Australian and international research findings, which show people take into account much more than material or utilitarian considerations when they assess and engage in wellbeing opportunities. Importantly, people also consider how such opportunities enhance or constrain the conduct of relationships between people. As such, relationships are a critical aspect of wellbeing and Aboriginal wellbeing choices.

8.2.1 Wellbeing: A perception of how the world should be

Recent work in the international development arena conceptualises wellbeing in a way that reflects the concerns of Tjuwanpa's residents. White (2010) suggests there are three qualities associated with wellbeing. First is its association with the desire for a positive state of being. This is opposed to its negative portrayal in Indigenous policy under the Commonwealth's *Closing the Gap* policy (COAG 2008, 2009a) – a policy that emphasises being unwell, not the same as, dysfunctional, or excluded. Second, wellbeing or feeling well embodies an holistic view that recognises strengths, integrity and multiplicities in everyday lives. Third, wellbeing is about how one feels about life. Individual actions are therefore positioned around perceptions of doing well and feeling good, in a material sense; and doing good and feeling well according to a moral standpoint, where a person feels at ease with their place in the world. From White's perspective therefore, wellbeing goes beyond objective material assessments to include how people *feel* about their own state of being, found in, 'values grounded in a broader shared understanding of how the world is and should be' (p.160).

White is suggesting here that people act according to constructions of their wellbeing and these are far broader than those set by statistical indices measuring

material wellbeing. The ‘well’ qualifier makes the concept irreducibly normative, concerned with values and assessment. Its focus on ‘being’ suggests attention to states; ‘not only of body and material endowments, but also of mind and subjective assessments’ (White & Pettit 2004 p.242). There is some evidence that this may well be the case in Indigenous Australia. Biddle’s (2011b) analysis shows that despite evident statistical disadvantage on mainstream development indices, Indigenous peoples were significantly more likely to report satisfaction with life compared with non-Indigenous Australians. This suggests that Indigenous respondents frame satisfaction with life according to different measures than those used by non-Indigenous Australians.

White’s definition of wellbeing may help to explain this. White proposes that wellbeing goes beyond material satisfaction to encompass subjective understandings that define how a good life is to be lived. These understandings have, ‘a moral sense about feeling at ease with one’s place in the world – which is critically associated with relationships to others’ (White 2010 p.160), and this is situated in particular social and cultural constructions. Relationships thus matter. Taking this position, White sees wellbeing as an interlinking between *material* wellbeing – the material attributes of life such as assets or standards of living; *relational* wellbeing – a person’s social relationships, access to public goods, and human capabilities, attitudes and personal relationships; and *subjective* wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing relates to how a person perceives their position about how the world should be materially, and from a moral or cultural standpoint.

White’s definition of wellbeing accommodates the views of Australian Aboriginal academics (Atkinson 2002; Bessarab 2008; Grieves 2009), who situate Aboriginal wellbeing within the maintenance of Aboriginal spirituality and Law. Care, respect and responsibility between peoples and places feature in how Aboriginal people assess their wellbeing. Repeatedly at Tjuwanpa, people used the words ‘*comfortable*’ and ‘*safe*’ to describe how association with kin groups and country enable them to feel well in their world. Atkinson (2002) argues that feeling safe is essential to all aspects of Aboriginal wellbeing.

‘The word safe, both in the sense of being within the lore and in the sense of

being cared for, is vital in well-being for Aboriginal individuals and groups. The experience of safety determines all the other factors of well-being'(p.45).

Indigenous Australian studies point to how relationships between peoples and place contribute to Indigenous wellbeing. Using data from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, Dockery (2009) shows an empirical link between strong attachment to traditional Indigenous culture and statistical dimensions of socio-economic wellbeing including better health, education, and employment outcomes. Other studies conducted in remote and regional areas also point to an association between the ability to maintain association with country and improved physical and mental health outcomes, employment, and schooling (Burgess, Mileran & Baile 2008; Garnett & Sithole 2007; Hunt 2010; Rowley et al. 2008; Weir, Stacey & Youngetob 2011). Two other studies have also indicated a link between association with place and emotional wellbeing in remote Aboriginal populations (Biddle 2011b; 2004). Biddle therefore suggests care is needed in the development of Indigenous policy, which pursues Indigenous material development outcomes at the expense of traditional cultural practice. He concludes that 'restoration of Indigenous attachment to their culture may be an integral part of the solution' (2011b p.23).

Other studies highlight how Indigenous specific, human relationship dimensions of wellbeing intersect with material conditions, access to services and demographic factors in Aboriginal communities. Australian researchers and practitioners examining the social determinants of mental and physical wellbeing point to the interrelationship between a range of complex psychosocial and environmental factors (Anderson, Baum & Bentley 2007; Carson et al. 2007; Kelly et al. 2009; Purdie, Dudgeon & Walker 2010). Indigenous cultures contain relational sources of resilience – found in family, spirituality and country, and these cultural strengths can act as protective factors against social and emotional ill health or aid significantly in mental treatment modalities (Vickery & Westerman 2004). Atkinson theorises that the distress and trauma experienced by many Aboriginal people is caused by the erosion of,

‘ ... the sense of self, of self-worth, and of well-being in individuals and groups so that they are unable to function from either their own cultural relatedness, or from the culture of the oppressors’ (2002 p.71).

Atkinson maintains that failure to recognise the importance of Aboriginal social and spiritual practice not only reduces the effectiveness of services but also, can make things worse.

Over the past decade, the international development literature has been considering how cultural forms of relatedness interact with wellbeing. A study in Bangladesh found individuals assessed their quality of life primarily in terms of their ability to work within kin-based values, rather than through the pursuit of individual preferences (Devine, Camfield & Gough 2008). The importance of social relationships is also well illustrated in a study of poverty involving 60,000 people across 15 countries representing the poor in Africa, South Asia, East Asia and Latin America (Narayan, Prichett & Kapoor 2009). Comparing two case studies in India, Rao and Walton (2004) illustrate how the maintenance of kinship systems and obligations work together with cultural aspirations to determine the effectiveness of state efforts concerning economic development and social change. Drawing on studies in Pakistan, economist Sabina Alkire (2004) illustrates how – when rating development activities – poor people inevitably value socio-cultural impacts associated with relationships or frameworks of meanings alongside poverty related impacts associated with material wellbeing. These studies point to the critical role that culturally derived forms of association play in wellbeing choices, aspirations and the exercise of human agency in countries other than Australia.

The studies cited above provide bio-medical and qualitative evidence for emotional, physical and material wellbeing outcomes derived from enactment of socio-cultural practice and relationships with place. Aboriginal wellbeing is therefore not only constituted through government service provision and the material attributes in life. Choices are made in pursuit of conditions, which enable Aboriginal peoples to live a social and spiritual life that has meaning for them. Western Arrernte outstation responses to the reforms can thus be seen to reflect

wellbeing considerations sitting within the subjective, relational, and moral parameters that White (2010) elaborates.

Evident throughout the narratives is that Tjuwanpa's residents' choices were shaped by cultural values, beliefs and aspirations about what it meant to be well. They sought a culturally determined state of wellbeing that was holistic – pursued through relational ways of being. White's conceptualisation of wellbeing thus permits reflection on outstation engagement with the NTER reforms from the point of the connection between individual choices based on values vested in belief systems embodied in Western Arrernte Law, and the practice of these belief systems through social and spiritual relatedness to country and important others. This in turn enables us to better understand how outstation people's engagement with the measures introduced under the NTER was linked to a socially and spiritually constructed sense of wellbeing, derived from a particular Western Arrernte moral and social order.

8.2.2 Culture: For or against Indigenous economic wellbeing?

I contend here that culture matters. If Tjuwanpa's outstation families are to engage in state services and programs that seek to improve Aboriginal economic wellbeing, governments must understand and accommodate culturally constructed, relational ways of conducting life as well as Aboriginal aspirations for their futures. In Australia there are two opposing views on the value of Indigenous culture. On one side of the debate are studies and academic discourse that sees Indigenous wellbeing situated in the interplay between material opportunities and life circumstances, and Aboriginal culture, spiritual practice and social life. An opposing view, taken by some Australian anthropologists and economists, is that culture destroys Aboriginal wellbeing by undermining the conditions necessary for economic development. These writers see cultural practices contributing to serious dysfunction in Indigenous communities – evidenced by high rates of violence, child neglect, and the failure of remote peoples to take up the opportunities available in the mainstream economy. I will take up the case of these writers first.

Over the last decade an influential group of academics have maintained the relatedness inherent in Indigenous culture is at the heart of the social dysfunction in Indigenous communities, particularly the extreme levels of gender-based violence, and child abuse and neglect. They also point to the influence of kin and land based systems of affiliations, in the failure of remote peoples to enter the mainstream economy (Hughes 2007; Johns 2009; Sutton 2001, 2009). It is Sutton's view that the failure of Indigenous peoples to thrive is due to kinship and its prevailing influence over Indigenous agency, which is not only an historical failure of state policy and colonisation. He concludes that, 'deep – rather than superficial – cultural redevelopment is necessary if there is to be a radical improvement in people's chances of ending their suffering' (Sutton 2009 p.65). Sutton also frames Aboriginal receipt of welfare as the problem, therefore setting the course of action for Indigenous wellbeing as removal of conditions generating welfare dependency. Some believe Sutton ignores the multi-variants of Indigenous wellbeing (Walter & Mooney 2007) and the subsequent possibilities for alternative economic policy arrangements in remote communities (Altman & Hinkson 2010).

Gary Johns' (2008, 2009) position is not dissimilar to that of Helen Hughes (2007; Hughes & Warin 2005), who joins Sutton in calls to reshape Indigenous cultural practice in remote communities. These writers maintain that governments should no longer support uneconomic remote communities or recognise traditional forms of community title. Johns argues that,

'Policymakers may have to make a bold assumption, that a modest start in the real economy is better than being held in a designated underclass on a permanent basis' (2009 p.21).

Hughes takes the position that the policy of self-determination – that has fostered recognition of culture as a central tenant within its framing – has been, and continues to be, the source of economic marginalization of Aboriginal peoples. In these assessments, culture is analysed from the perspective of its pervasive and detrimental influence over wellbeing, leading these writers to argue that governments must institute structural reforms to reshape prevailing cultural practices and tackle its dysfunctional roots.

Austin–Broos (2001, 2009) also believes that cultural practices – such as demand sharing and traditional processes for dispute resolution – can diminish wellbeing in dramatic ways. She theorises that the enactment of Western Arrernte relatedness within contemporary government programs and outstation life has significantly contributed to exacerbating social tensions and violence as well as economically marginalising outstation families at Tjuwanpa. Austin–Broos, however, challenges the position of Sutton and others, believing that they persist in promoting the notion that those, like the Western Arrernte, can suddenly give up who they are as relational and related beings.

‘In short, to be the individual that market society and even CDEP expects, Western Arrernte must be prized from kin relatedness and from the emotional links to place’ (Austin-Broos 2009 p.246).

Economists concerned with poverty alleviation in developing economies argue, however, that a culturally informed perspective is essential to engaging local populations in economic development efforts. Culture informs policy through knowledge about people and their relationships, thereby providing a lens through which to understand the, ‘motives, incentives, beliefs, and identities that interact with economic incentives, historical factors and political capabilities to affect outcomes’ (Rao & Walton 2004 p.9). Culture is therefore central to understanding ‘*what* is valued in terms of being well, *who* does the valuing, and *why* economic and social factors interact with culture to unequally allocate access to a good life’ (2004 p.4).

Economist Sabina Alkire (2004) argues culture is influential in determining aspirations. Its relationship to poverty reduction must therefore be worked out alongside other influences. This position is further elaborated by Appadurai (2004), who states that rather than seeing cultural forms of social organisation as an obstruction to economic development and wellbeing efforts, cultural capacity is fundamental to them. He maintains that too often we conceptualise culture as past and development as future, and in this binary, see the two as opposing each other in economic change. Based on his study in India, Appadurai argues that ideas about the future are founded on systems of ideas that set aspirations for a good life

within local normative constructions, beliefs and values. Culture is therefore the basis for collective aspirations and action as people anticipate and manage risks through cultural designs and have culturally specific ways to reach consensus.

Mary Douglas (2004) also challenges the view that cultural relatedness is an impediment to economic development. She maintains that economic theory predominantly rests on demand analysis. This presumes individual preferences for material wellbeing, subsequently defining failure to adopt economic opportunities as the product of dysfunctional culture – the argument put forward concerning remote Aboriginal communities (Hughes 2007; Hughes & Warin 2005; Johns 2009). Douglas sees collectivist cultures, however, as being primarily concerned with the risk or danger to trust and interactions in the group or society, while individualistic societies assess risks against individual activities or aspirations. She therefore argues that individual physical wants cannot be the only starting point for economic analysis, as development positioned as individualism severs the means through which trust is maintained and meaning is made. Understanding how connecting relationships and networks operate in collective societies is therefore essential. Without this knowledge, the communal agency that supports localised modes of achieving wellbeing is obscured or obstructed. The result is what Douglas terms ‘a culture of apathy’ that is not irrational, but rather, people’s perception, ‘that they are trapped and it is usually difficult to see any way out’ (2004 p.88). There is here an echo of the narratives at Tjuwanpa where time and again we hear outstation residents say that they will just have to ‘*wait and see*’ what happens next.

Based on her work with Western Arrente, Dianne Austin–Broos (2009) also references the danger inherent in the Commonwealth’s failure to understand and accommodate the importance of relatedness in Indigenous policy arrangements. Reflecting her concerns over the neo-liberal discourse that has remained dominant in Indigenous policy formulation, she argues that the Commonwealth’s agenda in the NTER is the individualisation of Western Arrente people as workers and citizens. While Austin–Broos sees the history of mission and government support for outstations and CDEP as having economically marginalised and impoverished

Western Arrernte people, she maintains the NTER has denied the locatedness of Western Arrernte identity in relatedness to place and kinship networks.

‘...Western Arrernte tradition is not transportable. Whilst the Western Arrernte are mobile within their region, mobility beyond it on a permanent basis is still quite rare.Western Arrernte would become anyente ware, ‘one alone’ in exactly the way people judge Europeans to be. Arrernte do not value this way of being. It is foreign to their sense of relatedness. And as it is sustained today that relatedness provides continuity with a past but also a buffer for Western Arrernte people against the exclusions of the present’ (Austin-Broos 2001 p.197).

Regardless of their prescriptions regarding what needs to be done, all of these writers point to the critical role that cultural forms of social organisation play in influencing individual decisions about how wellbeing, and associated economic opportunities, are pursued and coordinated between people, groups and institutions. What is also clear is that economists internationally and in Australia are joining sociologists and anthropologists in arguing that traditional measures of development fail to elicit the important role kin relationships and connections to local networks play in state poverty alleviation and wellbeing programs. This highlights the need to find alternative ways of understanding and measuring Indigenous wellbeing that builds on and does not undermine, the aspirations and strengths inherent in culturally determined forms of social organisation.

By putting the spotlight on relatedness between individuals and their social and cultural contexts, it is possible to make explicit the factors that influence identity, feelings of security, and the wellbeing aspirations underpinning the engagement of remote Aboriginal peoples in state economic wellbeing initiatives. As is clear from the Australian and international literature, understanding the relational nature of social and cultural capital provides the means to arrive at policy and programmatic approaches to wellbeing, which engage Aboriginal peoples because the state is responsive to culturally valued aspirations and ways of relating. If governments are to realise Indigenous engagement in state programs and decision-making, their policy and practice needs to explicitly recognise and accommodate the link

between human and physical capital, and culturally located social practice.

8.3 Engagement, Capabilities and Voice

I have argued that the Tjuwanpa narratives show Indigenous engagement is a state of being, emerging as choices in response to the interplay between material opportunities, local conditions and the pursuit of culturally constructed wellbeing values. Drawing on economist Amartya Sen's capability approach (Sen 1999a, 2009), I make the case here that ordinary people's capability for voice is therefore vital.

Voice permits the constraints and strengths inherent in Aboriginal choices to be made known and debated. Failure to engage local people in discourse precludes the possibility that they might better understand and critically assess the outcomes resulting from their decisions. The absence of voice therefore presents significant risks that state investments are ineffective or do harm because they fail to recognise the heterogeneity of individual circumstances and the culturally located wellbeing values driving Aboriginal decisions. While experts and practitioners concerned with Indigenous wellbeing bring significant knowledge to Indigenous policy and programs, reliance on experts fails to engage remote peoples in decisions about their futures. In doing so, the meaning, intent and circumstances of Indigenous agency are obscured or ignored. Remote Aboriginal people, like those at Tjuwanpa, are also left struggling to interpret the meaning of government policy objectives. With the absence of voice – or the ability to effectively participate in public dialogue about their futures – remote people are further denied the opportunity to share important knowledge about what might work within the context of their local conditions, cultural aspirations, and ways of being.

I have put the case in the previous section that culture is inseparable from perceptions of wellbeing, with Aboriginal peoples making choices and pursuing life strategies with the aim of feeling, being and acting well. The risk in this position, however, is that culture is seen as immutable and remote Aboriginal

people incapable of change. I do not take the position, however, that culture is static, that it represents a glorious past that should be preserved at all costs, or that it was the only consideration underpinning outstation choices. There is certainly no evidence through the narratives that Western Arrente outstation families were unwilling to embrace change. As I argue here, the debate should not be about cultural change versus marginalisation. The focus of our discussions needs to be on how Aboriginal aspirations and choices can be informed and subject to rational discussion and debate. The emphasis should therefore be on how the state can support remote families to make informed choices and enable them to understand the implications of their choices for the current and future wellbeing of their children and families.

If this is to happen, however, the conditions permitting ordinary Aboriginal people to have the '*capability*' for voice need critical attention. As the Tjuwanpa narratives and the literature in earlier chapters make clear, there are considerable constraints for remote Aboriginal peoples in engaging in public discussions. In remote Aboriginal contexts, the capability for voice requires very specific attention to language differences, time, relationships, and the social norms governing Indigenous talk, representation and decision-making.

8.3.1 Capabilities, choice, reason, and voice

I have earlier made the point that the engagement of Tjuwanpa's families in the economic reforms under the NTER reflected consideration of culturally located, subjective wellbeing values. Accommodating these values requires a framework for Indigenous policy that establishes the link between human and physical capital, and choices derived within culturally located social practice. Amartya Sen's concept of the '*capability approach*' (1992, 1999a, 1999b, 2009), elaborates a way of realising Indigenous engagement in state wellbeing efforts by bringing together a valuing of Indigenous wellbeing choices and linking this to the capability for voice, through which people are able to critically assess their choices. This leads to Sen's emphasis in his work on engaging local populations in processes of critical deliberation. From Sen's perspective, voice is an essential capability.

Underpinning Sen's writing is his exploration of how socially located choice influences the take up of wellbeing and economic development opportunities, particularly in the context of poor and marginalised groups. Sen's body of work offers a conceptual framework for Indigenous policy as it grounds poverty alleviation and social protection within the heterogeneity of individual choices, and subjects them to reason. In this section I therefore draw a link between the capability approach and the Tjuwanpa outstation narratives. I suggest Sen's framework for development offers a way forward that might see Western Arrernte families engaging in state wellbeing efforts as it values and makes known their wellbeing concerns and aspirations, while also supporting outstation families and governments to make informed choices and decisions.

As the literature on the capabilities approach internationally is expansive and makes for dense reading, my summary here seeks to provide the reader with a somewhat simplified presentation of its key concepts. Emerging from the work of economist and mathematician Amartya Sen (1992, 1999a, 1999b, 2009), the capability approach recognises that culture sets the basis for individual choices and aspirations. Culture interfaces with the heterogeneity of individual circumstances in determining the ability of people to engage in the wellbeing opportunities made available by the state (Alkire 2008; Clark 2005; Crocker 2008; Deneulin, Severine & Crocker 2005; Deneulin, Séverine & Shahani 2009). Sen argues that governments must recognise and take these differences into account if state efforts to improve wellbeing are to be effective and just. This necessitates that those who are affected by government actions have the capability to engage in rational, reasoned deliberation about cultural aspirations and how they work or interface with the wellbeing opportunities on offer from the state.

The importance of Sen's work is in its origins in understanding human agency, and the role that the interrelationship between values, opportunities and local circumstances plays in the choices people make about their lives (Sen 1999a, 2009). Sen maintains the question is not whether culture matters – as this would deny its pervasive influence in human life – but how it matters (2004). Unlike writers in Australia who maintain that culture effectively seals the fate of

Aboriginal populations (Hughes 2007; Johns 2009; Sutton 2009), Sen argues that culture is a constituent part of development. It influences economic behaviours and plays a critical role in how people participate in civil life, through which people secure access to resources and opportunities. Most importantly for this study, Sen sees culture as central in the formation and evolution of individual and communal values that shape choices about how the ends and means of state wellbeing efforts are viewed. ‘In one form or another, culture engulfs our lives, our desires, our frustrations, our ambitions, and the freedoms that we seek’ (2004 p.39).

Sen’s primary argument is that the goals of economic and social development need to be reset, away from utilitarian concepts that assess wellbeing in terms of utility or material gains and losses. The focus needs to be on expanding the *freedoms* people have to pursue valued *functionings*, or valued ways of being in their world (Sen 1999a, 1999b, 2009). A functioning could be related to basic needs such as being adequately nourished and housed. Valued functionings can also relate to identity, or the ability to pursue important relationships or cultural practices. Clearly there are multiple functionings that a person may simultaneously value – such as being in good health, being in a satisfying job, being safe, or being able to follow one’s spiritual practice. This is evident throughout the narratives where, for example, people valued employment for its economic and social benefits, but also valued work in a context that enabled them to acquire knowledge of country and fostered important kin relationships. Income was thus important but not an end in itself. What featured in Tjuwanpa residents’ assessments of work, income management and CDEP, was how employment opportunities enabled people to function in ways that were important to them. Functionings are thus aspects of human fulfillment that have two important characteristics. They are heterogeneous and they are valued ways of living life.

In evaluating social policy and programs targeting human wellbeing, Sen asks whether state efforts promote greater freedom for people to function in ways that they value, as distinct from whether people have more income, things or happiness. The value of the approach is its emphasis on evaluating social

arrangements in terms of ‘what people are able to do and be, on the quality of their life, and on removing obstacles in their lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life that, upon reflection, they have reason to value’ (Robeyns 2005 p.94). In the capabilities approach, mental states, relational processes, political freedoms as well as command over human and material resources are all important as these can all contribute to valuable ways of being for people. In articulating the capability approach, Sen’s emphasis is thus on assessing the potential and substantive freedoms available to the individual to convert opportunities such as income, goods and services – or equally, opportunities to participate in public life – into valued functionings that are constitutive of a person’s being.

A critical question asked by the capability approach is, ‘What opportunities are available to a person to pursue these valued ways of functioning?’ *Capabilities* thus refer to multi-variant social and economic opportunities or the command of social resources – such as access to mutual support networks. The capability approach therefore focuses on assessing the opportunities available, which contribute to valued ways of being in the context of a person’s life. In the Tjuwanpa outstation context, the capability approach would therefore look at how jobs, income or educational attainments provide opportunities for outstation people to live a life in a way that is valued within Western Arrernte social and spiritual constructions. The emphasis in Indigenous social policy arrangements would therefore be on how the capability for employment contributes to enhancing people’s freedom to pursue their spiritual connection with country or their relationships within kin networks, rather than seeing employment or income as ends in isolation from these valued ways of being.

This approach immediately recasts the endpoint of government wellbeing efforts. Capabilities are the means and not the end point of government programs and services. Engagement in economic activities is important. Instead of determining income or jobs as ends in themselves, however, what is considered is how these activities contribute to non-market constructions of wellbeing. The capability approach also recognises that variability in a person’s life circumstances – such as

health, location and the demands of social relations between people – may constrain or enhance people’s ability to lead an acceptable life (Sen 1999b p.360).

From Sen’s perspective, access to opportunities is not sufficient. Capabilities must also incorporate opportunities that can be freely chosen. Capabilities thus represent the possibility of *agency* and *freedom*. On the one hand are opportunity freedoms – or the substantive opportunities available to a person to pursue valued ends. In this sense, government efforts to expand Indigenous employment and training opportunities in remote areas are substantive freedoms. Within the notion of freedom, however, Sen, also emphasises process freedoms – the capacity to freely choose. It is therefore not opportunity alone that matters, but the freedom to take ‘charge of choices over our private domains, no matter what we may or may not achieve’ (Sen 1999b p.363). People are thus seen as ‘active agents of change, rather than as passive recipients of benefits’ (Sen 1999a p.xiii). Agency recognises that people may forego aspects of life that are important to them and make choices based on the wellbeing of others – as Solomon did for example, in considering the needs of younger family members in his move from the outstation and into Hermannsburg. Orgki also talks about her pain and the dilemmas she faced in her decision to send her children to school in Alice Springs. Perspectives about what is important or good therefore go beyond a person’s consideration of their own wellbeing concerns.

Freedom, however, is also associated with the removal of conditions that rob people of their ability to provide for their needs, or restrict people’s ability to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Such ‘unfreedoms’ effectively prevent people having the capability or freedom to pursue the life that they value. Sen identifies five kinds of freedoms or unfreedoms. These are associated with enjoyment of civil rights; the enjoyment or utilisation of economic resources; social opportunities that enable people to live better such as healthcare or education, transparency guarantees (the openness of interactions and transactions), and protective security such as social safety nets (Sen 1999a p.38). Freedoms incorporate access to material opportunities and the freedom to pursue valued spiritual or social practices as, ‘when practices are

destroyed, people's paths to human development are destroyed' (Alkire 2008 p.139). Positioning freedom in this way, Sen sees social and economic institutions, access to technologies, and the arrangements in social and political life as having a critical role and influence over the means people have available to expand their freedoms.

While the Commonwealth's Intervention and the Rudd Government's *Closing the Gap* policy could be seen as aiming to expand Indigenous social and economic opportunity freedoms, the Tjuwanpa narratives speak to different unfreedoms experienced in association with the reforms. Sen makes a distinction here between outcomes that arise as a result of coercion, domination or passive acceptance, and those that result when a person is able to exercise their autonomy. The Commonwealth argued the township leasing would expand economic opportunities and secure government investment in remote Aboriginal townships in order to expand employment and improve housing. The voices of Sovariel, Julia and others make clear their views, however, that they had no choice in these arrangements. Their position was not that economic opportunities were not important, but that the terms of the exchange were coercive and had a detrimental impact on other critical functionings associated with Western Arrernte identity and family relatedness. While ultimately Western Arrernte people agreed to a 40-year housing lease in Hermannsburg, the perception at Tjuwanpa was that government held all the cards and they had no choice but to agree.

Sen, however, does not accept that preferences or priorities should be accepted blindly. Reason must also be applied, supported by information and analysis. People must therefore be able to make informed choices about the means to deal with prevailing concerns. **Reason**, linked to **deliberation**, therefore prevail as critical aspects of the capability approach. In applying reason, Sen argues that it is not sufficient to look only at someone's mental state or wants.

'Political and civil rights, especially those related to the guaranteeing of open discussion, debate, criticism, and dissent, are central to the processes of generating informed and reflected choices. These processes are crucial to the formation of values and priorities, and we cannot, in general, take

preferences as given independently of public discussion' (Sen 1999a p.153).

While deliberation requires the application of reason to individual and groups preferences, Sen also links the opportunity for deliberation to freedom. If freedoms to achieve valued ways of being are central to development efforts, then people require the democratic freedoms necessary to influence these outcomes (Sen 2002).

Deliberation therefore has a number of requirements. It must allow for discussion about the kind of society people wish to enjoy and live in. It requires relevant information and appropriate conditions enabling debate about how choices enhance or constrain these aspirations. Deliberation also necessitates the identification of the capabilities or opportunities that are necessary for achieving these priorities. Deliberation therefore requires processes that give Indigenous peoples the means to influence these ends and enable consideration of differing views on what priorities should prevail (Panzironi 2005). Sen argues it is essential 'for the people affected to participate in deciding what they want and what they have reason to accept' (1999a p.32). Voice is therefore necessary to 'express publicly what we value and to demand that attention be paid to it' (Sen 1999a p.152). As this involves context-based analysis of priorities and prevailing conditions, participatory approaches that engage local populations must necessarily be adopted.

'Accordingly, indigenous peoples' chance to gain a satisfactory level of self-determined well-being is inextricably linked to the structures and processes put in place by a wide range of international, national and local institutions' (Panzironi 2005 p.10).

The capability to engage in deliberative discussion is the *only* capability that Sen prescribes. He gives particular emphasis to the need for inclusiveness in such discussions, noting:

'An adequate approach to development cannot really be so centred only on those in power. The reach has to be broader, and the need for popular participation is not just sanctimonious rubbish. Indeed the idea of

development cannot be disassociated from it' (Sen 1999a p.247).

Sen summarises his position as follows:

‘What people can positively achieve is dependant on economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people’s freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice and in the making of public decisions that impel the progress of these opportunities’ (Sen 1999a p.5).

Sen’s line of argument reflects the emphasis given by many others to the role of deliberative democracy and its potential to transform and empower local citizens, challenge unjust structures, and lead to more effective government interventions (Bainbridge et al. 2011; Bonvin & Farvaque 2006; Chambers, R. 1983, 1997; Chambers, S. 2003; Crocker 2008; Deneulin, Severine & Crocker 2005; Freire 1976, 1998, 2001; Fung 2004). It also reflects the intrinsic right to participate within human rights conventions recognised in a specific provision under Article 18 in the 2008 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In the capability approach, Sen and others link human wellbeing choices to what it is people have reason to value, with culture seen as playing a critical role in shaping the values upon which choices are based. Here the role of state is one that supports the development of *capabilities*, or opportunities that enable people to function in ways where they are free to pursue the kind of life they value. Sen maintains, however, that the capability for voice is essential here. Processes of participatory deliberation – within which the capability for voice is explicitly recognised – permits an understanding of the values and circumstances at play in people’s choices to engage or not in state wellbeing opportunities. Importantly, however, deliberation also provides an opportunity to apply knowledge and reason, through discussion of benefits, risks and alternatives, to individual and community choices and to government interventions.

8.3.2 The promise of the capability for voice in Indigenous Australia

In Australia, the former Treasury Secretary Ken Henry, has emphasised the importance of the capability approach and its application to Indigenous wellbeing efforts. He sees voice as central to the means for, 'Indigenous people to shape policies that affect their destinies' (Henry 2007b p.10). Other writers are also discussing the capability approach within the Indigenous policy dialogue in Australia (Allen Consulting Group 2006; Altman 2009; Bessant & Watkinson 2006; Biddle 2011b; Duhs & Davidoff 2010; Jetti 2011; Jordan, Bulloch & Buchanan 2010; Panzironi 2005; Pearson 2005). Largely missing in these writings, however, is discussion of the role of Indigenous capability for voice in fostering Indigenous wellbeing. When appropriate processes of deliberation are applied within marginalised and impoverished groups, there are significant benefits to the wellbeing of populations. These benefits are well documented in the international development literature and in studies across Indigenous Australia.

Local deliberation most importantly allows for people's expression of insights and preferences. It is particularly critical to understanding the multi-dimensional and relational nature of wellbeing in different situations and how these 'shape and influence individual aspirations, capabilities and agency' (Rao & Walton 2004 p.30). Because participatory, deliberative processes rely on the lived experience of local populations, it becomes possible to understand local constructions of, 'objective endowments, subjective perceptions and interactive processes' inherent in wellbeing' (White & Pettit 2004 p.260). This enables the complex interplay between material conditions, local contexts, meaning making and the role of socio-cultural norms in influencing wellbeing outcomes to be made known.

There are three significant benefits for government here. First, deliberative processes provide valuable information about Indigenous choices and their links to policy successes and failures. Within the capability approach, local level deliberations therefore assist with assessments of whether policy arrangements enhance Indigenous wellbeing achievements and wellbeing agency, are forcing compliance, or are having impacts on other capabilities that people value

individually or collectively (Panzironi 2005). Sabina Alkire (2004, 2005, 2008) takes up this point, arguing that it is only when there are opportunities for local people to engage in informed participation and decision-making that they can consider the range of options available and the likely trade-offs or opportunities they present to the exercise of freedoms associated with material, social and cultural ways of being. 'Informed participation entails explicit and widespread assessment of *which* capabilities will change' (Alkire 2004 p.193). Only local people themselves can shed light on determining what is at stake as a consequence of decisions or whether an initiative expands basic capabilities at the cost of other capabilities, such as the loss of the social fabric of mutual care. The risk is that important cultural capabilities are infringed or ignored when only statistical measurements of socio-economic indicators of wellbeing are applied. This risk has been argued in the context of supporting the capability approach in assessments of Indigenous wellbeing in Australia (Jordan, Bulloch & Buchanan 2010; Panzironi 2005).

Second, participatory deliberative processes shed light on the efficiency and equity of external interventions (Osmani 2007, 2008). These processes have received most attention in relation to poverty alleviation of marginalised groups because of their instrumental influence in these respects. Drawing on a wide range of studies, Osmani illustrates how information drawn from local groups can improve the technical efficiency of external interventions, contribute to monitoring and verifying government investments, create pressure for more equitable access to opportunities, and reduce costs by tapping into local resources.

Third, deliberation can draw group, community and government attention to strengths, assets, capacities and talents found locally or in networked relationships between groups and institutions, which problem-focused assessments rarely articulate (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). This is evident in case studies in Indigenous Australia (Bainbridge et al. 2011; Hunter, E. et al. 1999). Where local stakeholders share values and clear identity, there is also potential to engender community mobilisation and collective action through identifying issues that are common to different groups (Beard & Dasgupta 2006; Fung 2004).

Importantly, participatory discourse offers the potential to engage local people in an assessment of how local conditions and values interplay with wellbeing outcomes. Knowledge that is drawn from deliberations with local populations can complement and deepen existing statistical assessments. They have particular value in shaping, ‘local categories of value and assessment’ (White & Pettit 2004 p.251) that have meaning to local groups. Research also suggests that the involvement of local people in reasoned discussion and debate can result in more just and fair decision-making and in the process, local people gain knowledge and competencies (Fung 2004).

With voice, also comes the possibility to extend the capacity of marginalised groups to aspire – through encouraging groups to explore the internal and external cultural contexts within which aspirations and modes of achieving them are located (Appadurai 2004). Appadurai’s emphasis here is on supporting a dialogic environment within which marginalised groups are able to articulate the distinction between their own culturally-located aspirations for their futures and those of the dominant class – a position somewhat similar to Paulo Freire (1976, 1998, 2001) – although Freire’s emphasis is on creating consciousness within oppressed groups of the means used to oppress them. From these positions, deliberation aims for empowerment within which marginalised groups achieve a new consciousness of power relations and through which knowledge and strategies for survival can be tapped.

The promise of critical thinking through participatory modes of deliberation at local levels thus has benefits for government investments in remote communities through enabling a deeper understanding of the values and conditions underpinning Indigenous wellbeing choices. Deliberation also enhances the prospect of greater efficiency and equity at local levels through tapping into local strengths, knowledge and resources.

8.3.3 Indigenous capability for voice: Benefits and conditions

The narratives in this study leave no doubt that outstation families despaired at the

possibility of understanding government intentions and saw no opportunity to negotiate Western Arrernte interests. Their stories reflect their frustration at being unable to engage with government representatives on a level playing field. Julia was fed up with being told about how she should live her life. She wanted a real say about events affecting her future. In Solomon's view, a BBQ at the end of a government meeting was a poor exchange for the understanding he sought and the discussions he wanted to engage in.

The analysis in this chapter, however, points to significant benefits for the wellbeing of Indigenous populations in Australia through Indigenous capability for voice. The capability for voice fosters informed decisions; expands Indigenous agency freedoms; builds on culturally located aspirations, values and strengths, and informs appropriate, responsive design and delivery of government programs and services. As participatory modes of deliberation provide the means to this critical capability, the findings at Tjuwanpa point to the need for careful design of local deliberative processes.

Throughout the outstation narratives is the message that public discourse must pay attention to processes accommodating culturally appropriate modes of deliberation. Central here is the design of processes recognising the critical role of time and trust – particularly how it is engendered through relatedness – in the implementation of participatory modes of discourse in Indigenous settings. Studies in Indigenous Australia reinforce the need for conditions that outstation families speak of (Al-Yaman & Higgins 2011; Bainbridge et al. 2011; Campbell, Danielle & Hunt 2010; Carter, Jennifer 2010; Carter, J, Claudie & Smith 2006; Davies et al. 2011; Hunter, E. et al. 1999; McCalman et al. 2010; Measham et al. 2011; Scougall et al. 2008). Undertaken in remote, regional and urban locations across Indigenous Australia, these studies evidence a strong link between improved Indigenous wellbeing outcomes and the use of carefully considered, participatory, deliberative processes.

Each of these studies point to the necessity of working within cultural frames of reference, time schedules, and communications processes, which Tjuwanpa's outstation families highlighted as critical to discourse in remote Indigenous

settings. Importantly, they suggest that the use of kin-based networks together with the use of experienced, external support that empowers local groups to make and pursue decisions, works in support of wellbeing outcomes. Further, this body of work shows that Indigenous groups want access to appropriate information that can inform their deliberations. With information, processes of critical reflection are possible, which engenders commitment and empowers local groups. Summarising what worked in early childhood programs funded under a four-year, Commonwealth initiative, the evaluation noted, ‘The most successful projects paid attention to process and outcomes’ (Scougall et al 2008 p.37).

If deliberative processes are to bear fruit, a number of risks must be carefully managed. Unless deliberation yields tangible results for areas of urgent concern, local groups may also lose interest in becoming involved (Fung 2004), an issue noted in studies in Indigenous Australia (Measham et al. 2011). Local elites may also capture deliberations in order to advance their own interests, particularly when external agents have an imperfect knowledge of local populations (Somville & Platteau 2009). In remote Aboriginal contexts, care needs to be exercised when making judgements about what might be seen as capture by local elites – or ‘Big Men’⁶⁶ as Hughes describes them (2007). Elite capture is more likely to represent the social norms governing obligations inherent in kin groups – a situation noted by Nungari when expressing her frustration at influencing community council decisions in Hermannsburg. The risk of elite capture is therefore more likely if external governance structures, or one-size-fits-all generic deliberative processes, are imposed on remote Aboriginal populations. As was the case in early governance initiatives supported by the Hermannsburg mission (Sommerlad 1973b), these approaches may fail to understand differences in responsibilities and nuances in decision-making across different populations.

Further, as the study at Tjuwanpa indicates, discourse in remote Aboriginal

⁶⁶ The term ‘Big Men’ refers to men of influence in Melanesian and Polynesian societies, the nature of which differ significantly from those of Aboriginal peoples. Hughes therefore uses this term inappropriately.

contexts is shaped by norms governing sociality differing from those operating in non-Indigenous environments. The way in which deliberative processes are conducted therefore needs to accommodate consensual, kin-based approaches to decision-making together with its complexities (Bauman et al. 2009; Hunt & Smith 2006, 2007), and recognise how trust shapes the nature of discourse between external stakeholders and local groups. Two case studies of programs operating in a variety of Indigenous locations show that using cultural ways of interacting and problem solving enhanced successful outcomes (Bauman et al. 2009; Scougall et al. 2008). For example, these programs provided meeting spaces where people felt safe to express themselves within the cultural norms governing social interactions. In this environment, talk and decision-making worked more effectively than in large group discussions.

All of the case studies cited above emphasised that discussion processes have to recognise people's need for time. Time enables people to move away from more structured discourse to discuss the problem or their position with others before reaching a decision. In addition, planning and implementation schedules needed to accommodate the need for Aboriginal people to talk on matters outside the immediate agenda at hand. This recognised Indigenous priorities for fostering relatedness through knowledge exchange and sociality. Successful projects also recognised language differences and appropriate Indigenous forms of communications – such as respect for silence and the need to avoid shame.

The existence of trust between Aboriginal people and external stakeholders is a critical ingredient to the success of Indigenous services and programs and is mentioned again and again in Indigenous case studies and practitioner literature (Burchill et al. 2006; Carter, Jennifer 2010; Carter, J, Claudie & Smith 2006; Davies et al. 2011; Measham et al. 2011). In these studies, trust was engendered through processes that permitted time for relationships to develop through activities and known institutions, within which local people felt comfortable. Trust was also enhanced when gender differences, family networks and clan affiliations were recognised. These projects also employed staff with close relationships within the local community, relevant cultural experience, and the technical or

professional competence to undertake activities.

Time not only plays a critical role in forging trust, but also influences people's ability to participate in deliberative processes. The assumption that Aboriginal residents are always available – perhaps arising from outsider perceptions that they are not 'really' working and therefore should be available according to government schedules. When Thatha states 'We're busy, you know...!', she points out how governments fail to recognise the multiple demands on their time that Aboriginal families experience (Lea et al. 2011; Scougall et al. 2008). Many Aboriginal populations also need to deal with practical issues such as distance and transportation issues (Measham et al. 2011) meaning schedules require flexibility and longer planning horizons.

Indigenous groups also experience different complexities when engaging in negotiations and decision-making, as unresolved conflicts may pre-exist between groups and have a significant impact on people's preparedness to engage in discussions (Bauman 2006b, 2007). While the Tjuwanpa study indicates that Western Arrernte discussion and decision-making has complexities associated with the need to accommodate kin-based consensual processes, this need not be problematic. Governance studies in Australia suggest that kin-based systems of decision-making can be put in place and when this is done, they are likely to be more effective than systems imposed from outside (Hunt & Smith 2006, 2007).

Language constraints in remote settings must also be recognised. As the literature in Chapter 7 illustrates, the needs of Indigenous first language speakers in contemporary institutional settings is poorly recognised and accommodated by government agencies (Cooke 2009; Eades 2009; Gray 2000; Lowell 2001a; Taylor, K. 2010; Trudgen 2000). This situation continues in the context of NTER initiatives (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2011). While expanding the pool of interpreters may be a means to facilitate government communications, attention to interpreters is not sufficient. As families at Tjuwanpa spoke about understanding the language of the Intervention, the central issue was the meanings behind the words they heard and the likely implications of the NTER reforms on valued ways of being and behaving. They wanted to understand the risks the leases posed to

their way of life and laws, the kinds of employment opportunities that might become available, and how training was to be linked to employment opportunities appropriate to local realities and priorities. This means local people need to be sufficiently informed about alternatives and how wellbeing priorities are likely to be advanced (Alkire 2004, 2008). People also need to be able to make informed judgements about possible unintended consequences arising from new developments. If reason is to be applied to Aboriginal choices about the capabilities they need to pursue valued ways of being (Sen 2009), remote peoples need sufficient information about options. Importantly, they also need appropriate opportunities to critically reflect on the way forward. This means that language and communication processes must be accessible to the people directly affected, transparent, timely and reliable. Information must also be locally relevant and where possible, should include information about how other Indigenous groups in other localities have approached the issue (Hunter, E. et al. 1999). A longitudinal study of a Family Wellbeing project in Alice Springs showed individual and community wellbeing outcomes substantially improved when participants were engaged in critical reflection through discussion of their own stories (Scougall et al. 2008).

8.3.4 Managing risks in participatory processes

Outstation residents in this study make it clear that if they are to have the capability to engage in processes of public deliberation, attention needs to be paid to the social norms and local conditions, which enable their meaningful participation. For this to happen, attention must be directed to who is to be involved and the roles they are to play. Indigenous commitment to the decisions reached through these processes, however, ultimately depends on whether governments will support the decisions reached by local groups. There are substantial risks when deliberation fails to account for these considerations.

The planning and conduct of participatory, deliberative processes requires significant expertise. Exploring how the capability for voice can be engendered, Alkire points out that those involved in facilitating participatory processes must be

skilled ‘enablers’ rather than technical experts (Alkire 2004 p.206). These enablers need to have the skills to identify and partner with local people who are trusted by different kin groups, and be able to work with them in the design of appropriate processes. As the study at Tjuwanpa shows, relatedness has a critical influence on people’s preparedness to engage with newcomers to the group. Facilitators also require an understanding of the social norms governing Aboriginal representation and decision-making. This is also critical if deliberation outcomes are to be enacted by those affected by decisions. Facilitators must also be able to coordinate the provision of information, and in presenting options, be able to accommodate local perspectives and alternatives and record them faithfully. Facilitators also need to be able to remain flexible, as time is needed to deal with disputes, clarify positions, and accommodate the everyday realities of Aboriginal lives that often delay or impede discussions (Bauman 2006b). Importantly, facilitators also need to be able to bring different stakeholder groups to the table, including government groups, and identify government representatives with recognised authority to represent a position in negotiations.

In the context of remote Aboriginal groups, power differences represent the greatest risk to participatory deliberation. Power differences between local populations and state institutions means governments can ignore the positions reached as a result of deliberative discussions. The failure to recognise power inequalities,

‘... can be used to obscure differences within target communities, legitimize extractive and exploitative processes of information gathering, impose external agendas, can contain or co-opt potential popular resistance’ (White & Pettit 2004 p.243).

The difficulties that government agencies have in sharing power are evident in a study of a partnership between remote Aboriginal residents and the Northern Territory Health Department, which sought to develop a more effective and responsive health service (Campbell, D., Wunungmurra & Nyomba 2005). The study highlights that despite government rhetoric and policy that exhorts Aboriginal people to take greater responsibility for improving their children’s

health, government health officials opposed their efforts to do so. Without government support they proceeded to design and implement a local health action strategy they believed would work, ... ‘ a health action strategy that has been sustained several years after project completion (p.163)’. There are echoes here of women like Elva and Orgki, who spoke with resentment about government failure to acknowledge their efforts to protect children.

Further, the authority to judge what is to be traded-off must not be assumed by outsiders. The priorities of Indigenous groups – not only those of governments – have to be part of negotiations. Government interventions must therefore be characterised by the devolution of power to community groups, cooperation between external agencies, and the implementation of initiatives by trusted local groups and institutions. A case study from Yarrabah in North Queensland showed youth suicide rates were halted when government staff committed to working with local community representatives through forums and strategies, which were locally conceived rather than externally imposed (Hunter, E. et al. 1999). The overarching lesson in the Yarrabah experience was the importance of deliberative processes supporting community ownership of the problem, the involvement of ordinary people in determining and implementing solutions in culturally appropriate ways, and the use of mechanisms encouraging a broader understanding of possible strategies. This saw problem-solving approaches developed, which worked in ways externally imposed solutions could not. This situation only became possible, however, when government agencies supported the devolution of decision-making.

In Australia, concerns have also been raised about government transparency in reporting findings from government consultations with Indigenous groups. Meeting transcripts from community consultations seeking Aboriginal views on the future of the NTER (Concerned Australians 2011; Harris 2011; Nicholson et al. 2009), showed Aboriginal input into these discussions reflected very different views to those found in official reporting (FaHCSIA 2009). At Tjuwanpa, Solomon and Lee pointed to the deeper issue here, seeing government interpretations of local discussions located within different priorities and

frameworks of meaning, enabling governments to turn Indigenous discussions ‘into their own little stories’. It is therefore imperative that decisions reached with Indigenous groups through informed, participatory deliberations are binding, with recognised procedures put in place to deal with situations in which they are ignored or distorted (Alkire 2004).

Case studies from Australia reflect a clear message regarding what contributes to improving wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous communities. Wellbeing outcomes can improve if local people have the power to shape service delivery and when processes of public deliberation take into account Indigenous ways of being, acting and feeling in the world. These studies demonstrate Indigenous peoples want involvement in designing how wellbeing initiatives are to proceed. When they have the ‘capability’ to do so, wellbeing strategies are responsive to local cultural, relational and social concerns because they accommodate local circumstances, support valued ways of being, and give attention to the cultural norms governing Indigenous interactions. In short, when local Indigenous populations are engaged in service design and implementation from the beginning, local people engage because these programs have meaning and relevance.

Engendering this capability for voice in Indigenous Australia requires thought, appropriate support and resourcing. Studies across Australia, show time, flexibility, and relatedness matter significantly to the design and conduct of participatory, deliberative processes in Indigenous communities. Those managing these processes need to be skilled facilitators, who understand the risks and the importance of recruiting people and organisations trusted by local groups, and can assist with communications and the planning of appropriate strategies. These strategies need commitment by government stakeholders to longer-term time horizons, flexibility in design, and appropriate resourcing of information and communications strategies. Above all, they require governments to share decision-making power with local groups and have in place appropriate accountability mechanisms. Governments must be accountable to Indigenous peoples for responding to the decisions that are made and government representatives transparent in their reporting about what Indigenous communities

are saying. Without these conditions, the capability for voice becomes meaningless.

8.4 Conceptualising engagement in Indigenous policy

In the Australian Indigenous context, policy must drive the behaviours, systems and resourcing of government agencies and their staff. As this study shows, unless there is explicit recognition of the role that culture, spirituality and local circumstances play in forming the values that underpin Aboriginal wellbeing choices, there is little likelihood that the outcomes derived from engaging Aboriginal groups in deliberative processes will have meaning or value for government decision-makers however ‘good’ these processes are.

In the preceding sections I made the case that the engagement of Western Arrernte outstation families during the first two years of the NTER reflected two important characteristics. First, is that outstation residents’ decisions to engage with government reform initiatives considered an holistic Western Arrernte construction of wellbeing, which valued social and spiritual relationships alongside material and practical considerations. Second, was the absence of opportunities for voice, through which outstation families could inform, reflect on and negotiate their choices.

From the perspective of Sen’s capability approach, the engagement of Tjuwanpa’s outstation families in the economic reform opportunities emerging under the NTER can be understood as characterised by the pursuit of freedoms, associated with valued ways of being, doing and acting. Township leases, income management, and *Welfare to Work* reforms were thus assessed in terms of whether they supported or frustrated these values. Through the lens of the capabilities approach, the capability for voice is a critical capability, with Australian and international studies pointing to the role Indigenous-appropriate processes of discourse play in fostering rational and informed decision-making on the part of Indigenous groups and governments. This in turn secures the engagement of

Indigenous peoples because state programs and services are situated to expand the freedoms available to Indigenous peoples to achieve valued ways of being, acting and feeling. This study found government capacity for this essential capability sorely missing at Tjuwanpa during the two years following the Intervention. I have made the case that the Commonwealth's aims for improving engagement with its remote Indigenous citizens require opportunities that support valued ways of being, together with conditions supporting the capability for voice. The question I now address is the extent to which Indigenous policy arrangements in Australia are positioned to do so.

8.4.1 The conceptualisation of culture in Indigenous policy

Indigenous-specific policies are linked to the commitment made by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in December 2007 to '*Closing the Gap*' on Indigenous disadvantage (COAG 2007). The mechanisms to implement this policy commitment were detailed in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). NIRA sets the overarching policy framework for national, state and territory government investments to tackle Indigenous wellbeing over the period to 2014 (COAG 2009a).

NIRA is supported by a number of policy documents, with the National Partnership Agreement for Services to Remote Areas (COAG 2009c) and the 2011 Indigenous Economic Development Strategy (FaHCSIA 2011), shaping the nature of government investments in remote Indigenous communities. Although these policies represent the Labor Government's position post-NTER, these initiatives are grounded in a continuation of the aims of the Intervention despite the political change in national leadership.

The Commonwealth's policy objectives to 2014 are: to close the life expectancy gap; halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five; enable access to early childhood education; halve the gap in Indigenous student literacy and numeracy and Year 12 attainment; and halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. NIRA and the National Partnership Agreements devote significant attention to articulating benchmarks

and statistical indicators to assess progress in meeting *Closing the Gap* objectives – to be advanced through: early childhood development; schooling; expanded health services; rises in economic participation rates; provision of healthy homes; attention to safe communities; and development of Indigenous governance and leadership capacity. In remote areas government investments target 26 priority locations around Australia, including 15 Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory – one of which is Hermannsburg.

In its opening remarks, NIRA explicitly acknowledges ‘the importance of Indigenous culture, and engagement and positive relationships with Indigenous Australians’ (COAG 2009a p.3). NIRA intends that governments are to build on Indigenous strengths and identities, recognising that ‘connection to culture is critical for emotional, physical and spiritual well being’ and ‘plays a vital role in shaping people’s aspirations and choices’. NIRA subsequently makes a commitment to ‘recognise and build on the strength of Indigenous cultures and identities’ (p.A-22). The terms ‘*engagement*’ and ‘*partnership*’ feature prominently in policy documents. They are described as critical to building a relationship between governments and Indigenous peoples, with relationships seen as the means to foster the sustainability and success of government programs and services. If NIRA values Indigenous culture and sees Indigenous engagement as essential to the sustainability and effectiveness of government interventions and investments, how does the policy recognise the links between Aboriginal choices, culture, wellbeing priorities and relational considerations? As this study shows, these considerations underpin the decisions of remote Aboriginal people about their engagement in government programs and decision-making.

Although the role of culture in shaping Indigenous choices and aspirations is explicitly recognised in the overarching policy document framing Commonwealth investments in Indigenous services, *Closing the Gap* policy focuses overwhelmingly on articulating statistical deficits in material wellbeing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The focus of government measurements – and its subsequent investment strategies, is thus on a narrow, normative, individual assessment of wellbeing. This fails to establish the link

between expanded opportunities – such as the capability to earn an income through employment – and how this capability enhances valued, culturally located ways of being in remote Aboriginal regions. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (COAG 2009c) for example, directs government financial investment in remote Aboriginal Australia to the development of service hubs in Aboriginal towns, encourages voluntary mobility to centres with more employment opportunities and reiterates the importance of Aboriginal home ownership while specifically discouraging investments in Aboriginal outstations. It further specifies that investment decisions will focus on ‘participation in education/training and the market economy on a sustainable basis; reduce dependence on welfare wherever possible; and promote personal responsibility, and engagement and behaviours consistent with positive social norms’ (COAG 2009c p.A-1).

Listening to outstation narratives it can hardly be argued that families in this study were ignoring their responsibilities to protect and care for children. Indeed, women and men related to the aims of the Intervention to protect and care for children. Nor can it be asserted that they were not endeavouring to be ‘consistent with positive social norms’ as they operate in the Western Arrernte social milieu. Overwhelmingly Tjuwanpa’s outstation residents also wanted ‘real’ work and training opportunities that would equip them for mainstream employment. The question was whether the economic opportunities on offer from the state fostered their ability to pursue life as a Western Arrernte person, in the context of Western Arrernte social and spiritual life. Further, their assessments of government’s economic strategies considered the interplay between local conditions and their ability to take up the opportunities on offer. Families could not see, for example, how they could repay housing loans or find work in regional centres given their level of education, the absence of technical qualifications and problems finding and holding rental accommodation.

With NIRA targeting increased participation in employment (COAG 2009a Page A-37) the indicators in the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation (COAG 2009b) focus only on income and employment

indicators. This trend has continued, with the 2011 Indigenous Economic Development strategy (FaHCSIA 2011) measuring education, skills development, employment, business and financial security outcomes. The issue here is that counting the number of Indigenous people in jobs and training and contrasting gross income household income against national indices does little to help us understand the conditions that influence economic participation in remote Aboriginal contexts.

Indigenous policy thus ignores the question of how state interventions enhance the agency freedoms that Aboriginal people have to pursue ways of life they value (Sen 1999a, 1999b, 2009). While the Commonwealth's investments can be seen as aiming to expand the wellbeing opportunities available to remote Aboriginal populations, they are divorced from considerations of what these investments enable people to do and to be. This subsequently makes it impossible to analyse whether state programs and services enhance opportunity freedoms for Indigenous people, which enable them to pursue valued functionings located in a different spiritual and moral order.

This is not surprising in view of the way that Indigenous culture is depicted in the Indigenous Economic Development strategy (FaHCSIA 2011). This policy positions culture solely in terms of its utilitarian value. Under the heading 'Unique Assets and Culture' (p.14), culture is discussed in terms of the value of Aboriginal land as a potential material economic asset, followed by discussion of the problems remoteness presents in terms of economic opportunities. Culture is next referenced in the context of its influence on work obligations and job outcomes. 'Workplaces with cultural awareness, competency and mentoring programs will benefit from more satisfied, responsive and productive employees' (p.42). On page 53, culture is referenced against its value in using Indigenous leaders as role models of economic success, and on page 65, support for culture is represented as government investment in Indigenous languages, and the creation of 600 CDEP jobs in the arts and culture sector (p.70). The prevailing sense here is that Indigenous culture only has value in terms of its material worth – a kind of 'art on the wall' culture, which can be hung up or harnessed in pursuit of individual

economic returns as its end point rather than how any such returns can enhance Aboriginal capabilities to pursue valued ways of living.

Effectively NIRA targets socio-economic disadvantage through investment measures benchmarked against ‘a good life’ according to normative economic values and a particular, statistical interpretation of what this is to look like. NIRA recognises culture as vital to Indigenous aspirations and choices and commits to building on its strengths but provides no guidance on how Indigenous culture, aspirations and strengths are to be understood, accommodated, measured or supported. Nor is the link established between service provision and expanded economic opportunities to more holistic Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing and cultural aspirations. There are therefore no means within Indigenous economic and remote services policy through which to assess or understand how the complex interaction between Indigenous people, their values and social order, intersect with government programs.

Kowal states that why this might be so is because of the difficulty for the state in reconciling the right, ‘to be “culturally different” and to maintain these differences over time with the generic rights of the citizen’ (Kowal 2008 p.338). Citizen rights, Kowal suggests, are embraced in statistics that situate the good life (or what is *not* the good life), in white, middleclass, educated groups, and that the liberal state resists any efforts to deviate from this. She argues that while Australia as a post-colonial state attempts to embrace difference by espousing multiculturalism, it tolerates Indigenous difference only so long as unacceptable statistical equality differences are eliminated. When Indigenous culture is positioned as the cause of statistical inequality (Hughes 2007; Sutton 2009), tolerance of cultural difference diminishes.

In Altman’s assessment, *Closing the Gap* deliberately frames Indigenous disadvantage as a technical problem and does so in order ‘to eschew the Indigenous rights agenda and ignore history and the politico-economic causes of marginalisation in policy and politics’ (Altman 2009 p.6). By ignoring diversity and difference through goals of statistical equality, Altman argues that needs predominate over rights, market priorities overwhelm Indigenous collective

structures, and the state is able to affix a technical solution to the complexities of history, state indifference and difference. Taylor's (2008) analysis suggests a more pragmatic issue. In his view, governments remain fixed on the use of broad statistical indices of wellbeing because their primary purpose is to inform government policy rather than Indigenous priorities, with governments also struggling to identify indicators that can deal with the heterogeneity of Indigenous circumstances and societies.

Within statistics, NIRA 'constructs the *people* of Indigenous Australia—as statistical units containing a range of indicators of deficit, which are to be measured, monitored and rectified' (Pholi, Black & Richards 2009 p.11). As such, solutions are externalised and individualised; local resources, assets, strengths and coping strategies are ignored in analysis; the negative impacts of state policy on Indigenous wellbeing remain hidden, and the relational considerations that are a critical contributor to Indigenous wellbeing are not considered. Policy assessments are thus poorly informed about the circumstances that contribute to or undermine Indigenous wellbeing decisions and in turn, their engagement with the state. This is the issue Sen's capability approach seeks to address.

I am not arguing that government policy is not attempting to address critical opportunity deficits that impinge on Indigenous capabilities. The issue is that in their framing, NIRA and the measures introduced under the NTER fail to acknowledge how culture and the heterogeneity of Indigenous circumstances impact on Indigenous engagement in state wellbeing programs, particularly those that target economic disadvantage. Participation rates, income comparisons and lease agreements fail to make known the conditions that influence Indigenous choices. They also obscure the extent to which Indigenous peoples are able to exercise agency freedoms and hide any potential detrimental impacts of government initiatives on wellbeing or their impact on Indigenous social structures. The very real risk here is that Indigenous people can be seen to be 'engaging' in or supporting policy directions, when in reality they may be resisting these changes or feel they have no choice, a situation very evident in this study. It is also evident when a government report detailing the findings of Aboriginal

consultations on the future of the NTER (FaHCSIA 2009), is analysed against transcripts of these consultations (Concerned Australians 2010, 2011). Indigenous policy thus claims to hold a position that Indigenous culture, aspirations and strengths matter while governments substantially limit what is seen, measured, valued and given voice.

8.4.2 Support for voice in Indigenous policy

There is, however, a further problem. Although NIRA acknowledges that government efforts must be ‘*underpinned by effective engagement with Indigenous Australians*’ (COAG 2009a p.A-20), setting Indigenous engagement as one of the six core principles underpinning NIRA’s implementation, I argue here that the Commonwealth’s engagement strategies on the ground are unlikely to realize this end. This is not only because meaningful engagement needs to work within a framework that understands human agency and choice, but also because engagement requires conditions and processes that support the capability for voice. Against the findings at Tjuwanpa and from studies across Indigenous Australia, NIRA’s resourcing and conceptualisation of this important capability can be seen to be sorely lacking.

The engagement principle in Indigenous policy recognizes that relationships with Indigenous people on the ground provide the mechanism through which community needs and aspirations can be integrated into the planning and implementation of Indigenous programs (COAG 2009a). Engagement therefore aims to foster community ownership of programs; recognise local circumstances, language and culture, and promote Indigenous representation. Indigenous engagement is therefore positioned as the means to ensure the sustainability and success of government programs and services.

Implementation of the engagement principle is through government-Indigenous partnerships, through which governments inform, solicit advice, channel information and access feedback on Indigenous policies and programs. Three kinds of partnerships are elaborated at national level – an elected National Indigenous Representative body, specific Indigenous advisory groups, and

Indigenous expert organizations. The role of these groups is to channel communications and to provide feedback, analysis and advice to governments on Indigenous policies and programs. On-the-ground engagement with those who are the target of government services, however, is left to a somewhat vague postscript:

‘Utilizing available arrangements and existing informal ongoing personal interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and building relationships over time, is another important way of engaging with and building partnerships with Indigenous communities’ (COAG 2009a p.A-23).

In the Northern Territory engagement has been operationalised through employment of a Commonwealth Government Business Manager (GBM) and Indigenous Engagement Officer. Located in larger Aboriginal townships these officials provide a single government entry point. Investments in interpreter services and cross-cultural training of government staff are also intended to strengthen communications between government officials and Aboriginal residents. NIRA also anticipates participation of Indigenous people in local, regional and national decision-making bodies and allocates resources to strengthen Indigenous capacity to function in formal governance contexts. Governments also commit to fostering the emergence of strong indigenous leaders to champion the COAG reforms (COAG 2009c). The 2012 budget measures have expanded these investments, based on the rationale that Indigenous Engagement Officers, more interpreters, and Indigenous governance training will enhance the engagement of remote peoples in COAG initiatives (Macklin 2012). The question is whether these investments hold promise in terms of developing the kind of Aboriginal-government relationship on the ground that NIRA anticipates will foster engagement and result in more effective government programs in the Northern Territory.

The outstation narratives and the literature cited in this study suggest that there are issues for government Indigenous Engagement Officers or elected leaders, due to cultural constructions of legitimacy and authority within and across kin groups. Into government initiated Indigenous governance structures come the values, norms, responsibilities and relationships, which give meaning and legitimacy to

decision-making (Hunt et al. 2008). Hiring an Aboriginal person or promoting governance training for Indigenous leaders, without recognising how Indigenous governance is enacted within consensual, kin-based networks and social norms, risks seeing government investments wasted. There is therefore the risk, highlighted in the Tjuwanpa narratives, that these measures can further erode Aboriginal social structures.

A critical question, however, is what local Indigenous leaders are expected to discuss and deliberate? NIRA makes clear that advice and deliberation of government initiatives is to be placed largely in the hands of nationally recognised Indigenous authorities and experts. Thus while NIRA anticipates that local people will sit on local advisory groups, this assumes that Indigenous people see value in doing so, and that these groups and their agendas are supported by family and clan groups. The research at Tjuwanpa suggests that none of these attributes can be assumed.

There is little in NIRA to suggest Commonwealth policy foresees remote Indigenous people engaging in rational deliberation of choices, setting priorities or actively influencing the design of government services in their areas. If this were the case, there would be evidence of specific investments in local studies and information that could inform clan-based discussions. There would also be specific funding of appropriate mechanisms and deliberative processes that would recognise the care and expertise required in these kinds of deliberations (Alkire 2004) Although there are investments in Government Business Managers (GBMs) and Indigenous Engagement Officers in some communities, their primary job is to coordinate government services and facilitate communications between government and communities about government programs and priorities that have already been decided. Their job is not to undertake a highly skilled, facilitation role.

Further, policy would delineate those decisions that can best be made at local and regional levels, without which Indigenous engagement in decision-making is largely meaningless. The very real risk here is that enactment of local decision-making becomes a pointless exercise. Hours are spent in consultations deciding

where Aboriginal township speed-humps are to be constructed for example, without commitment to the overarching issue of road safety. Once in place, deep ruts at the side of the road around the speed hump indicate the futility of the exercise. Further, although GBMs and Indigenous Engagement Officers are seen as the means through which Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are to, 'have their voices heard in the development of policies that affect their lives' (Macklin 2012), NIRA establishes no mechanisms through which government is held accountable to Aboriginal communities for taking the outcomes from any discussions into account.

Certainly some government departments encourage staff to employ cultural sensitivity when consulting with Indigenous groups (FaHCSIA 2010b) and ask staff to recognise that Indigenous groups may pursue different priorities. Indigenous policy does not recognise that the design of deliberative strategies requires expertise, openness to program redesign and the possibilities that local discussions have, and government accountability for what is said. The very real risk is that the buzz words 'engagement' and 'partnership', become feel-good fuzz words (Cornwall & Brock 2005).

The best that might be anticipated from Government investments that seek to enhance on-the-ground engagement is that Aboriginal people might gain better access to information concerning government intentions, particularly through investments in interpreter services. Here again, however, there are substantial barriers to overcome. As the findings at Tjuwanpa and studies in institutional settings show (Cass et al. 2002; Cooke 2009; Kennedy 2012; Lowell 2001b), there are significant risks in assuming that interpreters provide the answer to meaningful and effective communications between bureaucracies and Aboriginal people. Indeed, government assessments of COAG investments in interpreter services reveal ongoing problems in recruiting suitably qualified interpreters in the Northern Territory as well as poor government recognition of the need to use them (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2011; FaHCSIA 2010a). Overall, however, investments in interpreters do not deal with the problem of the quality and availability of information needed by local people to assess risks and benefits in

government proposals. Nor do interpreters replace the trust, resources and processes that are necessary to facilitate deliberations within Aboriginal families and across clan groups.

The following statement summarises COAG's position on Aboriginal roles in their relationship with governments:

‘Governments are committed to engaging with Indigenous people, and Indigenous people have many roles to play. They can participate and engage with government on the implementation of programs, through national, regional and local advisory bodies, and as participants and users of services. And they can actively take responsibility for accessing services for the health, education and economic security of themselves and their families’ (COAG 2009a p.A-31).

The fundamental issue for government in its attempts to address Indigenous engagement lies in the fact that discussions on the ground remain limited to what it is that governments value. While this is a blunt assessment, there is little in NIRA or its associated agreements that moves Indigenous engagement beyond this equation. Engagement thus prioritises improving the quality and responsiveness of government services given on condition that Indigenous peoples in remote communities conform to particular normative behaviours, follow Centrelink rules, and locate their living arrangements near or in service hubs.

While NIRA positions Indigenous engagement around relationships, these relationships are vested in expert policy advice and in improvements to government communications at community level about what governments expect Indigenous people to do. Culture is recognised but only resourced in terms of its economic utility. Indigenous capacity to engage in local decision-making relies on externally imposed governance structures. This measure ignores Indigenous decision-making protocols, fails to articulate how power will be shared, and makes no provisions about how government will be held to account for decisions reached. Further, investments in communications through interpreters, recruitment of government liaison officers, and cultural training of government staff do not

accommodate the need for investments in people and organisations who have the relationships and facilitation skills required for effective local deliberations.

8.5 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that COAG policy situates Indigenous engagement as central to state efforts to improve Indigenous wellbeing. At the same time, *Closing the Gap* policy fails to come to terms with how Indigenous engagement relates to culturally located Indigenous wellbeing choices, and how appropriate processes for public deliberation can advance and inform these choices.

As highlighted at Tjuwanpa and in studies in remote and regional Australia, Aboriginal wellbeing is constituted in identity and practice that is linked to place and kin-based forms of association. This mirrors findings from international development studies that point to the pursuit of relatedness in everyday life across many poor and marginalised communities. Outstation families were thus responsive to material and economic wellbeing opportunities if they perceived that these opportunities provided them with freedoms to pursue valued ways of being, feeling and acting. Engagement with the NTER reforms was thus linked to heterogeneous wellbeing choices (White 2010) shaped by Western Arrernte cultural and spiritual responsibilities, and the practical realities operating in their remote desert environment.

While those concerned with Indigenous policy and wellbeing have differing views on the impact of culture on Indigenous wellbeing – particularly its influence over Indigenous engagement in economic development efforts – there is agreement that culture is an extremely important influence and cannot be ignored. Many studies across Indigenous Australia, however, point to improvements in material and emotional wellbeing outcomes when remote peoples are able to pursue values that are culturally relevant to them. These studies also point to risks to Indigenous emotional health and the social fabric of life when these ways of being are ignored. Other Australian and international studies show improved wellbeing outcomes when Aboriginal people are given meaningful opportunities through

discourse to shape and implement services and programs.

Sen maintains that culture is a constituent part of development (Sen 2004), and that its influence must be worked out alongside other considerations if state development and wellbeing efforts are to be effective. Sen's capability approach links human agency to the opportunity freedoms available to pursue culturally located, valued ways of being. Indigenous engagement can therefore be seen as being realised when state programs and services recognise and support opportunities that enhance people's capabilities to live in ways that are valued by them. As wellbeing values are derived from cultural aspirations and individual circumstances, critical discourse becomes the only way to determine how state support for particular capabilities will impact on functionings that are highly valued by remote Aboriginal populations. This necessitates attention to opportunities that enable Aboriginal peoples to have a meaningful voice in deliberations as well as access to information that informs their choices. Engagement in the public domain must therefore be structured and resourced in culturally appropriate ways, within which their voice has legitimacy and governments are held accountable.

The conditions necessary for Aboriginal engagement in the public domain are well articulated in the literature. Attention to time, trust, relationships, and communications is required. For this to happen, however, these principles must sit within an Indigenous policy, which supports engagement through the devolution of decision-making, makes it transparent and accountable, and appropriately resources public deliberation efforts. COAG's Indigenous engagement policy is poorly positioned to do this. *Closing the Gap* policies ignore the cultural locatedness of Indigenous wellbeing and fail to position Indigenous engagement as having anything to do with Indigenous involvement in rational deliberations about their futures. In the absence of this, policy focuses on the material utility of culture and policy effectiveness is determined by measurements of equal opportunity, income levels or Indigenous participation rates. This permits no evaluation of the appropriateness of services and programs in different contexts. Nor does it value an understanding of how Aboriginal decisions about their engagement in state

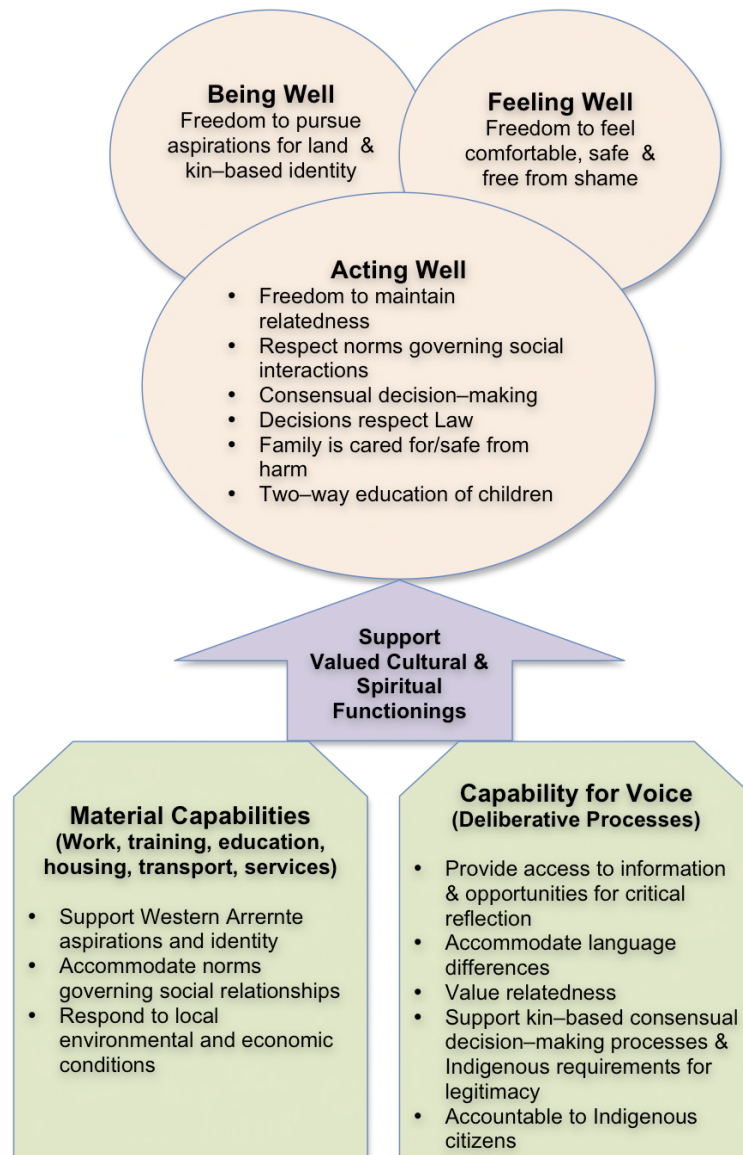
wellbeing opportunities is influenced by Aboriginal wellbeing concerns – particularly concerns relating to identity or spiritual and social practice. Knowledge of the considerations underpinning Indigenous decisions thus remains hidden and the strengths inherent in cultural aspirations go untapped. Although the Commonwealth wants to forge a relationship with remote peoples, it fails to establish common ground for this to happen.

The Commonwealth and Territory Governments subsequently construct Indigenous engagement in remote regions of the Northern Territory around investments to improve communications and build Indigenous capacity to participate in state initiated local advisory bodies. These measures do not resource the conditions necessary for Aboriginal engagement in the public domain or delineate how decision-making powers are to be shared. While government engagement policy seeks a relationship with Aboriginal peoples and wants them to participate in services, it offers them no means to critically deliberate choices or to have any substantive influence over program and service design. In this context the relationship that government seeks through engagement with Indigenous peoples is ultimately one-sided.

In order to move towards a policy position that reflects the conditions that the Western Arrernte participants in this study speak to, I propose an alternative conceptualisation of engagement. In the diagram below, engagement is presented as a dynamic requiring three sets of conditions.

First, government policy must speak to the spiritual and cultural functionings that time and time again have been shown to influence the choices that Aboriginal people make in their daily lives. Wellbeing is not an individualised state of health, educational attainment or income level. Remote peoples have a kin-based social order vested in their relationship to land. Their rules of social organisation are derived from these ties. Through daily practices, which recognise this social and spiritual order, Aboriginal people feel comfortable and safe. In the diagram I use the terms '*being well*', '*acting well*', and '*feeling well*'.

Dynamics of Engagement



These terms reflect the interaction between Indigenous identity (being well), Indigenous modes of social behaviour (acting well), and the emotional states (feeling well) that pursuit of identity and rightful social behaviour engenders. This is at the heart of what wellbeing means to the remote people represented in this study. Unless governments can talk directly to these valued social and spiritual functionings, state efforts to engage remote Aboriginal peoples are going to be wasted. People will readily choose to engage in services and programs if they assess that these opportunities support Aboriginal ways of being in the world.

Material opportunities, such as those made through government investments in employment, training or schooling, therefore need to make sense in the context of Indigenous aspirations and the material circumstances of their lives. As this study shows, training and work opportunities have meaning when a job or qualification results in income that enables employees to pursue association with country and kin, while also enabling them to avoid situations that would engender shame or family hardship. These are the circumstances within which Indigenous engagement could become a reality. It will not become a reality when engagement is divorced from the circumstances and aspirations of individual lives.

Government programs therefore need to speak not only *to* these values, but also speak *with* local populations in the design and evaluation of government programs and services. The capability for voice holds that the values, strengths and material circumstances of specific populations can only be known through dialogue. Further, voice enables informed choice. As this chapter argues, creating the space for dialogue under current policy arrangements is likely to be a complex undertaking. Case studies from around Indigenous Australia, however, demonstrate that it is not impossible. In the context of remote Aboriginal populations, this means language differences must be recognised and accommodated as English communications can cause confusion, misunderstandings that disrupt social relations, and shame. It requires state investments in facilitators and processes that enable discussions to proceed in ways that respect Aboriginal norms governing talk, decision-making and representation. It also requires that governments are held accountable for what is

said and agreed. Unless these conditions are met, government rhetoric regarding the engagement of Indigenous peoples in the decisions that affect their futures is largely meaningless.

Chapter 9: Conclusion – Engendering Engagement

‘Politics uses hard words instead of plain English – but you still gotta communicate to understand each other... understand the perspective.’ (Solomon 2007)

9.1 Introduction

The key aim of this study has been to deepen the understanding of policy makers and those involved in delivery of government programs about the conditions underpinning the engagement of remote Aboriginal peoples in government programs, services, and consultations about their futures. Set over a two-year period between May 2007 and May 2009, against contemporary events associated with the implementation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, Tjuwanpa’s outstation families described how they understood the changes in Indigenous policy arrangements in the Northern Territory and the implications of the reforms for their lives.

In this chapter my aim is to reflect on how government policy makers and those concerned with the design and implementation of Indigenous policy and wellbeing programs, can support conditions that would foster Indigenous engagement. I do not believe fulfilling this objective will mean working at crossed purposes. As the narratives make clear, Western Arrernte people share with the state a common endeavour for the wellbeing of their families. The challenge for the state is to create opportunities within which remote Indigenous peoples like those at Tjuwanpa believe they can engage, because state opportunities provide them and their families with a means to be well, feel well, and act well as an Indigenous person. This will mean not only paying attention to the material needs of Indigenous lives, but also to Indigenous relational and spiritual aspirations.

Importantly, it will require Indigenous policy emphasise, value and resource informed, rational discussion about how Indigenous wellbeing is constituted and might be pursued.

9.2 Overview of the Study Findings

This study opened with three overarching questions: First: *How did Western Arrernte outstation families understand and respond to key NTER measures?* Second: *What does this tell us about the conditions underpinning remote Aboriginal peoples engagement in government wellbeing efforts?* The third question asked: *Does Commonwealth policy and practice reflect the conditions that would facilitate Aboriginal engagement **in** state wellbeing programs and **with** those responsible for their implementation?*

The response of Tjuwanpa's outstation families to the NTER highlights differences between how remote Aboriginal people and policy makers understand how life is to be lived, what it means for an Aboriginal person to be, act and feel well, and how the realities of life in an economically disadvantaged, remote desert location intersect to influence Aboriginal life choices. Although the Commonwealth's rationale for the NTER held that Aboriginal people must take greater responsibility for their children's futures, the narratives reveal Western Arrernte outstation families were trying to do just that. Children's safety and family futures were at the heart of Western Arrernte values and had a profound influence over how outstation families shaped their lives. Hearing the voices of Tjuwanpa's outstation families it is difficult to argue that the wellbeing of children and families was a distant concern. The central tension posed by the Intervention, however, was how this was to be constituted.

The voices in this study reveal that outstation choices to engage in government programs were influenced by socially determined, heterogeneous wellbeing values. These values underpin Western Arrernte ways of being, feeling and behaving, realised through relatedness between people and place. Central to outstation interpretations of the NTER reforms was whether the Hermannsburg

township lease, changes to CDEP, income management, and new opportunities for jobs and training provided the means for outstation families to know country, to share with kin, and to act in ways that maintained important kin-based relationships. People's responses also reflected pragmatic assessments of the viability and appropriateness of service arrangements in realising these valued ways of being. While Tjuwanpa's outstation families valued income, training, cars, skills and jobs, it was what these material assets enabled people to be and do and feel that mattered. Wellbeing aspirations were thus shaped by Western Arrernte norms and moral responsibilities that intersected with the material conditions of their lives. Their choices considered whether government initiatives enabled people to freely function in ways where they could be well, feel well and act well as a Western Arrernte person and family member.

As articulated in the *Commonwealth's Closing the Gap* policy, governments fail to make the link between important Aboriginal social and spiritual functionings and how the state's wellbeing programs can work in support of these valued ways of being. NIRA policy recognises the strengths inherent in Indigenous culture and the necessity of engaging with remote Aboriginal peoples, but fails to deliver a framework within which cultural values are seen as integral to Indigenous engagement. At issue here is that Commonwealth policy aims to improve the material circumstances of Indigenous people's lives on the assumption that wellbeing is achieved independently of the relationship between people, and between people and place. Engagement is individualised, ignoring how relatedness operates in the context of remote Aboriginal communities. Engagement is thus situated outside of the values that would have meaning for remote Indigenous peoples.

I have argued that outstation families' engagement in the NTER was integrally linked to social norms and spiritual values situated in subjective assessments of how Western Arrernte life is to be lived. At the same time this study shows how outstation families lacked the means to critically inform their decisions and to make their voices heard in government decisions regarding their futures. As the narratives make clear, the voices of ordinary women and men from Tjuwanpa's

remote outstations were silenced as a consequence of government failure to recognise their aspirations and concerns and consequently, to put in place the conditions that could have fostered critical dialogue about their futures.

Solomon's voice is used to open this chapter as he pointed to the necessity for two-way communication between the state and its remote Indigenous citizens. I argue that this is a fundamental requirement if Indigenous engagement is to be realised. Understanding meaning – the meaning of Aboriginal actions and decisions – requires Aboriginal capability to tell their story, in ways and through processes in which they feel comfortable and safe. It also requires a commitment to negotiate. Aboriginal peoples like those at Tjuwanpa need to be confident that what they say is understood, respected, and responded to. They need to be able to understand and discuss the implications of their choices for their children's futures. For this to have meaning, however, they must also have influence over how government interventions are designed and delivered.

Orgki's call to political leaders for recognition; Julia's cry to be heard not told what to do, and Solomon's cynicism about BBQs as the token indicator of government's wish to communicate with him, however, speak to Western Arrernte frustration with the lack of meaningful opportunities through which they could understand, influence and negotiate government interventions. The abysmal failure of visiting government officials to accommodate the needs of Indigenous first language speakers; their lack of attention to the social norms governing Western Arrernte speech; their devaluing of the time needed to reflect and seek clarification, and the absence of processes through which outstation families could reach a consensus and represent their interests are matters that are referenced again and again through the literature. Despite the fact that studies across Indigenous Australia show that investments in processes that prioritise discourse have significant potential to enhance Indigenous wellbeing outcomes, the findings from these studies continue to be ignored in practice and policy. Those writing from the perspective of the capability approach – the approach that underpins the United Nations Millennium Development Goals – argue that this capability for voice is a pre-requisite for any government investments that aim to alleviate poverty and

improve the wellbeing of marginalised groups.

Understanding engagement as a reflection of the wellbeing choices of remote Aboriginal peoples and putting in place the conditions whereby they might deliberate their futures, will require that Aboriginal peoples in remote communities have the capability for voice. Voice enables their realities to be made known, their decisions informed, and taps valuable knowledge and strengths, which can be harnessed in the design and delivery of government programs and services. The role of critical deliberation and its potential to make known the realities, social responsibilities and possibilities inherent in life in remote Aboriginal areas is, however, ignored in the Commonwealth's engagement rhetoric, with the conditions that might realise Indigenous capability for voice poorly accommodated in government investments.

Although Indigenous engagement is a key principle underpinning the Commonwealth's Indigenous *Closing the Gap* policy, the term is ambiguous. Australian governments target statistical differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens defined in the material circumstances of their lives. The problem for the state in realising Indigenous engagement is that governments fail to take important cultural functionings into account alongside material outcomes. This risks the disengagement of remote Aboriginal peoples if they see government investments working against – rather than with – cultural aspirations and the norms governing social interaction. At best, current investments in interpreters, Indigenous leadership and Indigenous Engagement Officers can only augment understandings about what it is that government wants remote peoples to do. These strategies fail to provide a means through which remote peoples themselves might be able to negotiate the conditions for their engagement in programs and critically reflect on their choices and their futures. In not interrogating notions of engagement the risk is that the failure of remote Indigenous peoples to engage with the state assumes they are morally at fault through a failure to be socially responsible. This brings a normative, moral judgement to Indigenous actions and fails to illuminate the conditions underpinning their choices.—

I argue that if engagement is to be realised, the reasoning underpinning Indigenous choices and the characteristics of Indigenous interactions in the public domain need to be understood and accommodated. The meaningful engagement of Indigenous people in state wellbeing efforts thus requires that governments recognise the role that social values and Indigenous voice play in Indigenous choices about how wellbeing is pursued and enacted. Realising Indigenous engagement thus requires that Indigenous policy explicitly recognise participatory forms of critical deliberation, supporting negotiation of choices and sharing of local knowledge. This positions engagement as a dynamic state of being existing at the interface between Indigenous capability to freely pursue cultural constructions of wellbeing, material opportunities, and the capability for voice.

9.3 The Limitations of the Study

Before discussing what we might do to create a more meaningful environment within which Indigenous engagement could be possible, I will briefly discuss the limitations of the study arising from its epistemological positioning and methodology.

Although the literature provides strong evidence that remote Aboriginal peoples share a number of cultural characteristics – particularly the influence of relatedness over daily life (Austin-Broos 2009; Liberman 1985; Myers 1991), this is a study of Western Arrernte people not all indigenous peoples in Australia. The study seeks to understand the responses of a particular group of remote Western Arrernte people to a set of contemporary state reforms. Consequently, it does not set out to make the case that all Aboriginal peoples share or give the same value to the spiritual and cultural practices that outstation families referenced in their narratives. Western Arrernte outstation stories, however, illuminate the nature of the dynamic at the point of the hyphen (Jones & Jenkins 2008) – the spaces in between the relational encounters that occur everyday in the lives of Tjuwanpa's outstation residents. Based on their experiences and elaborated through the literature, the study therefore provides insights into what are often puzzling,

frustrating and often seemingly overwhelming complexities that government representatives and other outsiders encounter when trying their best to work in remote Aboriginal contexts.

As I point out in this dissertation, resolving these tensions is not about coming up with *the* answer or predicting how Aboriginal peoples will respond to new government policy initiatives. Rather the study findings point to the need for rational, critical dialogue about what is relevant to particular peoples in specific locations. The study findings therefore point to the policy and processual issues, assumptions and considerations inherent in state efforts that seek to engage Aboriginal people (Stringer, E. T. 2007).

In line with this, the study did not interview or seek to determine the prevalence of particular attitudes or ways of thinking. Eighteen people speak through these pages, representing women and men of different ages from across the five Western Arrernte clan groups. I drew primarily on the narratives of eight of these participants who felt sufficiently comfortable enough through my relationships with them to trust me with their thoughts and opinions as they encountered the NTER reforms. There may therefore be other aspects of Western Arrernte engagement with the NTER that are not covered here. Certainly my intent has not been to tell the Aboriginal account of the NTER. This would essentialise Aboriginal peoples and minimise the complexity of the package of NTER reforms, which incorporated measures such as increased policing and alcohol bans in remote communities that are not dealt with in this study. I am confident, however, that while people often had different opinions about the impact of the reforms, the values and normative base that drove these assessments was widely shared by Western Arrernte people. As the literature shows, these values and patterns of social interaction are reflected across remote Aboriginal populations.

With relatedness key to the methodology employed for this study, there is also the risk that outstation participants engaged in gratuitous concurrence (Lieberman 1980a). As noted in Chapter 7, gratuitous concurrence is a function of Indigenous sociality employed to maintain and foster relatedness. I cannot deny that what I witnessed over the two and a half years I spent at Tjuwanpa left me deeply

distressed at the way in which the conduct of the NTER so blithely ignored Aboriginal concerns for their lives and futures and Australia's human rights obligations. At the same time my written and verbal communications about the Intervention emphasised a sharing of what I knew – not my opinions of the reforms. I therefore encouraged people to explore with me their responses to events using the question, '*Tell me a bit about ...?*' I thus sought to encourage people's reflections on events taking place. Can I be certain, however, that people did not wish to maintain harmony with me in the way they crafted their stories? Absolutely not, as this would place me outside of relatedness and make impossible the kinds of insights that outstation people revealed. The distinction here was my asking open-ended questions about people's feelings and interpretations of events, not presenting my assessments and asking whether they agreed with them.

What I am certain about, however, is the consistency of their responses. My transcripts show constancy in their concerns, with different conversations with the same person over the two and a half years providing a greater depth of understanding about where each participant was coming from. Reading excerpts of these transcripts back to participants before gaining their permission to use them, people invariably added to or emphasised the points they wanted me to make. In all instances they further elaborated their position with some referencing a position I had missed. For example, discussing my findings with Thatha, Orgki and Ngulpa I asked if I had covered what they wanted to convey through the study. Thatha was quick to reply. '*You missed the bit where we're busy, you know! We're not just sittin' on the outstation waitin' for government to arrive!*' Relatedness enabled her to feel comfortable and safe with me and thus free to add to what I had missed.

This study would certainly have been richer and perhaps easier had I spoken Western Arrernte. As I speak an Asian language fluently, I recognise the limitations that language differences posed to my understandings of people's interpretations of events. Fluency in Western Arrernte would also have made it substantially easier to establish relationships with outstation families. Time was therefore a substitute – albeit perhaps a poor one – for my linguistic incompetence. It enabled me to get to know people through everyday life and allowed us to share

events as they happened.

9.4 The value of the study

There were many times when I despaired at answering the question of what this study would contribute to our understanding of Indigenous lives and how we might improve the ways in which we work with Australia's Indigenous peoples. In 2009, armed with folders of transcripts and notebooks full of Western Arrernte life during the NTER, I returned home to the east coast. There I set about the process of illuminating the transcripts from the Australian and international literature. The accounts of Australian scholars and practitioners spoke again and again to the centrality of relatedness, spiritual practice and cultural norms in Indigenous life and wellbeing. Indigenous and international wellbeing studies pointed throughout to the need to take a wider view of wellbeing, able to accommodate spiritual practice and relatedness alongside material wellbeing considerations. Linguistic studies in contemporary Indigenous settings revealed the same frustrations that outstation families spoke of when encountering English language communications and the failure of government service providers to recognise the needs of Indigenous first language speakers. Analysis of Aboriginal decision-making came back repeatedly to the centrality of recognising kin-based forms of discussion, consensus and representation. Case studies of programs across Indigenous Australia and in developing economies showed the promise of participatory forms of discourse when attention was given to discourse and decision-making power was shared.

There are two aspects of this study, however, that are significant. First, it interrogates notions of engagement from an Aboriginal accounting of events as they happened in a contemporary policy setting. Engagement was therefore not conceptualised and analysed from other theoretical constructions about what it should be, such as those of Arnstein (1996) and Pretty (1995). The narratives themselves spoke to what was important from within Western Arrernte responses to events, with the literature used to elaborate on the perspectives of Tjuwanpa's

outstation residents. Second, the study distinguishes in engagement the notion of Indigenous choices and how cultural constructions of wellbeing influence the way remote people understand and respond to government wellbeing strategies. From the perspective of the capabilities approach, the role of culture is recognised as it determines the valued human functionings that are pursued through the take up or resistance to the capability opportunities available through state wellbeing investments. The challenge here is to critically assess how capability opportunities – such as the capability for work through the *Welfare to Work* policy, enhance or hinder valued ways of being, acting and feeling as an Indigenous person in their social milieu. This points to the need for investments in discourse and rational decision-making involving ordinary Indigenous citizens, through which the links between valued ways of being and the means to pursue these can be explored and subject to reason. The study also illustrates how these processes need to be structured. The study therefore challenges governments to make clear the assumptions and theories underlying their rhetoric of engagement. Aboriginal people make choices about their engagement – not governments – and unless the thinking, values, aspirations and material considerations underpinning their choices can be made known and valued, engagement remains a fuzzy, normative concept potentially driven by notions of moral superiority.

The central value of the study, however, lies in its potential to reshape our understanding of what it means to be a Western Arrernte mother, father, aunt or grandfather encountering state actions – to feel what it might be like to suddenly find our job in jeopardy; to face the prospect that we may no longer be able to live in our homes; to experience hope, anxiety or confusion as previous understandings and agreements about what was considered best for our families and our children's futures suddenly changes. By giving voice to this experience the study enables us to hear a different discourse – to feel across difference, to reshape our views of Aboriginal Australians as less than or as failures represented as a 'gap' between us and them. Outstation families are no longer, 'objects of curiosity, and subjects of research, to be seen but not asked, heard or respected' (Martin 2003 p.203). In hearing what they have to say there is practical wisdom about how we might reshape the ways that things are done. In this there is the hope that we might begin

to reconstruct the terms of engagement, learning from the experience of those on the *'other'* side of the fence about how *we* might change (Jones and Jenkins 2008).

9.5 A framework for Aboriginal engagement

Establishing principles and a clearer framework within which Indigenous engagement is fostered means that government efforts to involve remote peoples in state wellbeing efforts could bear fruit. Based on the study's findings I discuss the aims, principles and operational considerations that the Commonwealth's commitment to Indigenous engagement implies. While participation can be coerced, meaningful engagement is not something that can be mandated. Engagement therefore requires the ability to engender an environment within which remote Aboriginal peoples feel free to engage in government initiatives and decision-making forums while feeling comfortable and safe with those who are associated with their planning, delivery and assessment.

9.5.1 Aboriginal engagement: Its aims

What are the aims of any overarching framework for Indigenous engagement? First, engagement endeavours to involve indigenous people – as individuals and as kin related groups – in opportunities fostering human capabilities that enable Indigenous peoples to function in ways that are valued by them. State wellbeing opportunities must therefore be constructed within a policy framework that recognises Indigenous wellbeing as situated in the freedoms available to peoples and groups to pursue lives in which they can be well, feel well and act well as an Indigenous person. This position requires an expansion of Indigenous policy objectives to accommodate the subjective moral and social functionings valued by remote Aboriginal peoples alongside material, utilitarian functionings. Here, the state's focus on individual functionings needs to be expanded to include consideration of group functionings, which would enable wellbeing planning and assessment to accommodate choices derived from relatedness considerations. This would create the space within which Aboriginal peoples are more likely to engage

‘in’ state wellbeing initiatives.

Second, engagement aims to make possible shared understandings and agreements for solutions to the complexities inherent in how Indigenous wellbeing values are to be supported in contemporary environments. This is engagement ‘with’, which makes possible critical reflection, dialogue and debate between Indigenous peoples and governments about the considerations underpinning the positions and decisions of both groups. In this space, the participation of ordinary Indigenous citizens in defining how wellbeing opportunities are to be framed are valued and appropriately resourced.

Engagement is therefore not a separate undertaking. Rather it is a state of being operating in through Indigenous wellbeing choices and discourse. Engagement recognises that individual choices to engage in state wellbeing programs are made in social contexts of family obligations and spiritual practices, the pursuit of which is influenced by the material conditions of their lives. The aim for Indigenous engagement is therefore a meaningful dialogue, through which remote peoples can shape programs and services that enable them to freely pursue opportunities to be well as an Aboriginal person in the context of their social and spiritual milieu.

In assessing engagement we therefore need to go beyond counting Indigenous participants in programs and reliance on mechanisms that target expert advice to a focus on assessing two of engagement’s critical features. First are the actual opportunity freedoms available to all remote peoples to freely participate in programs and services, and in critical discourse about Indigenous futures. Second, are assessments of the processes used to tap into subjective assessments of the relevance and appropriateness of government programs. in terms of how they enhance or constrain people’s ability to feel, be and act well as an individual in the context of their social relationships and spiritual values.

9.5.2 Engagement principles for remote Aboriginal peoples and recommendations for practice

Outlined here are principles for a framework for Indigenous engagement. These

principles set the parameters for decisions and investments, while allowing policy makers and program managers flexibility regarding the design of processes and programs that target the engagement of peoples in remote Aboriginal communities. Like a house, realising engagement requires a strong foundation that can then allow processes to be constructed according to prevailing conditions and the needs of its inhabitants. These principles are as follows:

Recognition of Heterogeneity

The cultural context and circumstances prevailing in specific locations influences the decisions that Aboriginal people in remote locations make about their engagement in government programs, in government consultations and in decision-making forums. Government engagement efforts therefore need to understand these circumstances. This study has found that remote populations are more likely to engage when:

They see a rational link between government programs and how these programs support their own wellbeing aspirations and spiritual practice,

Program designs and consultations are designed to take into account the specific norms governing social relations in different cultural groups,

The influence of economic, transport, and environmental conditions operating in remote locations are taken into account in the design of government programs and consultations.

Unless policy establishes a link between Indigenous wellbeing and the heterogeneity of Indigenous circumstances and cultural practices, there is little likelihood that the principle of engagement in national *Closing the Gap* plans will move beyond its current feel good rhetoric. Policy formulation will require explicit recognition that Indigenous choices are determined from the standpoint of valued functionings, which are culturally determined ways of being, feeling and acting well. There is therefore a need to more closely align Indigenous policy outcomes to the capabilities approach that underpins the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. To do so, requires recognition of subjective functionings and

how capability opportunities such as work support them.

Implementing the principle of heterogeneity will require rigorous analysis of the social dynamics, cultural wellbeing aspirations, and specific historical and economic conditions operating in remote locations. This will necessitate involvement of kin networks and local Indigenous service providers in research and analysis. In turn, research and planning processes will need to use qualitative, participatory methodologies, which give priority to Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing. Remote peoples must be engaged as equal participants in research and evaluation processes.

In addition, Commonwealth policy will need to accommodate indicators, which can assess a broader definition of wellbeing incorporating subjective assessments alongside objective measures. Without this, the emphasis on Indigenous engagement is meaningless, as the heterogeneity of conditions influencing their participation remain hidden. Statistical accounts need to be accompanied by qualitative data that broaden assessments about how wellbeing opportunities enhance or constrain wellbeing achievements and wellbeing agency.

Sharing, transparency and accountability to Aboriginal people for what has been learned will also be required. One way to do this – as suggested in the methodology for this study – is through permission processes that enable individuals and groups to discuss and check findings and agreements arising through public participation processes, research and assessments. This requires time and investments in opportunities that enable people to reach consensus concerning what is told, what is agreed to, and who represents their position.

Recognition of Relatedness

Relatedness refers to the social relations between people in the context of people's association with place (Myers 1991). Evidence from studies in remote contexts as well as case studies across Indigenous Australia point to the critical role of relatedness as both a prevailing feature of Aboriginal social behaviour and its influence over subjective assessments of wellbeing. Efforts to engage remote Aboriginal peoples therefore recognises that these two features of relatedness are

inextricably linked. Relatedness is integrally associated with identity, the integrity of social structures and emotional wellbeing. When relatedness is fostered and respected, people express feelings of being comfortable and safe. In remote Aboriginal Australia, relatedness influences the conduct of everyday life and operates across casual and formal encounters between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. The findings from this study show remote populations are more likely to engage when:

Participants in work, training, interviews and meetings assess these environments as being places where they feel comfortable and safe.

Relatedness is accommodated in governance arrangements, consultative processes, the design of program and service delivery, and in work and training environments.

Programs, service provision, work and training opportunities are seen to foster capabilities that enable people to pursue or realise relatedness.

Relatedness implies that a critical question in assessing Indigenous wellbeing is how government initiatives impact on the pursuit of relatedness between people and place. Statistical analysis therefore needs to be accompanied by local, qualitative assessments that capture subjective understandings about how material opportunities provided by the state contribute to wellbeing outcomes vested in relatedness. Gross indicators of individual income or employment figures do not reflect the social commitments and responsibilities operating in remote economies, where many Aboriginal families support other family members in a variety of ways. More nuanced analysis of local conditions and how they interface with the social conditions of people's lives is therefore needed to augment national economic accounts.

Recognising relatedness will therefore mean the design and delivery of programs and services to remote areas need to go beyond seeing Aboriginal workers and clients as individuals operating outside of their social milieu. In the context of remote communities, accommodating relatedness will require creativity and flexibility program design, particularly those programs aiming to build capabilities

leading to employment outcomes and work competencies. This study points to three important features that need to be incorporated into the design and delivery of services in remote areas.

First, program partnerships need to be established with local Indigenous organisations and service providers. These groups have pre-established working relationships with local families and have a nuanced understanding of local conditions and dynamics. Because of this capacity, these organisations can help to broker relationships with external service providers. They can also create connections to families able to assist with program planning and delivery. This enhances the likelihood that state investments are responsive to the social and economic milieu in different areas.

Second, the design of wellbeing programs needs to recognise and build from the social bonds and life aspirations inherent in relatedness. This is likely to reduce the risk that people fail to participate because they feel isolated or uncomfortable in the sociality of work, learning and institutional contexts, or that they remove themselves because these environments challenge social norms for rightful behaviour. Importantly, in recognising relatedness there is the potential for local populations to explore how employment capacities can enhance the pursuit of valued ways of being linked to aspirations for family and country. Recognising and valuing relatedness would also open the way for discussion regarding how kin structures and social norms can be harnessed in support of program outcomes.

Third, relatedness implies that careful attention is given to recruitment of front line staff. Indigenous services staff need to have cross-cultural capacities in addition to technical skills and experience. Preliminary work orientations need to be accompanied by ongoing mentoring and supervision, ideally involving mentors drawn from local populations. Critical here, however, is that training and supervision move beyond information about Indigenous cultural practice to encourage exploration of non-Indigenous values and assumptions and how they intersect with work responsibilities. Further, remuneration packages will need to provide incentives for experienced service providers to stay in remote locations. The high turn over of staff in remote areas in the Northern Territory acts as a

constraint to the development of relatedness with non-Indigenous staff and this must be explicitly recognised and accommodated.

Appropriate Opportunities for Critical Deliberation

The capability of remote Aboriginal people to engage in processes of public discourse and debate about the aims and design of state wellbeing interventions is fundamental to their ability to exercise informed choice. It is only when remote Aboriginal citizens have the capability for voice that the values, priorities and aspirations that influences choices about their engagement in government programs can be made known. Further, as case studies from across Indigenous Australia and internationally show information from the ground improves the technical efficiency and effectiveness of state interventions by tapping into local knowledge, Indigenous aspirations, skills, networks, and resources. Deliberation can also engender local commitment to finding solutions and making them work.

In remote Aboriginal communities deliberation takes place in the context of cultural values and social norms governing speech, representation and processes for decision-making. Remote peoples also need to trust that cultural values and priorities are given equal value at the negotiating table. In the context of relatedness, participants must also feel comfortable with those conducting deliberations. The findings from this study show that remote Aboriginal groups are more likely to engage in efforts that seek to inform and negotiate wellbeing choices when:

Discourse goes beyond merely consulting people about decisions that are already made.

People trust that the relationship between Aboriginal values and government interventions will be negotiated.

Discussions work within kin structures to identify and discuss constraints to the development of critical capabilities and how cultural values intersect with this.

Indigenous citizens have access to appropriate and timely information that speaks to their concerns and aspirations.

Deliberative processes are designed to fit with norms relating to how remote peoples reach decisions and represent them in the public domain, and schedules recognise the critical need for adequate time in the design of these processes.

Deliberations are undertaken in partnership with individuals and organisations that are known and trusted by local populations.

If the principle of heterogeneity is to be meaningful, national policy and state investments will need to prioritise support for local discussion and critical debate regarding Aboriginal choices in the design and evaluation of government programs. Knowledge derived from qualitative assessments using critical discourse methodologies, can provide extremely important information about how Indigenous choices to engage are being constructed. Investments in participatory, qualitative studies can also highlight how state efforts impact negatively on other functionings that Aboriginal people value individually or collectively and illuminate critical issues in program designs. This information deepens statistical assessments, and provides important indicators for wellbeing evaluations that are difficult to measure in national accounts – such as relatedness outcomes. Of necessity local Aboriginal families and groups need to be involved in these discussions. Through their involvement, Aboriginal people can verify government investments and provide invaluable advice on how they can be improved.

As the exercise of voice in remote Aboriginal contexts takes place within specific cultural constructions governing the conduct of talk and decision making, care must be exercised in assuming that decision-making authority can be delegated outside Indigenous kinship structures. While there will always be a need for institutionalised governance arrangements at the interface between citizens and the state, further studies are needed that explore how Indigenous governance processes and mechanisms can be integrated into formal governance structures. Analysis from this perspective would also enable governments to check

assumptions about the effectiveness of investments in structures that sit outside of the social practice of Indigenous governance.

If Aboriginal decisions are to be informed, processes of discourse must include appropriate, accurate information that is relevant to the problem at hand – including opportunities to share with and learn from other Indigenous groups who have developed programs or approaches that are seen to work in support of Indigenous agency and wellbeing priorities. Planning and appraisal of Indigenous programs additionally need to identify local strengths, resources and knowledge that can be harnessed in support of wellbeing efforts. Government representatives also need to check how Aboriginal citizens understand the principles and processes inherent in government decision-making and how grassroots deliberations can influence them.

If remote Indigenous peoples are to have the capability for voice experienced facilitators are needed. Expertise is needed to plan and coordinate local negotiations and action research on the ground, requiring people with sophisticated experience and skills in grassroots community development and communications able to partner with members of local clan groups. Such facilitators will need to have authority to work across local organisations and government agencies to identify appropriate resource people and design strategies appropriate to individual locales. They will also need to demonstrate the capacity to manage disputes, determine information and communications needs, and work with local groups to design appropriate processes for deliberations.

Recognising the expertise required for the conduct of local deliberations, the strengths, limitations and risks associated with Indigenous Engagement Officers need to be more rigorously assessed. These are Commonwealth appointments answerable to the state. At the same time they operate in the context of social responsibilities to maintain relatedness. As this study shows, their role has the potential to undermine local governance processes and social structures.

Government accountability mechanisms will also need to be determined. This is critical. Power differences, the historical experience of discrimination and

oppression, and the difficulties that remote populations have in representing their positions in the political domain mean that trust must be consciously fostered. Findings and agreements arising from local discussions need to be shared, transparent and accessible to remote populations. Protocols concerning permissions need to be developed in consultation with local groups and backed by formal mechanisms similar to protocols used for ethics approvals in Australia for Indigenous research. To mitigate against the risk that government staff, '*make up their own little stories*', Indigenous approvals need to move from agreement to participate to seeking permission for what is told.

Subsidiarity must also be tackled so that decisions involve those who are best able to make them, with funding mechanisms in place that can enhance local decision-making and local involvement in program planning and implementation. There are several mechanisms used in Australia's international development assistance programs that could be explored including block funding, civil society grants mechanisms and emergent program design frameworks. These mechanisms accommodate heterogeneity and recognise complexity, offering flexibility in program design and delivery while maintaining a focus on outcomes. Deliberations can then be focused on how communities could be made safer – not where the speed humps are to go. The limitations of local decision-making also need to be made explicit.

Accessible Communications

Language differences represent a significant constraint to the engagement of remote Aboriginal peoples and need to be explicitly recognised. Everyday encounters with English speakers can be cause for shame, lead to confusion and disrupt important social relations. Understandings of concepts, meanings and institutional processes may also differ substantially from those of bureaucrats and managers of Indigenous programs, and can contribute to misunderstandings that may have serious consequences, particularly for remote Aboriginal clients and their families. The social norms governing speech in remote Indigenous communities also influence the preparedness of people to engage in government support programs, work opportunities and public forums. Based on the findings

from this study, accommodating language differences will require that:

Communications are conducted in a language and with people that Indigenous first language speakers feel comfortable with.

Time is taken to explore and explain new concepts, processes and rules. Time also needs to accommodate people's need to check their conceptual understandings of what they have heard in a safe environment.

Attention is paid to culturally appropriate processes for discourse and speech.

The implementation of this principle will require significantly more attention to language differences than is currently the case in Indigenous policy and government practice. Written English communications must use plain language and avoid the use of acronyms, complex words and complex sentence structures. Communications materials and processes should consider the use of graphic representations of important information or oral story-telling devices that build on Aboriginal ways of learning and understanding. Use should also be made of new communications technologies, which are expanding in remote areas. At the same time, assumptions about who has access and proficiency to use them needs to be checked.

The use of interpreters must also recognise the limited professional capacities of many Indigenous interpreters, particularly when they are expected to communicate complex or unfamiliar concepts. Importantly, government or other external agents need to recognise that interpreters operate in social contexts that prioritise the maintenance of relatedness. Interpreters therefore need to be carefully selected and fully briefed before they are employed for particular tasks. Given the difficulties in finding professionally accredited interpreters in many remote locations, Aboriginal people who are not professionally accredited should be considered provided they are adequately briefed. These people may also be more effective interpreters because they can communicate in the context of relatedness and knowledge of family dynamics. In identifying these people, however, it is important to involve kin networks so that risks to their social relationships are reduced and family

groups clearly understand the role the interpreter is to perform.

If communications are to be improved government agents must recognise that interpreters are needed. This is unlikely to be the case unless it is a mandatory requirement, backed by ongoing investments in interpreter training and preparation, and government staff trained in how to work with them.

Improving communications will also mean government planning and implementation schedules must accommodate longer time frames. This would permit processes that engender an iterative understanding of government proposals, a checking of how concepts and proposals are understood, and enable kin groups to prepare a response. The rushed government meetings exasperating Thatha and left Solomon groping in the dark, wastes government resources and effectively silences Aboriginal voice. Further, the expectation that Aboriginal people are readily available to participate in government meetings and interviews at short notice has to be replaced by recognition that there are multiple demands on people's time.

Provision of Information and Analysis

Meaningful engagement requires that Aboriginal people have access to sufficient information and analysis about the likely benefits and consequences of policy decisions and their engagement in proposed programs. Information and analysis must aim to establish a clear link between Aboriginal wellbeing priorities and how anticipated government program outcomes will advance Aboriginal aspirations for their futures. The implications of material capabilities for family and individual futures therefore need to be made explicit. As this study makes clear, Aboriginal people are more likely to engage when:

They can analyse how government capability opportunities advance or restrict their ability to pursue important social and cultural aspirations.

Information and analysis is relevant to local cultures and based on the realities of remote economies.

The language, presentation and analysis of information are accessible to Indigenous first language speakers.

While an extensive body of work exists about remote Indigenous peoples and their circumstances, most information and studies finds its ways onto the shelves and computer files of government staff, academics or program managers. Perhaps it is assumed that remote Aboriginal people are not interested in this information. Perhaps they are seen as incapable of making sense of complex data or arguments. The findings from Tjuwanpa suggest that neither of these propositions is true. Certainly people at Tjuwanpa struggled to obtain clear, concise information delivered in a way they could access and understand. Their stories, however, tell of considerable ability to reflect on events and analyse impacts and consequences. As the Tjuwanpa Rangers employ sophisticated technologies to undertake research in association with academic institutions, it can hardly be argued that they are also incapable of understanding the role that scientific data plays in knowledge development. If outstation families and other Aboriginal groups in remote areas are to engage in deliberations about their futures, they need access to information and encouragement to share what they know.

In remote and not so remote communities around the world, farm extension practices encourage farmers to share what they are learning with each other. These kinds of learning approaches can overcome the need for paper-based information sharing and can build on Indigenous oral traditions and cultural practices regarding knowledge exchange. Action research processes, that draw on local knowledge and encourage critical reflection about proposed solutions and program practice, have again and again demonstrated the power to inform local participants and external agents and improve service delivery. Like remote peoples all over the world, Aboriginal peoples quickly take up technologies that enable them to communicate with the outside world. They use computers and mobiles, play electronic games, and watch DVDs. If we are to harness these opportunities, governments must give priority to Aboriginal needs for information and invest in creative ways in which it can be shared and assessed.

9.6 Conclusion

Despite all that is known about the lives of Aboriginal peoples, their values, circumstances and the social norms governing the organisation of everyday life were ignored as the Intervention was planned and executed in remote communities across the Northern Territory. Garnering the moral indignation of the Australian public over reported sexual abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children, the Howard Government justified the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act to introduce a swathe of sweeping reforms. It argued that these reforms were necessary to create conditions that would tackle the underlying causes of Indigenous child abuse, neglect and family dysfunction. Softening its language with the promise of a new relationship between Australian governments and their Aboriginal citizens, the incoming Rudd Government recast the Intervention under a promise to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. Throughout, the voices of the women and men whose lives were affected by these reforms remained muted in discussions about their futures.

Although some may see this study as a critique of the Northern Territory Intervention, this has not been its intent. Governments, churches and well-meaning citizens alike have intervened in the lives of Aboriginal peoples since the arrival of the first British settlers. The aim of this study has been to use the backdrop of contemporary Indigenous policy events to hear how a group of Western Arrernte people understood three government reforms applied to very remote Northern Territory Aboriginal peoples. The Intervention is thus a lens through which we might gain an empathic understanding of remote Aboriginal lives, and to hear what people on the ground have to say about the conditions under which they might be able to meaningfully engage in state programs and services.

What is clear from the stories of women and men from Tjuwanpa's outstations is that government wasn't listening. It did not need to. Government already had the answers. The lease over Hermannsburg would create the conditions that would increase private and government investments in remote areas. Punitive measures designed to control individual expenditure and force participation in work and

training would see more people employed. The yawning gap here was a failure to engage with people under conditions enabling them to feel comfortable and safe, not only in the work and training environments within which they were expected to participate, but also where they felt safe in pursuit of their identity and children's futures.

These conditions are patently evident throughout the stories of the men and women who are represented in this study. The first condition is that services and programs must speak to Aboriginal aspirations for their futures and build from their strengths. A job, for example, has to have meaning. It must resonate with the hopes and responsibilities for family and country that Western Arrernte people bring to their everyday lives. It must create a space within which women and men feel pride when their families recognise their learning and contribution to their people. This cannot be mandated by the state *or its officers*. Although the public depiction of remote communities focused on neglect and dysfunction, the voices of Tjuwanpa's outstation families in this study repeatedly spoke to the need to foster family unity and described their efforts to protect and educate their children in the context of their relationship to Western Arrernte land and with each other. The township lease, income management, CDEP, and the centralisation of services in Hermannsburg threatened these aspirations.

Second, in the workplace, the training environment or in encounters with people they did not know, the men and women in this study spoke to conditions that enable them to participate without fear of shame or retribution. The norms governing social interactions in Aboriginal societies are well documented through the literature. These codes of behaviour are referenced again and again by the storytellers here. Effectively they are saying; 'Please take into account that English is not our first language and when you use it, you not only make it impossible for us to understand your words and intentions, but you also expose us to the risk of making a mistake and that makes us feel shame. Also understand that we are not comfortable with strangers. We need to know you and trust you and that might take time. Questioning also makes us feel uncomfortable. This is not the way we talk. Please also understand that we need time to make decisions. We

are thinking about the implications of our decisions for our families, not just for ourselves, and that means we must talk things over and agree on the position we will take. We also feel uncomfortable when you expect us to talk with you in front of others, as we need to agree on the right person to represent us. If we are quiet, it does not mean that we have nothing to say. In fact, we have a lot to offer. We are just being mindful of our responsibilities to our elders and our social obligations when we talk. Sometimes we just need time to understand what you are saying and why you think it is important. And please, when you appoint an interpreter or someone to represent your position to us, understand the limitations of what they are able to do. You need to carefully prepare them. You need to understand there are consequences for them and their families if they are seen to be doing or saying the wrong thing.’

Finally, the storytellers speak to the everyday realities of their lives. A family car cannot be tied up so that one person can go to a training course. Renting a house in Alice Springs means considering family demands for accommodation when they come to town. Getting a job outside the area may be possible, but not for those without recognised qualifications, English fluency and preparedness to deal with racial discrimination in the city.

In not recognising these three basic conditions, the processes and programs used to deliver the Northern Territory Intervention and its continuation under the *Closing the Gap* policy, ignored the basic ground rules of engagement. Engagement was counted through participation rates in government programs and services. Engagement was ‘done’ in rushed meetings. Talk was conducted through meetings and interviews that failed to respect Western Arrernte social norms and people’s need for time. Western Arrernte aspirations for their futures, the practicalities of everyday life, and their efforts to protect their children were never discussed by any of the visiting government officials.

Clearly something has to change. I have argued that the first change is to reconceptualise Indigenous engagement in Commonwealth policy. This will require a shift away from individualised statistical accounts of what it means to be ‘well’ to a policy that allows consideration of family relationships and Aboriginal

aspirations for their futures. This in turn requires a broader vision for Indigenous policy, a vision that positions work, training or health in the context of capabilities that enable Aboriginal people to pursue what it is that they value. To do this necessitates valuing Indigenous culture. As it is not for governments to dictate what it is that Indigenous peoples are to value and hold dear, policy must permit reflection, dialogue and reasoned discussion with ordinary people on the ground about what is valued in their lives, and whether government investments are helping them to develop the capabilities to pursue these valued ways of being. With its emphasis on voice, reason and freedoms, adopting Sen's capabilities approach would reshape government policy and its emphasis on individualism and statistical difference. It would create the ground for substantial government investments in the process of talk and outline conditions that government representatives need to put in place for these processes to be meaningful. It would set planning, monitoring and evaluation efforts within a framework where remote women and men reflect on and assess for themselves how government opportunities have worked in support of their aspirations or against them. The capability approach would also lend weight to funding modalities, partnership approaches, and designs that allow programs to emerge over time and in response to local conditions and strengths – mechanisms already well tested in Australia's overseas aid program.

If the Commonwealth were to reconceptualise Indigenous engagement, what might the meeting under the bough shelter at Tjuwanpa look like today? The wind would still be blowing. Kids would still be playing on the slippery slide. Cars would be lined up along the perimeter with families arranged according to kinship ties and social obligations. But everyone would know beforehand that the meeting to take place would be discussing the support they need to see their families strong and their children have a future as a Western Arrernte child. Family groups would already have had discussions about what they want to say, what they believe might work, what they are doing already, and who will speak for their position. Before the meeting they would have had access to information that helped inform their position, and time within which they could question or clarify things they did not understand. During the meeting and other meetings following, they would be

hearing Western Arrernte and participating in discussions in their own language. Government representatives would still be present, but they would use experienced facilitators and interpreters to conduct the talking process. These people would be known and trusted by family groups. Loud speakers would be available. When speaking, government staff would say one sentence at a time and then allow interpreters to speak. The interpreters would be well prepared in advance. Government staff would also be mandated to listen and record what was said and agreed. They would also check what they had heard to see if they got it right. Then they would be tasked with making changes to program arrangements and budgets in line with what they had learned about what is working at Tjuwanpa. Perhaps then, Solomon would not walk away shaking his head and wondering, ‘Now what did I learn from that?’

I argue that the voices of ordinary Indigenous citizens like those at Tjuwanpa are essential to realising their engagement in government services and programs. It is only when women and men talk that we can learn about their aspirations, cultural preferences, local strengths and efforts, and the circumstances inherent in remote locations. Through meaningful discussions we can share information and reflect on consequences arising from choices and decisions. In having a voice, remote peoples have an opportunity inform government policy and programs. The people expected to benefit from these policies and programs are therefore more likely to engage in them because these programs respond to Aboriginal values, knowledge and concerns. Importantly, in having a meaningful voice there can be scrutiny of government actions, enabling remote peoples to assess how the state contributes to expanding or contracting Indigenous freedoms to pursue valued ways of being. This is the lesson of the Intervention and all of the interventions into Aboriginal communities that have preceded it.

Appendix 1: Overview of Key NTER reforms

A1.1 Introduction

Provided below is a brief overview of the key elements of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) reform package and the subsequent changes that were introduced under the incoming Rudd Government. From the position of the people involved in this study, the reforms that primarily concerned Tjuwanpa's outstation families were the compulsory five-year takeover of Aboriginal townships and the subsequent negotiations under the Labor Government to extend the Hermannsburg lease for 40 to 80 years; the loss and subsequent return of the Community Development Employment Program and its associated *Welfare to Work* measures, and the quarantining of 50 percent of Centrelink welfare benefits under the Commonwealth's income management reforms. The history of the leases is provided in some detail to illustrate the efforts of the federal government over many years to change land title arrangements over Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory as the means to promoting economic investment and home ownership in these areas.

A1.2 The NTER package of measures

The NTER reforms announced by the Howard Government on June 21, 2007 were accompanied by the declaration of a state of emergency in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (Brough 2007b). This status was deemed necessary in order for the federal government to respond to an alarming picture of child abuse and neglect reported in the Northern Territory with the release of the Little Children are Sacred Report (Wild & Anderson 2007).

The legislation enacting the NTER overrode the property and privacy rights of Aboriginal people and the powers of local Aboriginal governance institutions. In applying these measures and the application of income management exclusively to

Aboriginal Centrelink beneficiaries in the Northern Territory, the Howard Government argued that deprivation of these rights was a special measure, justified on the basis of widespread abuse of children. Deemed a special measure, the federal government was able to suspend the application of the Anti-Discrimination Act to the NTER legislation when it was introduced to the House of Representatives in August 2007.

While the measures introduced under the NTER were presented as an emergency response (Brough 2007c; Howard 2007) and a radical shift in Indigenous policy arrangements (Altman & Hinkson 2007), many of these changes had been emerging for a decade. Under the Howard Government, however, these changes coalesced. The resulting reforms led to a fundamental reshaping of federal government programs, and new arrangements for Commonwealth funding and delivery of Aboriginal services to outstations in the Northern Territory (FaCSIA 2007a; NTG 2008). The incoming Rudd Government supported and extended these reforms under COAG's national *Closing the Gap* policy, implemented through a number of federal-state/territory agreements such as the Remote Services Agreement (COAG 2009c). The reforms coincided with a restructuring of local government service arrangements under the Northern Territory Government, which dismantled Aboriginal community councils and replaced them with an elected regional shire structure.

The package of measures introduced under the NTER also included the quarantining of fifty percent of all Commonwealth welfare payments to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory under a measure called '*income management*'. Income management aimed to ensure that government funds to Aboriginal people were used for essential food and clothing items for children. Effectively people had to designate where they would spend funds quarantined under income management, with choice limited to local township stores, or Coles, K-mart or Woolworths in regional centres.

To apply income management to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory the Commonwealth began dismantling the Indigenous Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), a program that had underpinned the economy in

remote Aboriginal regions since its introduction in 1977. At the time that the NTER was announced there were approximately 6,000 Aboriginal workers employed under CDEP in the Northern Territory. As a CDEP wage was not classified as a welfare payment, the new income management provisions could not be applied to CDEP wages. To remedy this Minister Brough announced that the CDEP scheme would be dismantled. All CDEP participants would be transitioned into arrangements where mainstream welfare to work requirements would apply (Hockey & Brough 2007). Under the new rules all CDEP participants would be assessed and registered on the Commonwealth's Centrelink system (DEWR 2007b). Those deemed eligible to work would then be expected to meet regularly with an approved employment broker from Alice Springs, to look for work, and to meet work responsibilities outlined in their agreement with Centrelink and their Job Network Provider. Once this happened, income management measures would apply. An individual's income support payments would be suspended if they were found to be non-compliant.

Since the program's inception, CDEP wages had formed part of a project and training package that had been predominantly administered by Aboriginal non-government organisations in urban, regional and remote areas across Australia. In the case of the Tjuwanpa outstations, the Outstation Resource Centre had administered CDEP since 1988, using CDEP wages, vehicles, equipment and administration to augment essential water, power and housing services to outstations. With the loss of CDEP these services were threatened, as the Resource Centre could not continue to function without the logistical and administrative support provided under its annual CDEP grant.

The package of NTER reforms included a range of other measures. The permit system, which recognised the rights of Aboriginal people to enjoy privacy within their country, was abolished for travel to and within Aboriginal townships. The permit system was intended to give protection to Aboriginal ceremonies and sacred sites within Aboriginal Land Trust boundaries. Restrictions on possession and supply of pornography were introduced as a protective measure for children. A system of licensing of community stores, which aimed to improve the quality of

goods available in remote communities, was also introduced. The sale and consumption of alcohol was banned on Aboriginal land. Alcohol was seen as the main contributor to violence and assault in Aboriginal communities. Other powers assumed by the Commonwealth included the right to direct how government-funded community assets would be used, and the power to direct the work of Aboriginal community councils and any government funded staff. Federal police were assigned to augment Territory Government police numbers and Government Business Managers (GBM) were appointed in each of the 73 designated townships with powers to facilitate the implementation of the reforms.

A1.3 Leasing of Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory

A1.3.1 Early efforts to reform the 1976 Aboriginal Lands Rights (Northern Territory) Act

Early indications of a change in the Commonwealth's Indigenous policy position with respect to land began in 2004 with a member of the Howard Government's Indigenous Advisory Group, Aboriginal leader Warren Mundine, putting forward his view that,

‘We need to move away from communal land ownership and non-profit community-based businesses and take up home ownership, economic land development and profit-making businesses’ (Sydney Morning Herald Dec 7, 2004).

Mundine maintained that Indigenous communities were locked out of the mainstream economy. He stated that if Indigenous youth were to have any future, ‘the development of Indigenous private enterprises, home and property ownership is the basis for building that future’ (2005). Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Amanda Vanstone echoed Mundine, calling for a reassessment of Commonwealth funded service arrangements to remote Indigenous settlements and paraphrasing Mundine's comments that they should not be left as ‘*cultural museums*’ (2005).

Pressure to change) the Aboriginal Lands Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976 (ALRA)⁶⁷, was also supported by conservative economist Helen Hughes (Hughes 2007; Hughes & Warin 2005). Hughes maintained this was required to facilitate economic investment on Aboriginal land and enable land tenure arrangements that would support home ownership. Making her case, Hughes wrote a scathing attack on remote Aboriginal settlements, arguing that the introduction of individual freehold title over Aboriginal land was the only way forward if governments wanted to tackle Indigenous disadvantage.

These critiques largely targeted very remote communities in the Northern Territory where Aboriginal people's rights over land were first recognised with the passage of ALRA in 1976. Under the legislation, unalienated Crown land could be claimed and held by an Aboriginal Land Trust under inalienable freehold title. This meant Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory could not be bought, acquired or mortgaged. Preceding the 1993 Native Title Act, which recognised native title rights Australia wide, this legislative measure has seen the return of 44 percent of the Northern Territory land mass or approximately 600,000 square kilometres of land returned to Aboriginal ownership since 1976 (Norberry & Gardiner-Garden 2006).

In 2004, the Northern Territory Government had also raised the possibility of township leases. The Land Councils at that time accepted that there were problems arising from the lack of formal tenure arrangements in Aboriginal towns but were concerned that the model proposed, which granted a 99 year lease to a government entity, undermined control by Aboriginal owners over decision making. They suggested different arrangements – particularly for business investment, which

⁶⁷ This Act preceded the Native Title Act. The Commonwealth effectively used its powers in the Northern Territory to grant Aboriginal title over Aboriginal reserves, the Hermannsburg and Santa Teresa Missions in Central Australia and the Delissaville area near Darwin. Land Trusts hold title on behalf of the Traditional Owners. Title is inalienable and equivalent to freehold title. Reflecting customary practice, however, land is held communally. ALRA also provides for Land Councils who represent traditional owners on matters relating to land.

they believed should be considered on a case-by-case basis (Terrill 2009). Over the next three years other models were put forward, all of which were implementable under the original 1976 legislation. None of these proceeded.

Although a Commonwealth Review had previously recommended changes to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in the Northern Territory to facilitate township leases (Reeves 1998), the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (HORSCATSIA) did not endorse this particular recommendation (1999). It was therefore not until 2006 that the Howard Government successfully amended the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, arguing that it was essential to providing a framework that could foster Aboriginal economic development and home-ownership. The 2006 amendment to the ALRA – under Item 46, Section 19 – aimed to facilitate the process whereby an Aboriginal Land Trust, with the consent of the Traditional Owners, could grant a head lease over Aboriginal land to an agreed Commonwealth Government nominated entity for a period of 99 years (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2006).

While Aboriginal rights to negotiate 99-year leases over Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory had already been provided for under the original 1976 ALRA legislation, the then Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough argued the 2006 reforms would make it easier for businesses, private investors, and government agencies to negotiate leases with Traditional Owners and to promote Aboriginal home ownership (Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination 2007). It was argued this would facilitate a stable environment for the private sector and was the only way in which private housing investments could be promoted in Aboriginal townships. Head leases would also provide government agencies, particularly public housing agencies, with property rights over government funded housing and infrastructure assets on Aboriginal land. Brough argued that the lack of leases, ‘...has meant the government has been unable to protect its investment and has also led to very poor outcomes for whom these assets were meant to help’ (Brough 2007d p.13).

In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal Land Trusts – as the property holding entity

–held infrastructure assets under the 1976 ALRA legislation. Up until the introduction of township leasing, government agencies had relied on informal agreements with Traditional Owners regarding land use (Dillon & Westbury 2007). Aboriginal housing organisations⁶⁸ such as the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre had traditionally managed and maintained government funded housing infrastructure and other assets on behalf of the Land Trusts, drawing on annual Commonwealth and Territory Government housing and essential services grants.

Minister Brough argued that leases would facilitate government investments in building improvements and new construction as leases would give governments greater scrutiny over the quality of housing construction and maintenance and enable government to apply public housing conditions to Aboriginal tenants. According to a review commissioned by the Commonwealth, the management of Aboriginal housing by Indigenous Community Housing Organisations was a shambles (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2007) and nothing would change unless government exercised greater control.

A1.3.2 Compulsory Acquisition of Aboriginal townships under the NTER

One of the central features of the NTER was the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land and imposition of five-year leases over 64 of the 73 Aboriginal communities prescribed under the NTER legislation. This measure sought to create the conditions under which governments could control the development of economic and housing infrastructure in larger Aboriginal settlements. Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory had held title to traditional lands since the inception of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.

With the appointment of Mal Brough in January 2006 as the Howard Government's new Indigenous Affairs Minister, a concerted effort began to negotiate township leasing and promote Aboriginal home ownership in the

⁶⁸ Usually referred to as Indigenous Community Housing Organisations or ICHOs

Northern Territory (Brough 2006). Although the Tiwi Islands and Galiwinku populations agreed to further negotiations on a township lease (Brough 2007a) and a small outstation group near Wadeye signed off a home ownership deal (Wilson, A. 2007, May 4), the leasing and homeownership proposals failed to gain traction across Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

Frustrated by the slow pace of negotiations and the resistance of Aboriginal peoples to proposals for township leases and home ownership, Minister Brough decided to act. The compulsory acquisition and leasing of Aboriginal townships under the NTER subsequently provided the means for the Commonwealth to make investment decisions on Aboriginal land without the need for negotiations with Traditional Owners. Referencing the compulsory acquisition of the townships as part of the second reading of the Emergency Response Bill, the Minister noted that, ‘The area of land for the five-year leases is minuscule compared to the amount of Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory. It is in fact less than 0.1 per cent (Brough 2007c p.14)’. He was also at pains to point out that this would make the area under lease too small for mining and that the leases would only be a temporary measure.

With the amendments in place as part of the NTER legislation, the Commonwealth began implementing leasing requirements as a condition of funding. A September 2007 Memorandum of Understanding with the Northern Territory Government stipulated that promised Commonwealth Indigenous housing funding would be conditional on Territory Housing holding long-term lease agreements over the land on which Aboriginal homes were constructed.⁶⁹

In short, from the Commonwealth’s perspective, leases were essential to building Aboriginal townships capable of entering the mainstream economy and improving Aboriginal wellbeing. Changes to the ALRA 1976 legislation would streamline

⁶⁹ This MOU also stipulated a maximum of \$20 million per annum in Commonwealth funding for the Territory’s 600 outstations, pushing the Territory Government to develop an outstations policy framed by restrictions in funding, including no new housing for outstation areas. This represented a dramatic shift in Commonwealth outstation policy.

the establishment of 99 year head leases under a government approved entity, thereby making the environment more attractive for private investors. In turn, this would expand Aboriginal employment and home ownership opportunities. Leases would also enable public housing authorities to control, and subsequently improve Aboriginal public housing. While the introduction of compulsory acquisition of the townships under five-year leases as part of the NTER was explained as a temporary measure – designed to facilitate government entry to communities to undertake urgently needed housing repairs – early changes to ALRA and financial arrangements with the Territory Government belied a longer-term strategy.

Following its election in November 2007, the incoming Rudd Labor Government made good on its promise to review the NTER. While the Review Team commented on the poor understanding about the leases experienced by Aboriginal people (Yu, Duncan & Gray 2008) it made no recommendations with respect to the future of the leases beyond calling for just compensation to landowners. The incoming Rudd Government subsequently made no change in the Commonwealth's position over leasing and continued a policy position of securing government financial investments in Aboriginal infrastructure through leases (Macklin 2008a). Thus while the Howard Government had compulsorily acquired Northern Territory Aboriginal townships for a five-year term, the Rudd Government maintained that it was necessary to both keep and extend these leases. It would do so, however, in consultation with Aboriginal people.

In June 2008 the Senate passed the Indigenous Affairs Legislation Bill 2008. This enacted further amendments to the ALRA by providing flexibility over the period within which head leases could be negotiated with Aboriginal landowners. Instead of the 99 years set under the Howard Government's previous legislation, leases could be as short as 40 years for a housing lease or 80 years for a whole of township lease. In making this change the Commonwealth hoped that greater flexibility in leasing period would be more acceptable to Traditional Owners (Macklin 2008a). The passage of the amendment followed the commitment of \$547 million for Indigenous housing in the Northern Territory bringing the total over four years to \$813 million (Macklin 2008b).

The Rudd Government's position on leasing was reflected in its ten-year, \$4.78 billion National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing signed between the Commonwealth, States and Territories in November 2008. This stipulated that funding is conditional on the,

‘... progressive resolution of land tenure on remote community-titled land in order to secure government and commercial investment, economic development opportunities and home ownership possibilities in economically sustainable communities’ (COAG 2008 p.5).

In 2009 the leases took on additional weight. At this time the Commonwealth linked leasehold to commitments made under the 2009 Remote Services Agreement between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. Under this Agreement, the Commonwealth had allocated \$291.2 million to develop 26 remote Aboriginal townships Australia-wide as regional service hubs and residential centres. Hermannsburg was one of the 14 towns designated in the Northern Territory. The development of these regional service hubs was a central plank under its *Closing the Gap* policy (COAG 2009c p.5). The release of additional services and housing funding linked to the Agreement, however, was conditional on Traditional Owners agreeing to either a 40-year housing lease or 80-year whole of community/township lease (Central Land Council 2010a).

In the case of Hermannsburg, the Commonwealth promised payments of \$2 million for the community and Traditional Owners in addition to funding for 26 new houses (Central Land Council 2009 p.3). In addition, Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin had promised Hermannsburg and Yuendumu communities extra funding for education and health once they signed a 40-year housing lease (ABC 2009; Central Land Council 2009). By late 2008, however progress on the Hermannsburg lease appeared to have stalled. Six months later, in May 2009, Western Arrente Traditional Owners had still not consented to a head lease

although progress was slowly being made elsewhere.⁷⁰

The incoming Rudd Government's position on leases therefore reflect a move away from the rhetoric of the Howard Government that township leases were a short-term measure to stabilise Aboriginal towns in the midst of a crisis. Further, Commonwealth policy now also reflected a narrower targeting of government funding, refocusing from the 64 settlements prescribed under the NTER to 16 of the largest Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory. These settlements would receive government investments in new housing together with funds to develop as service hubs on the condition that either housing or whole of community leases were signed.

As a designated growth town, Hermannsburg stood to benefit from new housing, an expansion of services and new government infrastructure as well as payments to Traditional Owners for the lease. Western Arrernte people, however, remained unconvinced. By mid 2009, negotiations on the leases remained unresolved and it was not until mid 2010 that the Central Land Council was able to confirm community and Traditional Owner agreement to forty-year housing leases over properties in Hermannsburg (Central Land Council 2010b).

⁷⁰ The first four communities to signed head leases under the new arrangements at the end of 2008. These were Tennant Creek, Nguiu, Groote Eylandt and Bickerton. By April 2009 Gunbalanya, Wadeye, Galiwinku and Maningrida had agreed to 40-year housing leases ((Central Land Council 2009)).

Appendix 2: Chronology of NTER events

Date	Event
April 2007	
Mon 30	Rex Wild and Pat Anderson, Co-Chairs of the enquiry into child abuse in the NT, submit their report, “ <i>Little Children are Sacred</i> ”, to the NT Government. The authors called for urgent action through a genuine process of consultation with Aboriginal people to deal with the problem of child abuse and neglect and the social conditions that underpin these problems.
May 2007	
Tues 8	Minister Brough issues press release announcing reform of Indigenous housing arrangements. Reforms include replacing CHIP by new ARIA program; 2007/08 funding for Indigenous housing increased by \$293.6 million in addition to existing funding of \$380 million; assistance for home ownership; and requirements linking Federal funding for housing construction and upgrades to Indigenous owners transferring ownership to state/territory housing authorities.
June 2007	
Thurs 21	Emergency is first proclaimed in the NT and a broad range of measures proposed as the means of stabilising and protecting communities. These included: Widespread alcohol restrictions on Aboriginal land Quarantining of 50% of all Centrelink and CDEP payments in prescribed communities for a period of 12 months to stem the flow of cash going

Date	Event
	toward substance abuse, and to ensure family income would be used for children's welfare.
	Enforcing school attendance by linking income support and family assistance payments to school attendance for all people living on Aboriginal land and providing meals for children at school at parents' cost
	Introducing compulsory health checks for all Aboriginal children to identify and treat health problems and any effects of abuse
	Acquiring townships prescribed by the Australian Government through five year leases including payment of just terms compensation
	Increasing policing levels in prescribed communities,
	On ground clean up and repair of communities by work-for-the-dole participants
	Improving housing and reforming community living arrangements in prescribed communities including the introduction of market based rents and normal tenancy arrangements
	Banning the possession of X-rated pornography and introducing audits of all publicly funded computers to identify illegal material
	Scrapping the permit system for common areas, road corridors and airstrips for prescribed communities on Aboriginal land, and;
	Improving governance by appointing managers of all government business in prescribed communities
	The establishment of a Task Force to oversee the Emergency
Tues 26	Minister announces that small survey teams will commence community

Date	Event
	engagement and area surveys in a number of communities across the southern half of the NT. Teams deployed to Central Desert communities of Areyonga and Haasts Bluff include military and medical personnel.
	CDEP manager at Tjuwanpa informed by phone that the 2007-08 CDEP contract verbally negotiated is to be replaced by a new three-month contract with new conditions. Tjuwanpa is given three days to have the committee approve and sign the contract.
Wed 27	NT DLGHS emails advice of consultative meeting on the local government reforms. Requests CEO and Indigenous representation.
Thurs 28	Tjuwanpa holds community meeting to brief leaders on the Intervention and approve revised CDEP contract.
Sat 30	First meeting of the Emergency Task Force agrees that there will be lifting of Centrelink's remote area exemption to pave the way for the introduction of mutual obligation requirements to those on Centrelink benefits.
July 2007	
Mon 2	First NT DLGHS local government reform consultative meeting Day 1: Alice Springs
Wed 4	NTER Task Force brief: Government survey team, army personnel and medical staff hold community meeting in Hermannsburg to brief residents on the NTER. Approximately 20 Indigenous community members present in addition to government services staff.
Mon 9	NT MP Anderson and Labor opposition MP Macklin call a meeting of women in Hermannsburg. Women request a refuge be established.
Tues 10	Medical team begins children's health checks in Hermannsburg.

Date	Event
Wed 11- Thurs 12	Two staff from the Independent Crime Commission visit Hermannsburg and Tjuwanpa to conduct investigations into corruption and child abuse in Indigenous communities.
Frid 13	Call to Tjuwanpa from FACSIA to inform the Resource Centre that 2007-08 funding for essential services is only to be released for an interim 3-month period pending further instructions from the Commonwealth.
Sat 14	Prime Minister announces that income management regimes (quarantining of welfare payments) will be applied to families who do not send their children to school) National Day of Action held opposing the Federal Government's intervention in the NT. Aboriginal leaders from Central Australia hold a "Land Grab" rally in Alice Springs to protest the Intervention.
Mon 23	Ministers Brough and Hockey announce that beginning September 2007, CDEP participants in the NT will be moved on to Centrelink income support with a transitional payment available to participants who meet approved criteria. This measure enabled government to apply income management procedures to some 4,000 CDEP workers in the NT with the remaining 2,000 workers transferred into 'real' jobs. Training and employment services would also be mainstreamed through Job Network Providers. CDEP providers encouraged to tender to become STEP provider or Work for the Dole sponsors. Replacement Task Force medical team arrives in Hermannsburg

Date	Event
Frid 27	DEWR briefs CDEP providers and Job Network Providers in Alice Springs on CDEP transition arrangements. Meeting informed that CDEP transition will commence rolling out in Sept 07 with CDEP program providers encouraged to tender for STEP and STEP-ERS contracts. DWER to field teams in August to help providers with transition planning.
Mon 30	DWER informs Tjuwanpa by phone of the lifting of remote area exemption for Centrelink beneficiaries. Normal requirements will apply with respect to looking for work. CLC publishes poster outlining key reforms regarding quarantining, housing, permits, leases, health checks, and alcohol and pornography restrictions. DEWR Community Job Broker placed in Hermannsburg to assist with CDEP transition and establishment of welfare to work regimes including Work for the Dole
Tues 31	DEWR requests immediate response to request for information about distances to outstations and CDEP payments. In July NT Government announces establishment of 'Housing Reform Unit' to develop new housing framework for remote communities. Notes: At this stage my journal notes show that it is unclear what the implications of the CDP transition and welfare to work requirements will mean for outstation people. The changes to be proposed under the legislation are unknown as there is no copy of the legislation available. Of concern is whether lease and permit arrangements will apply to all Aboriginal land in the NT or just to the 72 prescribed communities. It is also unclear to the NT government how housing and community assets are to be managed under the new arrangements and reforms announced

Date	Event
	by Minister Brough in May, and how these will tie in with local government reforms taking place in the NT
	August 2007
Wed 1	DEWR repeat request for information on outstations
Mon 6	Centrelink teams deployed to Areyonga and Hermannsburg to commence process of lifting the remote area exemption for Centrelink clients Details released of the government's package of legislation supporting welfare, land and other reforms in the NT. Legislation totals 512 pages NT Indigenous delegation travels to Canberra to meet Minister Brough. Minister agrees to meeting but sets time when only two delegates will have arrived. Task Force Health team visits Tjuwanpa outstations. 2nd team posted since end June
Wed 7	Legislation introduced into the House of Representatives and passed its first reading. The legislation comprised five Bills, including: The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007 supports: Alcohol restrictions Computer audits to detect prohibited pornographic material; Five year leases in 72 prescribed townships; Land tenure changes enabling town camps to become normal suburbs; The appointment of Government Business Managers in Aboriginal townships to manage and implement the emergency measures;

Date	Event
	The removal of customary laws as a mitigating factor for bail and sentencing conditions; and Better management of community stores to deliver healthier and more affordable food to Indigenous families The Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Bill 2007 supports: Welfare reform specific to the NT; Welfare reform specific to Cape York A broad welfare reform package that enables the Government to quarantine various income support payments and direct them to provide basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter for their children The Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Northern Territory National Emergency Response and Other Measures) Bill 2007: Amends existing legislation to support and complement the legislation and welfare reforms in the previous two Bills, Imposes bans on pornography and changes to the permit system. Two appropriation Bills passed, which provide for spending in excess of \$500 million in 2007-08.
Wed 15	Local government reform presentation by the NT DLGHS to Tjuwanpa community. Attended by 20 Indigenous leaders and staff.
Frid 17	The NTER package of legislation passed by the Senate including appropriations totalling \$587 million for the emergency. Intervention Task Force arrives at Papunya community to the north-west

Date	Event
	of Hermannsburg.
Mon 23	Work for the Dole commences in Hermannsburg.
Frid 24	FACSIA publishes NT Emergency Response Fact Sheet on line. Provides 33 pages on key elements of the reforms Federal government also distributes fact sheet for CDEP participants and CDEP providers in the Northern Territory through CDEP provider organisations.
Tues 28	The NT Government responds to the Little Children are Sacred Report with the passage of the Care and Protection of Children Act to strengthen the care and protection of children; and increases in policing and funding for Indigenous schools. Prime Minister Howard visits Hermannsburg community, (Ntaria) his first visit to an Aboriginal since the emergency response was announced
Wed 29	DWER and Centrelink brief 50-60 Indigenous residents at a community meeting at Tjuwanpa on CDEP transition and welfare to work requirements. Also briefs Tjuwanpa management on requirements for the CDEP transition including: Need to have separation certificates ready for all CDEP participants Requirement that all CDEP participants take leave entitlements prior to transition Need for Tjuwanpa to seek independent business advice on its future Recommendation that Tjuwanpa tender for STEP-ERS panel Indigenous Business Australia formally notifies Tjuwanpa that CDEP will be transitioned and that IBA will be available to assist organisations

Date**Event**

transition to viable businesses.

Comments. DLGHS are unclear as to how services will be provided to remote outstations under the new arrangements. They have assumed that outstations will still be able to receive federal government funds for essential services and that these will be provided by existing Resource Centres. However with the loss of CDEP funding mid 2008 Tjuwanpa faced closure due to the loss of required administrative overheads. By the end of the month Tjuwanpa had still not been advised by DEWR of the date at which time the CDEP transition would take place. Queries to the JNP regarding whether Work for the Dole could be implemented on outstations and also about insurance arrangements on outstations remained unanswered. There was also no information available on service jobs that government has promised to fund.

September 2007

Mon 3	CDEP transition, new welfare to work requirements and income management arrangements rolled out in Central Australian communities of Titjikala, Finke, Imampa and Wallace Rockhole.
Wed 5	DEWR conducts workshop in Alice Springs to discuss federal government employment and training programs available to the region.
Frid 10	STEP tender announced with closing date of October 10.
Mon 10	Federal government issues fact sheet and new alcohol bans introduced in the NT.
Tues 11	Tjuwanpa notified by DWER late afternoon of a meeting for WfD participants in Hermannsburg on Wed 12.
	Tjuwanpa receives copy of CLC Fact Sheets

Date	Event
Wed 12	DEWR meeting in Hermannsburg to inform participants of their requirements. Over 30 participants in breach of obligations in the first two weeks of the program. Nine of 38 participants attend the meeting.
Thurs 13	Tjuwanpa receives email containing 13 page CLC Fact Sheets on the Federal Government Intervention in the NT.
Thurs 13 and Frid 14	DLGHS local government reform consultation and planning meetings for McDonald Shire.
	Tjuwanpa informally advised at the meeting that CDEP transition preparations will begin the first week of October in Tjuwanpa, Hermannsburg, Areyonga, Wallace Rockhole and Santa Theresa.
Mon 17	DEWR advises Tjuwanpa of STEP tender.
Tues 18	Brough announces \$514 million in funding for Aboriginal housing in the NT. Under the terms of the agreement, the NT Government will take responsibility for the delivery of municipal and infrastructure services to all towns and communities in the Northern Territory, including outstations and town camps.
	NT Government announces \$20 million p.a. funding limit to outstations over the next four years.
Wed 19	Tjuwanpa holds meeting with key male leaders to present and discuss the reforms under the Intervention. Seven attend
Thurs 20	Tjuwanpa holds meeting with key female leaders to present and discuss the reforms under the Intervention. Four attend
Frid 21	Centrelink distributes 4 page fact sheet on income management
Mon 24	DEWR provides first formal written advice to CDEP providers in the Northern Territory of the transition from CDEP to Centrelink and the

Date	Event
	steps required in undertaking the transition. This does not specify dates at which time CDEP would cease in specific communities. DEWR announces tender for STEP-ERS panel and encourages CDEP provider organisations to tender for services. DEWR emails NT CDEP transition payment fact sheet to CDEP provider organisations. Labour's Indigenous Affairs spokesperson releases a proposal for retaining and strengthening CDEP in the NT.
Tues 25	CDEP providers in the NT meet to discuss the future of CDEP. Galarrwuy Yunupingu signs MOU with the Commonwealth Government for a 99-year head lease on Gumatj clan land to be held by the Gumatj Corporation.
Wed 26	DWER phones Tjuwanpa to advise that Centrelink will arrive October 1 to commence interviews with Tjuwanpa CDEP participants and require that Tjuwanpa inform all participants FACSIA team visit Tjuwanpa office to discuss job opportunities to be funded from federal government funds for Centrelink, Essential Services and Rangers programs
Thurs 27	Resource Centre Manager holds discussions with DWER regarding estimates of the number CDEP positions required to run Centrelink, housing, essential services and Rangers group programs in Tjuwanpa area.
Dates unclear	Contractor teams arrive in Hermannsburg to commence rapid fix of housing stock.

Date**Event**

Comments: Although Tjuwanpa had been informed that Centrelink teams would be visiting the area and that Tjuwanpa would be part of the second group of communities that would commence the CDEP transition and welfare to work arrangements, the Resource Centre was unable to obtain information about a date despite repeated requests to DWER for this information. Details were also unavailable about how income management would proceed and no contact had been made with the stores in Hermannsburg regarding this. Work for the Dole arrangements also remained unclear with DWER verbally indicating its expectation that CDEP providers would take on this role. Also unknown at this time was what arrangements were to be made for the management of Aboriginal housing and how IBA would manage its proposed takeover of CDEP assets held by CDEP providers.

October 2007

- | | |
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| Mon 1 | Tjuwanpa advised by fax that Task Force, DEWR and Centrelink representatives would be holding a meeting with community representatives to discuss welfare to work requirements on Wed Oct 3. |
| | Four communities of Finke, Imampa, Wallace Rockhole and Tjitkala transition to Centrelink and income management arrangements. |
| Tues 2 | Tjuwanpa receives letter dated 25 Sept, 2007 to advise that Tjuwanpa will be included as part of the second group of communities to transition from CDEP to Centrelink |
| Wed 3 | NTER Task Force, DEWR and Centrelink representatives meet with Tjuwanpa outstation leaders and community representatives to discuss welfare to work requirements. 60 -70 residents attend |
| | Hermannsburg stores receive advice from government consultants on |

Date	Event
	requirements for income management.
Mon 8	Centrelink Job Capacity Assessment teams interview Tjuwanpa CDEP participants, commence Centrelink registration and lift the remote area exemption for existing clients. New Job Network Provider team of two arrives to commence interviewing CDEP transition participants.
Thurs 11	Tjuwanpa receives email advice from IBA requesting meeting on Oct 23. Resource agency asked to prepare and submit a range of financial, planning and business papers.
Frid 12	Tjuwanpa advised by the Community Work Coordinator that Work for the Dole cannot be implemented on outstations and that provision will need to be made to have participants travel to work at the Resource Centre. Tjuwanpa advised by the Task Force Deputy Commander that Work for the Dole guidelines for outstations had not yet been decided.
Mon 15	Centrelink Job Capacity Assessment teams return to interview Tjuwanpa CDEP participants, commence Centrelink registration and lift the remote area exemption for existing clients. Tjuwanpa offered four full time additional essential services positions, effective 19 Oct, to be funded under 07/08 FACSIA funding. FACSIA requests names of candidates by COB Tues 16th. Tjuwanpa management meets with DEWR to continue negotiations on future employment and transition arrangements with in-principle agreement for 2.5-3 Centrelink positions, eight Caring for our Country Ranger positions and additional administrative staff. Tjuwanpa submits brief to DEWR on issues associated with Work for the

Date	Event
	Dole implementation under current policy and program arrangements.
Tues 16	Tjuwanpa phone contact with DLGHS. Dept advises that federal funding for municipal services will be directed to the NT government. How funding will be managed for outstations not under five year lease agreements remains unknown.
Wed 17	Tjuwanpa holds community meeting to discuss Intervention measures and future service delivery arrangements. Centrelink staff brief the meeting on welfare to work requirements. CDEP participant list posted on Resource Centre notice board shows that of 170 CDEP participants approximately 80 have yet to be interviewed by Centrelink and Job Network teams.
Mon 22	Tjuwanpa offered an additional 30 hours per week for Centrelink staff in addition to the 15 hours currently paid.
Mon 22 and Tues 23	DLGHS local government reform consultation and planning meetings for McDonald Shire.
	Tjuwanpa receives DEWR letter dated 17 Oct stating that CDEP will stop on October 26 th .
Mon 29	Tjuwanpa begins transition to new <i>Welfare to Work</i> arrangements. Centrelink team interviews clients in the Tjuwanpa area to agree on income management arrangements
	Comments: Verbal discussions with DEWR had indicated that the CDEP transition date for the second group of areas would take place 19th October. Tjuwanpa informed verbally on Monday 15 th that this was to be delayed with dates on the transition yet to be confirmed.

November 2007

Date	Event
Thurs 1	IBA meeting at Tjuwanpa office to advise that all CDEP assets are to be identified and transferred to a government trust. Tjuwanpa advised to seek IBA funded advice regarding establishing itself as a business. Option to lease back equipment. DEWR informs Tjuwanpa that separation certificates for CDEP participants must be completed by COB Tues 6th for 165 CDEP participants. These are required by Centrelink in order to process income payments due to be paid on Nov 12th.
Mon 5	Centrelink team interviews clients in the Tjuwanpa area to register income management arrangements. Centrelink workers indicate verbally considerable numbers of CDEP participants are yet to register with Centrelink or Job Network providers and most yet to register income management details.
Tues 6	New JNP makes second visit to Tjuwanpa.
Thurs 8	Local Centrelink staff raise concerns at Tjuwanpa regarding significant issues with registration and processing of new Centrelink clients from CDEP and with registering income management arrangement details.
Mon 12	First Centrelink payment scheduled for CDEP transition participants. Income management commences in Tjuwanpa and Hermannsburg. Centrelink team returns for three days to finalise registration of clients and income management arrangements.
Wed 28	New Labour government announces it will make a formal apology to Indigenous people. Indigenous Task Force suspends the winding up of CDEP in remote NT communities.

Date	Event
Thurs 29	NT Government passes significant changes to child protection laws including the appointment of a Children's Commissioner, to oversee and scrutinise the child protection system.
	December 2007
	Informal report from Tjuwanpa staff that most Rangers have not yet received Centrelink payment.
Mon 3	New Labour Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin sworn in.
Thurs 6	ABC on-line reports residents in Hermannsburg see a reduction in alcohol use and gambling in the community since the Intervention began
Fri 7	Six young people from outstation and Hermannsburg families killed in a car crash after failure to stop at a police road check.
Mon 10th	Minister announces a moratorium on the further closure of CDEP programs in the Northern Territory.
Frid14	FACSIA website update report.
	5,639 child health checks completed in 48 communities.
	8 child health check teams currently deployed
	40 additional police currently
	38 Government Business Managers in place servicing 61 communities.
	16 Community Employment Brokers in place servicing 30 communities.
	Income Management in place in 22 places including communities, associated outstations and one town camp.
	46 Work for the Dole activities commenced in 29 communities and 5

Date	Event
	town camp regions.
	Remote Area Exemptions have been lifted in all 73 prescribed communities.
	18 community stores have been licensed.
	Survey teams have visited all of the 73 prescribed communities in the NT
Sat 15 Dec	Prime Minister and Indigenous Affairs Minister meet with Indigenous NT leaders. Minister promises more consultation with Indigenous leaders and an evidence-based approach to decisions on the future of measures introduced under the NT Intervention.
Mon 17 Dec	Centrelink reports (ABC on-line) favourable response to income management arrangements from Aboriginal women and community stores.
Dec 24	Media reports Papunya residents confused about welfare reforms.
January 2008	
Mon 7	Income management begins in Alice Springs town camps and Ingerrika outstations.
Tues 15	Minister Macklin announces National Indigenous Council to be disbanded.
Wed 16	Minister Macklin announces \$64.6 million for Indigenous housing in the NT in addition to the \$22.9 million CHIP funding already committed.
Thurs 17	Macklin holds first meeting with Intervention Task Force.
Frid 25	Tjuwanpa informed that the NT Government, through the Department of Chief Minister would be taking over responsibility for outstation areas.

Date	Event
February 2008	
Tues 12	2,000 Indigenous people at the Aboriginal tent embassy protest the Intervention.
Wed 13	Australia's new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologizes to Indigenous Australians on behalf of the government for policies of forced removal of children and calls for a bi-partisan approach to Indigenous affairs.
Thurs 14	NT Government promises 200 more teachers for NT Indigenous schools.
Sun 17	New Labor Government announces it will not proceed with lifting of the permit system for major roads and Indigenous communities in the NT.
Mon 18	\$50 million committed to reduce Indigenous alcohol abuse.
Thurs 21	Bill introduced into parliament to reinstate the permit system for travel to communities. Also provides for licensing of community roadhouses as community stores and further restricts broadcasting of pornography.
March 2008	
Tuesday 18	Australian Senate establishes a Select Committee to monitor the Intervention.
April 2008	
Wed 30	Minister announces that CDEP will be reinstated as an interim measure for up to 12 months in 30 prescribed communities where the program was closed down in 2007. CDEP transition wages will continue beyond June 30, 2008 on the condition of no work no pay.
May 2008	
Tues 13	As part of budget provisions, Minister announces that Work for the Dole

Date	Event
	will be scrapped.
Sun 18	Discussion paper released on the future of CDEP with consultations on the future of CDEP scheduled for early June nationwide.
Wed 21	Tjuwanpa notified to apply for 140 CDEP positions and to have submission into government by Monday 26 May.
Mon 26	Tjuwanpa submits application for interim CDEP program for 140 participants.
June 2008	
Tues 3	Hermannsburg consultations on the future of CDEP. Participants are predominantly Hermannsburg Council workers, clinic staff and Tjuwanpa staff and Rangers.
Fri 20	NT school trials announced with the aim of boosting school enrolment and school attendance by linking non-attendance to suspension of Centrelink payments. Hermannsburg, Katherine, Katherine town camps, Wallace Rockhole, Wadeye and Tiwi Islands to be involved in the pilot.
Sat 21	Anniversary of the Intervention. Task Force report to the Minister on their review of the Intervention.
Mon 30	FAHSCIA provides Tjuwanpa with verbal advice of approval to fund essential services for a further 12-month period.

Appendix 3: History of the homelands movement

A3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides background on the Western Arrernte homelands movement, situating it in national Indigenous policy arrangements emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the politics of the Hermannsburg Mission settlement during that time. A brief overview of the definition of outstations is first provided so that the term can be conceptualised. This is followed by a short outline of the ontology of place or country as it pertains to Australia's Aboriginal peoples. This helps to ground an understanding of the importance of place in the Western Arrernte homelands movement.

A3.2 Outstation and homelands: Some definitions

Permanent settlement areas on traditional Aboriginal lands away from the main townships and urban areas are commonly known as homelands or outstations. The term outstation appears to have been first coined in the 1960s to describe service delivery to small settlements around Elcho Island. There was some criticism of this view, which represented outstations as affiliated with a central hub when Aboriginal perceptions consider them as settlements in their own right (Coombs 1978 p.150). In 1986, seeking to develop a policy for small, remote settlements, the Commonwealth Government distinguished between outstations and homelands, describing outstations as,

‘Small decentralised communities of close kin, established by the movement of Aboriginal people to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them’, and homelands as, ‘The traditional country of Aboriginal people.’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1987

p.4)

In more recent discussions, Altman uses the term outstations to refer to both the place and the people associated with it. As **‘the place’**, ‘They are locales where small groups of generally related people live on land to which they have statutory ownership and/or descent-based affiliations (2006 p.4).’ As **‘the people’**, outstations represent, ‘distinct Indigenous social groupings. People belonging to the group may not necessarily reside on the outstation but have rights and obligations with respect to the land. In Central Australia, Western Arrernte clans use the term outstation to describe the settlement area and the ancestral land surrounding the settlement, but also include the people associated with this land.

Outstations are also distinguished from small Aboriginal communities, settlements or townships by population size. Most outstation populations vary considerably over time, but are usually considered to be those settlements having discrete infrastructure and a population of less than 50.

A3.3 Connection to country

The homelands movement is underpinned by unique and complex Aboriginal relationships to land. Stanner describes the difficulty of trying to describe this relationship in the context of non-Aboriginal concepts of home and land.

‘No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word home, warm and suggestive as it is does not match the Aboriginal word which may mean camp, hearth, country, everlasting home, totem place, life source, spirit centre and much else all in one. Our word land is too spare and meagre. We can scarcely use it except with economic overtones unless we happen to be poets... To put our words ‘home’ and ‘land’ together in to homeland is a little better but not much. A different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance. When we took what we call ‘land’ we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and focus of life and

everlastingness of spirit' (Stanner 1969 p.44).

Aboriginal relationships to land need to be understood in the context of *tjukurpa*⁷¹ or as used in Western Arrernte language, *altyerra* – the process of creation, contained in a vast body of knowledge that is expressed and maintained through stories. These 'Dreaming' stories recount and lay down the relationship between Aboriginal people, and between people and their spirits. The Dreaming creates behavioural codes that set down people's social, cultural and spiritual responsibilities. Taking care of country is a fundamental aspect of *altyerra*, and implies responsibilities as well as a relationship to the land of one's ancestors. Looking after country and maintaining links to the land is an imperative. Davidson describes the intricacies of the Dreaming.

'One could say that the Dreaming is a spiritual realm which saturates the visible world with meaning; that it is the matrix of being; that it was the time of creation; that it is a parallel universe which may be contacted via the ritual performance of song, dance and painting; that it is a network of stories of heroes – the forerunners and creators of contemporary man' (Davidson 2006 p.14).

The land reflects the traces of ancestral creation beings; their stories and power etched into the earth at sacred sites through which their spirits rest. Their continuation is assured through Aboriginal children's connection to the place through totemic associations linked to patrilineal descent and association to place where conception is determined to have occurred. Rites of ceremony allow ancestral spirits ongoing presence, enabling them to re-emerge or pass through.

Heaven and earth are embedded together, on the same plane. A country is

⁷¹ There are numerous words for *Tjukurpa*, which is the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara term and most commonly used in non-Aboriginal usage of the term. In Arrernte the terms *Altjerre*, *Alchira* or *Alcheringa* can be used with Western Arrernte using the term *Altyerra*.

saturated in consciousness. It recognises and responds to people. It depends on people. Just as a people torn from their country are lost in non-meaning, without its people country is “orphaned” and in peril. When the web of the Dreaming is torn, the consequences for land and life are dire.

‘In other words, there is no distinction between the material and the spiritual, so ancestor, story, place, painting, ritual object, song and singer are all, in essence, the same thing. Dreaming tracks (or stories or songs) lace the whole of the continent. Australia itself is a narrative’ (Stanner 1969 p.15).

These powerful ancestral spirits thus continue through the past, present and future represented by place and brought forth through people’s ongoing knowledge in association with country. In this way, people and country are part of the same spirit.

A3.4 Brief history of the homelands movement in the Northern Territory

The movement of Aboriginal people into permanent settlements in the Northern Territory began with the establishment and expansion of pastoral leases in latter part of the 1800s. Diminishing access to traditional hunting areas and water sources, and the establishment of mission settlements and government ration stations, provided the conditions under which colonial administrators could contain the Aboriginal population outside of urban areas (Rowse 1998). Availability of food and water, particularly during a series of droughts in the early 1900s, saw an exodus of people away from their traditional lands to permanent settlements; a movement that continued until the late 1960s. Containment of Aboriginal people in permanent settlements suited government assimilation policy. The relegation of the Aboriginal population to fixed areas was necessary for the training and development of Aboriginal people that would enable them to fit with mainstream Australian values and lifestyles. Further, it enabled governments to control the presence of Aboriginal populations in urban areas such

as Alice Springs (Henson 1994; Rowse 1998). The Commonwealth's decision to mandate payment of award wages to Aboriginal workers in the late 1960s, together with the increasing use of technologies, reduced labour demand on pastoral leases – the main source of work for Aboriginal men and their families. These measures forced many Aboriginal stockmen into towns and settlements.

Despite government and mission efforts to contain Aboriginal people in settlements, many clans had associated with their traditional country throughout the period of European contact (Pfitzner 1976; Strehlow 1968). Land had remained central to ceremony and identity and many had become uncomfortable with life in settlements and their conditions on pastoral leases.

In the 1960's and 70s a series of events had a profound influence over the conditions that underpinned Aboriginal settlement patterns, particularly in the Northern Territory (Coombs, Dexter & Hiatt 1980). In 1966 the strike by the Gurindji people at Wave Hill in support of demands for the return of their land and equal wages captured the attention of the Australian public, and eventually its politicians and policy makers. Mining interests in remote Australia and its threats to traditional land and sacred sites also influenced Aboriginal decisions to push for a return to country. In 1963 the Yirrkala people in Arnhem Land, fearing the loss of land to the Nabalco bauxite-mining lease, sent a bark petition to Canberra, eventually commencing legal action in 1968. This challenged the legality of the leases and statutes under which they were granted, and sought recognition of their rights to the land. Although the Yirrkala challenge was not upheld, the court's ruling led the Labor opposition to promise that if elected, they would enact legislation that would ensure Aboriginal communal freehold title in the Northern Territory where the federal government held legislative control over land interests.

Increasing public pressure for the recognition of Aboriginal rights led the Commonwealth to establish the 1972 Woodward Inquiry. The Inquiry examined the legal establishment of Aboriginal land rights and recommended government financial support for the creation of reserves and incorporated Aboriginal Land Trusts. This would enable the return of Aboriginal lands to Traditional Owners with title held by the Land Trust, with Aboriginal Land Councils established to

facilitate linkages between Traditional Owners and external interests. This gave impetus to pressure on the Commonwealth from the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, which had already offered financial assistance in support of the establishment of homelands. By 1974 this had resulted in the provision of establishment grants of up to \$10,000 for clans wishing to establish basic facilities on traditional lands (Coombs, Dexter & Hiatt 1980).

In 1974, under the incoming Labor Government, Indigenous policy shifted away from assimilation to one of self-determination. This changed the role of government superintendents administering Aboriginal communities to an advisory role, with Aboriginal mobility and domicile no longer restricted to government or mission settlements. The new Australian Government also attempted to make good its land rights promise to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, but this was not realised until two years later when the incoming Liberal Coalition Government passed the Aboriginal Lands Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (ALRA). This Act provided the means through which Aboriginal clans could claim title to reserve lands and also vested rights to claims for mission lands in the Central Desert areas of Hermannsburg and Santa Theresa.

The ability of Aboriginal people to take advantage of the new law and the Commonwealth's financial incentives to establish homelands was facilitated by changes to social security arrangements. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, in-kind welfare payments were replaced with cash transfers, allowing welfare recipients greater financial autonomy. Coupled with the freedom to move away from government controlled Aboriginal townships, Aboriginal people were able to exercise some choice over where they could live. Conversely, the availability of cash coupled with the lifting of alcohol restrictions in Aboriginal communities in 1964, exacerbated social tensions in Aboriginal settlements (Coombs, Dexter & Hiatt 1980). Together with the emergence of petrol sniffing in the 1960s, these factors contributed to the conditions underpinning the resolve of some families to leave the settlements.

By the time the Commonwealth House of Representatives Standing Committee had tabled its report on outstations in 1987, some 588 homelands and 111 excision

communities had been established, most located on lands surrounding small Aboriginal townships in remote and very remote Australia (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1987 p.xvi). The Committee strongly endorsed ongoing and expanded support for the outstation movement. This enabled the expansion of the 1978 pilot Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) – established as a waged alternative to Indigenous welfare payments in selected areas, to outstation communities. The Committee's decisions also led to increased federal government funding of housing and water infrastructure to homelands.

In 2006, the Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) estimated the total number of small settlements in remote and very remote areas throughout Australia, (having a population of less than 50) to be 848, with 60 percent of these located in the Northern Territory (ABS 2007 p.56). Figures from a 2007 FAHSCIA audit showed that many of these were in the Northern Territory. The audit identified that over 400 outstations were permanently occupied with 130 not being used as a principle place of residence (NTG 2008). Quoting 2006 census figures, the same report estimated the reported Aboriginal population of settlements of less than 100 people (most of which are outstations) as 9,951.

A3.5 The experiment with self-governance in Hermannsburg

Throughout the history of the Hermannsburg Mission, Western Arrernte families had maintained contact with their lands, often leaving the Mission to supplement rations through hunting or leaving the settlement to camp on their grandfather's country and in this way, clandestinely maintained adherence to traditional spiritual life (Pfitzner 1976). In the 1940s – well before the Hermannsburg outstation movement began – the Finke River Mission supported semi-permanent settlements on tracts of land on the Mission lease (Downing 1988; Henson 1994). Aiming to bolster local economic opportunities and provide food for the settlement, the Mission provided loans to experienced Aboriginal stockman to establish cattle runs on three outstations on the Mission lease and sought funding for bores to

establish permanent water supplies. Although the loans were repaid, interest in the cattle ventures eventually waned although later, as the Hermannsburg outstation movement gained momentum, other families also made attempts to establish cattle runs on outstations (Sommerlad 1973b; Wiebusch 1989).

The impetus for the establishment of more permanent outstation settlements emerged in part out of early efforts by the Hermannsburg Mission's Senior Field Superintendent, Paul Albrecht, to encourage greater Aboriginal involvement in the running of the Hermannsburg settlement (Albrecht 2002; Downing 1988). Albrecht had grown up in Hermannsburg as the son of Friedrich Albrecht, the Lutheran Minister who had administered the Mission from 1926 to 1952. Under his son's tenure as the Lutheran Field Superintendent, three representative councils were established. The first of these councils – the Village Council, was established in 1963. Members were nominated by the community and were responsible for maintaining law and order in the Mission settlement and bringing offenders to court hearings held at Hermannsburg by visiting magistrates (Downing 1971). In 1969, a School Council was established to increase Aboriginal involvement in the school and thereby increase enrolment and retention rates. Its members liaised with families in relation to school attendance, assisted with staffing matters and provided support for the development of school facilities. With the encouragement of one of the local Aboriginal teaching staff, the council drew its members from family groups in the community (Sommerlad 1973c; Ungwanaka 1971).

By the late 1960s, the School Council was already showing some promise in terms of the engagement of the community in school matters. Following a 12-month visit to India in 1969, where he had been strongly influenced by community development principles emerging in the developing world, Albrecht established a Town Council in 1971 (Sommerlad 1973c). Albrecht saw the Town Council as a means of engendering greater local responsibility for the management of the Mission, hoping eventually to have Aboriginal residents assume full management for the Hermannsburg settlement. As with the Village and School Councils, the Town Council also drew its eight to 10 members from local family groups. It was

tasked with controlling a wet canteen, managing 'book-up' debts at the local store, managing employment issues, and approving alcohol permits (Sommerlad 1973c).

Within two years it was evident that numerous problems had been encountered with the operations of both the School and Town Councils (Aboriginal Arts Board 1974; Coombs, Herbert C 1978; Downing 1988; Sommerlad 1973b). By 1973 the Village Council had been defunct for three years; few children were attending school; vandals had damaged buildings, and violence in the community associated with alcohol was increasing. Funds for community services and programs were being diverted for individual family benefit and some families were beginning to disengage from community events. Hermannsburg's experiment in self-determination appeared to have been a massive failure.

Albrecht subsequently commissioned a review of the Mission's experience in establishing its community governance structures (Sommerlad 1973a). The review found that despite the Mission's intent to create an environment in which Aboriginal residents could determine and manage their own priorities, authority remained vested in non-Aboriginal Mission staff. In addition, there was evidence that program and service priorities were driven by the Mission in response to their perception of need with the result that Aboriginal interest in these initiatives quickly waned. Further, the review identified that the assumption underpinning the establishment of the Councils – that members would act in the interests of the settlement and that their decisions would be binding on all residents – was flawed.

The key issue related to how decision making and authority had been handled (Coombs 1978; Downing 1988). Council responsibilities to manage law and order issues impinged on the tradition of keeping family affairs private. It was considered shameful to discuss family matters in a public setting where other families were present. As many of the matters before the Council concerned the behaviours or actions of individuals who were not kin affiliates, Council members were seen as having no authority over those who were not kin affiliates. Further, those nominated as members of the Council by clans were affiliated only by marriage. They subsequently lacked position and authority within the Western Arrernte social order and were nominated precisely because they lacked authority

to act (Downing 1988). This effectively maintained the status quo, as matters relating to family remained within the family domain, ensuring that traditional leadership remained intact.

The assumption that the Councils would assume responsibility for decisions affecting the whole community, when Aboriginal authority and responsibility structures related to the clan, created further problems with adherence to Council decisions. It also affected the communication of information about decisions made by the Council within the broader community (Coombs 1978). The rationale behind the establishment of the Council structure was also poorly understood in the broader community. Some families saw the changes as an attempt by the mission to abandon them so they subsequently failed to support the initiatives.

At the same time, nominated Council members owed allegiance not to the community but to their family or clan group. They subsequently used their position to favour their respective clan affiliates in matters of employment or access to government and Mission resources. Increasingly hiring and firing became problematic. Kinship obligations took precedence over employment systems and work obligations. The subsequent failure of the Council members to deal with community peace and safety issues; their abuse of power, and their hand in the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities within the wider community led to increasing community dissatisfaction about the operations of the Councils. One writer noted that despite the best efforts of the Mission to establish local governance in Hermannsburg, the imposition of external structures had, ‘... cut right across their authority and discipline and led to power struggles and selfish exploitation by their own people’ (Downing 1976 p.7).

Both Albrecht and Sommerlad – the researcher hired in 1973 to conduct the review, believed that the gradual devolution of authority to the Aboriginal people of Hermannsburg had not worked (Albrecht 1994; Sommerlad 1973b). What was required was a return of local authority. They held the view that this could only be achieved through recognising traditional Western Arrernte authority structures. Mission authorities subsequently sought the return of the land covered by the Hermannsburg Mission lease to the main clan groups. They maintained that only

through such a move could clan authority be recognised and restored.

In 1974, on the advice of the head teacher Rex Ziersch and with Albrecht's support, Mission staff began to engage with community elders with the aim of identifying the traditional authorities and kinship structures in the settlement. The Mission believed that social order could be restored if this authority could be reinstated (Coombs 1978; Downing 1988). Staff found 22 clan groups linked to five common patrilineal descent groups, which varied in size from about 70 to 200 people. Each group had its own independent authority structures, with the head of each clan group exercising considerable authority and responsibility with respect to the clan's affairs.

Although these findings led to the Lutheran Mission seeing a return to country as the answer to issues of authority, some Western Arrernte families in Hermannsburg had been calling for a return to country for some time. Indeed while there was growing agitation within the Hermannsburg community for a greater say in decision-making, Downing (1976) reported that he had been hearing pleas from Aboriginal families for many years for a return to their homelands. Sommerlad (1973a) also reported in her review that several family groups intended to move out of the mission so that they could re-establish family units. Western Arrernte people felt that settlement life had not only undermined traditional authority but also diminished their relationship to their homelands.

In later writings on the outstation movement, Downing attributed the outstation movement in Hermannsburg to the process of the Mission's discussions with families in relation to the failure of the Councils. These discussions created the, '... stimulus of that questioning, which had caused the people to verbalise who they were and how they related to their land' (1988 p.70). Other factors included good rains, which ensured plentiful water supplies away from the settlement; the expectation that Aboriginal people would get a better deal under the new federal Labor government; the increasing social tensions in Hermannsburg resulting from government removal of alcohol bans in Aboriginal communities; and news filtering through about other Aboriginal groups who were calling for self-determination.

A3.6 The Tjuwanpa outstation Movement

By the end of 1974, twenty families had moved out of the Hermannsburg mission to settle on their traditional lands (Downing 1988). At the time the Aboriginal Lands Rights (Northern Territory) Act was promulgated in 1976, the outstation movement in the Tjuwanpa area was already well underway. 1979 figures show that approximately 500 of the 650 people estimated to have been living in Hermannsburg in the early 1970s had relocated to outstations away from the town (Albrecht 2002; Stoll, Ziersch & Schmaal 1979). This occurred despite the availability in Hermannsburg of substantial employment opportunities and services (Downing 1988). In all, over the 20 years to 1994 some 42 outstation areas were settled on the old Mission lease (Department of Health and Community Services 2001). Twenty-five were located within a 30 minute distance from Hermannsburg with only five outstations requiring travel of more than an hour.

Albrecht's promise to return Mission land to its Aboriginal people was realised in June 1982 when the Special Purpose Lease held by the Finke River Mission was converted to freehold title under the Lands Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976. This established the five Aboriginal Land Trusts of Ntaria, Ltalatuma, Rodna, Roulpmaulpma, and Urunu. The significance of this move for the Hermannsburg outstations was not so much in the official recognition of Aboriginal title – as a number of claims had already been settled in other areas in the Northern Territory by this time – but in the negotiation process that preceded the setting of land boundaries.

Under previous claims made under the Act in the Northern Territory, grants of land were made to Aboriginal Land Trusts collectively drawn from the most important clan leaders of the area. In the case of the Mission lease, however, Western Arrernte leaders wanted the lands of each of the five descent group recognised under separate title (Lindsay 1983). Aboriginal families and mission staff worked hard to see this happen, battling with the Central Land Council and the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Fred Chaney, who were pushing for the establishment of a single Land Trust over the entirety of the old Mission lease

(Hagen 1976). The long process of Mission led consultation with families to plot sacred and ceremonial sites significantly delayed the determination of title, but once this work was completed, clear clan areas had emerged. Boundaries were tested through ongoing consultations with clan authorities using aerial maps, with Aboriginal families providing a verbal description of each boundary. These descriptions were further agreed to via discussion with neighbouring clans. As there was usually an overlap between the land of one clan and that of another, there was concern that difficulties might arise in meeting the needs of the Registrar General, but clan leaders subsequently agreed to boundary lines distinguishing areas of adjoining lands.

This work in determining the five Land Trusts provided a solid foundation against which further survey work could be completed. Most importantly, this process tapped local Aboriginal knowledge to identify clan lands and instigated processes to broker local agreements across areas of shared territory. Underpinning this was the recognition of the fundamental importance of clan affiliations in the Western Arrernte domain. Despite the clan distinctions, section or skin affiliations overlapped these boundaries so that connections and relatedness were maintained across the five Land Trust areas.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Lutheran Mission continued to play a key role in developing the outstations; supporting the provision and maintenance of water and power infrastructure, constructing one or two-room demountable tin dwellings; and assisting with the development of small gardens. Until government remote area primary schools were constructed and staffed at Ipolera, Red Sandhill and Kulpitharra in the late 1980s, eight Lutheran mission teachers were deployed to outstations where they lived alongside family groups, often teaching under trees or in tin sheds constructed as school houses (Austin-Broos 2009; Fargher 1976). This provided outstation children with an alternative to schooling in Hermannsburg and Alice Springs.

The Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre was eventually established as an incorporated Aboriginal organisation in 1984 to service the needs of the outstation population. This followed the transfer of the lease from the Mission to the Land

Trusts in 1982, but was also influenced by the Territory Government's decision at that time to establish Community Councils in Aboriginal townships. Outstation residents again feared that dominant clan interests in Hermannsburg would prevail under community, area-wide community governance arrangements, believing this would once again undermine outstation autonomy and service delivery. Separate service arrangements, institutionalised under the Outstation Resource Centre, acted to protect outstation representational arrangements and interests (Turner 1986).

At the time of Tjuwanpa's incorporation, the rules established that all outstations on the five Land Trusts were entitled to be represented on Tjuwanpa's Board of Management. These arrangements met with local Aboriginal desires for a system of governance that recognised and built on clan authority. A manager who had worked at the Mission since 1973 and spoke the Western Arrente language, was subsequently appointed by the Tjuwanpa Board of Management (Wiebusch 1989). Increased funding for Aboriginal outstations recommended in 1987 (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs) and the later establishment of specific arrangements for the funding of Aboriginal services under ATSIC, resulted in substantial funding being made available to Tjuwanpa for construction of outstation housing and provision of water and power infrastructure. By 1989 Tjuwanpa was managing a turnover of \$1.5 million a year in government grants (Wiebusch 1989).

A3.7 The outstation population today

Mobility has continued to be a feature of outstation life. Estimates in 1986 put the Tjuwanpa outstation population at 385 (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1987 p. 281-284) with reports in 1998 and 2001 showing the outstation population increasing to 400 and 570 respectively during this time (Department of Health and Community Services). While the 2006 census recorded 300 people as resident at the Tjuwanpa outstations (ABS), the numbers of people living on the outstations continues to vary considerably due to

movements between the outstations, Hermannsburg, Alice Springs and other remote areas.

Consequently enumerating the population at any one time remains problematic. Alkngarrintja outstation's population for example, had 20 to 25 people reported as living there in 1986 and 1998. Department of Health and Community Services data in 2001 show this had risen to more than 40 at that time. By 2008, estimates by staff at the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre indicate the population had dropped to four. Figures for other areas such as Old Station, show that the population has remained relatively stable with around eight to 10 people reported to be living there over the past 20 years. In 1986, Ltira had an estimated population of eight. By 2001 this had risen to 20 and was somewhere between 15 to 20 people in 2007. Throughout this time population data indicates that all but three of the outstations maintained continuous occupation.

The impetus for the homelands movement at Tjuwanpa represents a combination of Aboriginal desires that were coupled with changes in both local and national administrative arrangements for Aboriginal people. Although Aboriginal families in Hermannsburg wanted to return to their traditional country to maintain their spiritual connections to the land, families also sought to avoid the social tensions and challenges to traditional authority associated with the mission settlement. Outstations enabled individual clans to pursue greater autonomy. This kind of independence was restricted in Hermannsburg under the influence of powerful clan leaders who were assuming greater authority under the Mission's new governance system. It is also likely that some outstation clans saw advantage in the financial and food resources introduced by the Commonwealth in the early 1970s to assist with outstation establishment.

The distinction between the outstation and Hermannsburg populations has continued. Until the introduction of Local Government shires in 2007 in the Northern Territory, the separate governance and administrative arrangements between Hermannsburg and the outstations reflected the desire for autonomy between clan groups. While most outstation families now have a base in Hermannsburg, in part as a result of a decision in recent years to allocate 14 new

houses in the town to outstation leaders, less than a handful of outstation clans shared a direct relationship with the previous Hermannsburg Community Council. Authority over the town remains quietly contested along lines of administrative verses traditional powers and outstations look to the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre as their source of support and point of representation.

Recent events indicate history repeating itself. In 2009, as the new Rudd Government sought to negotiate 40-year housing leases or 80-year community leases that would extend the five-year, compulsory leases introduced into the 72 Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory by the previous Howard Government, the issue of representation again raised its head in Hermannsburg. Who had the authority to represent Traditional Owners in the lease negotiations over the land on which Hermannsburg was situated? Who was speaking up and did they have a right to do so? Old battle lines were drawn.

Appendix 4: Relatedness as an Indigenous Research Methodology

'A critical dimension of the study of indigenous knowledge involves the insight indigenous people bring to the study of epistemology and research as colonized peoples. In this context, the standpoint of colonized peoples on a geopolitics built on hierarchies, hegemony and privilege is an invaluable resource in the larger effort to transform an unjust world' (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008 p.136).

A4.1 Introduction

This chapter tells my methodology story – a tale of the unfolding of this dissertation. It describes my evolution from uncertainty about what was the ‘right’ way to go about this search for knowledge, to my realisation that it was an emergent journey of learning and the development of shared understandings (Somerville 2007). As this story was my journey, I use my voice to tell an account of the steps I undertook in the study process and reference the literature to illustrate the arguments supporting my choices.

Central to my approach to this study were ethical responsibilities for research, bedded in concerns raised around the world regarding the conduct of research with indigenous peoples. This commitment saw me search to find ways that met my interpretation of what Indigenous research ethics meant in the context of a study seeking to better understand Tjuwanpa’s Western Arrernte outstation families. At the same time I needed to meet requirements for a dissertation that accommodated the rationality of the academy and academic discipline.

For a non-Indigenous female, new to the complexities of scholarly procedure and with a study positioned within an Indigenous research paradigm, I often found myself in a minefield of competing claims about what I should do, how I should do it, and whether I in fact could, or even ought, to do it. In the field my research process had no straight lines. It often seemed to be clumsy, chaotic and fraught

with difficulties. I could not anticipate events taking place at Tjuwanpa or rely on appointments or plans made the day, or even an hour before. Outstation lives and the events that took place within them did not line up within a controlled laboratory. Nothing proceeded smoothly. Then came despair as my research project ground to a halt with the arrival of the Northern Territory Intervention. This forced me to shake off my preconceptions about what I should do and how I should do it. I had to let go of ‘my’ project.

A4.1.1 The aim of the study

From the very beginning of my research journey I held to a view that people’s voices matter – that what they say gives us important knowledge about what works for them, producing knowledge that is both socially useful and politically powerful (Chambers R 1983, 1997; Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha 2011; Lather 2006; Marston & Watts 2003; Martin 2003). In addition to its instrumental value, however, voice for me also has intrinsic value (Osmani 2003) - a moral standpoint; a belief that in a just world people have a right to influence the decisions that affect their lives (Phelps 2006; Ricouer 2006). These considerations influenced how I positioned my study and the questions being asked. Thus the key question for the research, ‘*How did Tjuwanpa’s outstation families understand and respond to key NTER reforms?*’ sought to understand human actions not predict them. As Fehér (1998) makes clear,

‘Implicit in the epistemological dualism of explanation and understanding is a latent ontological distinction between nature and spirit. With regard to nature our knowledge is explanation, concerning consciousness it is understanding’ (1998 p.10).

Understanding Western Arrernte outstation experience was therefore central to the purpose of the study.

I then needed to consider the question, ‘*Understanding for what ends?*’ Concerns associated with research in an Indigenous domain positioned the study in terms of its critical value in producing an Indigenous knowledge that challenges non-

Indigenous constructions of identity and promotes the interests and priorities of indigenous citizens (Bishop 2005; Martin 2003; Smith 1999). This knowledge holds the potential to reshape non-Indigenous consciousness of the way things are in the relationship between Western Arrernte outstation families and the state (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008). Through a new consciousness there is the potential to transform the ways in which non-Indigenous outsiders conduct their relationship with Aboriginal peoples in remote areas of Australia. The aims of the study are therefore to build understanding of Western Arrernte terms of engagement with the state from their perspectives and to use this to challenge and change the ways in which the state conducts its relationship with remote Aboriginal peoples.

My approach to the study has therefore been to privilege Aboriginal voices, using Western Arrernte narratives that give insight into the meanings outstation families give to their actions. As such their purpose is to ‘expand the range of understanding, voice, and storied variations in human experience’ (Guba & Lincoln 2005 p.211). The aim in this study is to create an empathic understanding (Chase 2008) of outstation responses to the NTER that helps the reader to imagine life as it is lived on Tjuwanpa’s outstations (Bourdieu et al. 1999; Denzin 1989, 1997). This position in turn challenges the dominant mainstream Australian discourse of Indigenous disadvantage and difference. The outstation narratives also enable us to hear Western Arrernte perspectives on terms for engagement with the state in the context of their everyday lives. Positioning Western Arrernte narratives in the first part of the dissertation brings these voices to the fore, allowing the storytellers to set the terms of the analysis for the study and its possibility for the future. ‘In listening to indigenous storytellers, we learn new ways of being moral and political in the social world’ (Denzin 2008 p.463).

A4.1.2 An outline of the chapter

It was from these starting positions that this dissertation emerged as an ethnographic narrative, which sought to understand Western Arrernte outstation responses to events unfolding under the Northern Territory Intervention. My

standpoint was shaped by my early upbringing and professional background in community development working with remote peoples in the Pacific and South East Asia. As my values and experience influenced the framing of my study (Carspecken 1996), I begin the discussion of the positioning of my study by describing these values and how they shaped the choices I subsequently made about my research approach.

Across the globe indigenous voices and academics are raising concerns about research with indigenous peoples. These centre on the impact of research on indigenous rights and identity as a consequence of the privileging of Western epistemologies and their associated methodological positioning (Bishop 1998; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008; Martin 2003; Smith 1999, 2005). I present the arguments of these scholars next. I illustrate how they merge with the push in qualitative studies for work that speaks to knowledge embedded in lived experience. This requires methodologies that recognise the roles played by gender, race and power in the construction of knowledge and fostering research that makes a commitment to social transformation (Bourdieu et al. 1999; Christians 2005; Denzin 1989). This positioning set the ethical and epistemological considerations for my study within an indigenous research paradigm, a paradigm Wilson describes as a set of beliefs that underpin action in research with Indigenous peoples (2001). In this paradigm I endeavoured to accommodate ethical principles for research with Indigenous peoples within Western Arrernte ways of being in the world in my process of enquiry. It also determined the aims of the study, what is told, and how narratives are presented and assessed in this dissertation.

At first I worried that the methods I used and the people I spoke to seemed neither scholarly nor controlled. As my relationships with outstation families grew, however, I began to understand that Western Arrernte people enacted their engagement with the state from the same worldview from which they engaged with me in the study. The methodology for the study I therefore call a methodology of *relatedness* and describe the process of the research in the third part of this chapter. By relatedness I mean the enactment of ethics through relational processes constituted in caring, respecting, trusting and being

accountable to those who are represented in my research.

In the final part of the chapter, I discuss the study's trustworthiness and authenticity, the risks inherent in undertaking research in an Indigenous domain as a non-Indigenous researcher, and then reflect on what this means for the practice of research with Australia's Indigenous peoples. I make the case that in Australia's remote heartland; research must be grounded in a sound understanding of the principles underpinning Indigenous research ethics. Enacting these principles, however, will require that the priorities and rules of the academy accommodate research aims, processes, and timetables that extend beyond the demands of economic rationalism and accommodate consent processes that holds the researcher accountable to the people expected to benefit.

I did not anticipate at the beginning of my journey that I would experience such pain, despair, shame, and frustration in my research endeavour. Perhaps if I had been more experienced in the ways of academia, less naïve, more cognisant of Aboriginal cultures, and less optimistic about my own abilities I would have done better. On reflection, had this been the case I would not have pursued the course that I did. In the end I found a way through what at many times seemed impenetrable barriers. Margaret Somerville characterises this unfolding of the research process, the undoing of subjectivity and the search for alternative approaches to the issue of representation as a postmodern methodology of emergence (2007). In hindsight I could have perhaps done greater justice in this dissertation regarding the issue of representation. It could have been presented as a dramatic narrative for stage, but perhaps that is the next step for my journey.

A4.2 Epistemology and methodology: Tools of indigenous oppression or self-determination?

Within an indigenous framework, methodological debates focus on the broader politics and strategic goals of indigenous research. It is at this level that researchers

have to clarify and justify their intentions. Methods become the means and procedures through which the central problems of the research are addressed”
(Smith 1999 p.143)

Since the 1980's, increasing attention has been given to ethical principles in the conduct of research involving indigenous peoples. Australian universities and research institutions require researchers to demonstrate how their studies involving Indigenous peoples respect the values and cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. These principles also encourage researchers to interrogate their own cultural positions in the research process (NHMRC 2003, 2007). The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) provides broad guidelines based on similar principles, noting;

‘At every stage, research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and the Indigenous people’ (AIATSIS 2000 p.2).

The position in Australia reflects a growing concern across the world about the nature and use of knowledge derived from research with indigenous peoples, and the epistemologies that underpin research processes. In this next section I explore these ethical and epistemological discussions and how they have influenced my study. I start, however, with a brief discussion of the values that I brought to this study as throughout my work my choice of topic, methodology and methods are intertwined with the values I bring to the research (Crotty 1998; Denzin 1997).

A4.2.1 The values underpinning my choices

Many writers have argued that the social researcher's predisposition is always at play in the presentation and analysis findings (Christians 2005; Marston & Watts 2003; Patton 2002). This needs to be made most explicit in studies that position research from the standpoint of social justice as the research process, ‘*necessarily* begins with a value or a moral point of view’ about human relations or social structures (Neuman 2002 p.81). I therefore begin the discussion of my standpoint for this study with a brief description of the experiences that shaped my values and how they have shaped how the study has been positioned and approached.

Perhaps the starting point is the circumstances of my birth. I was born into a devout, struggling, working class Catholic family living on the outskirts of Wagga Wagga in South Western New South Wales. By age 11, I had begun to take an interest in ‘helping’ others; influenced by my father’s association with a local Catholic charity as much as the insistence of the nuns who taught me that we help those ‘less fortunate’ than ourselves. I continued my community involvement throughout my secondary schooling. This strong sense of social justice and moral responsibility engendered during my formative years, perhaps inevitably led me to completing a Bachelor of Social Work. What was not so inevitable was that soon after graduating I found myself backpacking on my own through South East Asia. It was ten years before I returned to live in Australia. I had initially fallen for a handsome Thai musician but when the strains of love faded I found myself working with the Non Government Organisation Save the Children, initially spending two years in refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border, then six years on a small village development program in provincial Thailand.

During my time in Thailand I had extensive exposure to participatory social change processes (Chambers R 1983), participatory action research⁷² (Fals Borda 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart 2000) and Paulo Freire’s pedagogic thinking (1976), all of which had a profound influence on my approach to community development practice. After my return to Australia from Thailand in 1989, I continued to work in the international community development arena with both government agencies and Non Government Organisations. This has seen me working on international development assistance programs involving many different cultures and remote peoples throughout South East Asia and the Pacific. Throughout this time I have focused on encouraging participatory approaches for the design and delivery of services to remote communities.

⁷² In 1988, in collaboration with Thai colleagues across the country, the participatory action research undertaken in the project I was working on profoundly influenced grassroots farming practices and national lending policies to farmers. Much of this work was undertaken before PAR began to be recognised as a methodology in qualitative studies.

Coming to the research, I therefore brought with me a long association with social justice issues in remote, cross-cultural contexts. I had seen many different examples of how culture, gender, knowledge, and power shaped the way in which remote peoples' experiences are seen and understood. My experience had shown me that who speaks matters, and matters profoundly. Having observed and been part of change processes that aimed to empower remote communities in developing countries, I was therefore drawn early in my study to an epistemological positioning, which sought to understand and give voice to lived experience (Denzin 1989, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln 2005).

A4.2.2 Ethical and epistemological considerations in research involving indigenous people

In Australia, any research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people requires consideration of six principles – reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity (NHMRC 2003, 2007). In 2006, as I prepared to submit my request for university ethics approval for this study, I was struck by what seemed to me to be a persistent message in the NHRMC guidelines that unethical research practice amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people is not simply a case of recklessly breaking the rules. Subtle and often unintended encroachments or disrespect of culture during the research process can erode trust, distort findings, and bring harm to research participants. I subsequently sought to understand the arguments that have led to these requirements.

The writings of scholars involved in indigenous research reflect how indigenous research ethics have emerged out of concerns expressed by an increasing number of academics in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada and Northern Europe who are writing about ontology, epistemology and research methodologies from an indigenous perspective. At stake for these writers are the ways in which knowledge has been constructed through the research process, and how this knowledge has been used –and continues to be used – to oppress indigenous peoples.

Maffie (2005) puts forward the case that there are multiple epistemologies, each of which are culturally and socially constructed. He views Western science as only one of many ethno epistemologies and argues these other philosophical discourses should share equal value concerning what constitutes knowledge. Maffie challenges the notion that Western epistemological practice makes a right or more proper epistemological claim by positioning truth as a requirement of knowledge. He argues that truth is a normative claim, which has been elevated to a meta-epistemological level by Western science. He posits that there are different conceptions of knowledge, and that truth is therefore relative. Eastern epistemologies, for example, tend to concern themselves with practical knowledge centred in a way of being in the world for the common good. Western epistemologies focus on theoretical knowledge. Maffie's position opens the contestability of epistemological positions.

Writers engaged in research with indigenous peoples argue strongly that epistemological positions – that is, knowledge or truth claims and how they are derived – matter profoundly in research involving indigenous peoples as epistemological preferences shape the way knowledge is constructed and how it is used (Bishop 1998; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008; Grande 2000; Marker 2003; Smith 1999). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) puts forward the view that research has played a central role in the colonization of Maori people, with findings used to classify, dehumanise and problematise them. For Smith, Western epistemologies are not only bedded in Western values and views of morality, but also in conceptualizations of time and space that devalue Maori ways of thinking about and interacting with their world. She sees research with Maori people as therefore, 'not an innocent or distant academic exercise, but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions' (Smith 1999 p.5).

Positioning knowledge in this way Smith sites research with indigenous peoples in an analysis of power relations and in 'local theoretical positioning' (p.186) that enables people to take control over their lives. To achieve this it sets out to benefit all research participants and in doing so, involves Maori in setting the research

agenda. It also 'presupposes positions that are committed to a critical analysis of the existing unequal power relations within our society' (1998 p.201).

New Zealand academic Stephen Bishop (1998, 2005), also challenges the use of non-indigenous research paradigms to determine how claims to theory can be made in relation to Maori people. Bishop makes the case that traditional educational research in New Zealand has misrepresented Maori experience, subsequently characterising Maori as inferior and unable to cope. He argues that in applying concepts such as neutrality and objectivity, that research methods sit 'within the cultural preferences and practices of the Western world as opposed to the cultural preferences and practices of Maori people themselves' (1998 p.200). Further he argues that this enables researchers to remove themselves from answering to Maori people for the knowledge derived from their research. It also permits the researcher to develop studies that predominantly serve the interests of the researcher, a view shared by others about anthropological research with First Nations people in Canada (Marker 2003; Wilson, S. 2001). Bishop rejects the rationalist, lineal, grand theory worldview of science as incompatible with a relational, circular Polynesian position in the world. Rather, he sees knowledge as developed through relationships. From this position, research with Maori people sits within a *Kaupapa* Maori epistemology that works within Maori cultural practice. Bishop sums up Maori concerns about research as being who controls its initiation; who benefits from it; how Maori social reality is represented; whose claims to knowledge are legitimate, and who the researcher is accountable to (Bishop 2005).

Like Smith and Bishop, Indigenous Australian academics argue that Australian research has been used as a tool of imperialism, providing the means through which colonisers applied normative concepts of what counts to be human, what it means to be developed, and what is the right and proper way to live (Martin 2001, 2003; Nakata 1998; Rigney 1997). They argue that this process of classification has shaped relations between Australia's imperial powers and Indigenous societies and justified a swathe of laws, policies, programs, and procedures that have deprived Australia's Indigenous peoples of their liberty, land, spirituality,

children, language and culture. Examining the role of research through different periods of Aboriginal history, Australian Indigenous academic Karen Martin (Martin 2001) shows how research has shaped the way in which Aboriginal peoples have been controlled, and how it has distorted and appropriated their lives and cultures. Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata exemplifies how this has been done, using an analysis of the Hadden reports – a six volume anthropological study of Torres Strait Islander people undertaken at the turn of the twentieth century (Nakata 1998). These volumes have been extremely influential in generating non-Indigenous understandings of Indigenous Australians. Lester Rigney (1997, 2000), another Indigenous Australian scholar, similarly argues that research has been used to make constructions of race, with race subsequently used as a tool through which power is exercised and peoples controlled. He maintains that constructs of race directly determine the way in which society at large views Indigenous people and this in turn, shapes the way in which Indigenous problems are perceived, and Indigenous policies and programs are designed and delivered.

In looking at the discourse on Indigenous people in Australia today it is not difficult to understand why academics and Indigenous leaders continue to voice these concerns (James 1997). Contemporary Australian Government policy and reporting situates Indigenous peoples on the other side of a ‘gap’ that must be ‘closed’, with Indigenous people represented as being in all respects less than or worse than mainstream Australians (Australian Government 2009; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2007). The most striking contemporary example of the use of research to determine Aboriginal lives in Australia is the use of the Little Children are Sacred Report (Wild & Anderson 2007). This was used to justify the Commonwealth’s Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory despite its use in this way being vehemently opposed by its authors.

Challenging colonial constructions of their identity and futures, Australian Indigenous writers call for the research process to arrive at the place where the voices of Indigenous peoples are privileged. For Australian Karen Martin, this means the research process must be centred on Indigenous ways of *knowing*, ways

of *being* and ways of *doing* (Martin 2001, 2003). Ways of *knowing* are the many ways, contexts and times that learning takes place about the entities of land, animals, plants, water, climate and people. Ways of *being* are relational – how people are as part of the world. Ways of *doing* take place through art, ceremony, language and traditions. Rigney (2000) sees possibilities for breaking the hold on the construction of knowledge in the work of feminist theorists. He calls for ‘Indigenist research, by Indigenous peoples, for Indigenous peoples, and in the interest of Indigenous peoples’ (p.8) that resists oppressive social structures, has political integrity, and privileges Indigenous voices.

Indigenous writers therefore demand a reframing of research away from its focus on the problematisation of indigenous peoples towards a social justice objective of self-determination. They reject as ‘real’ knowledge that is located in systems and cultures that are not those of the people being studied. They challenge the legitimacy of claims to truth gained through a Eurocentric, grand theory worldview of knowledge, positioning knowledge in indigenous aspirations and cultural practices. Indigenous knowledge making they argue, is grounded in processes that preference Indigenous identity expressed through indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. The way in which power and privilege operates to define the relationship of the researcher to Indigenous informants and its subsequent impact on findings is also called into question. The researcher is therefore asked to be accountable to indigenous people for the focus of the study, the interpretation of its findings and who benefits. What is at stake for these writers is the construction of indigenous identity and how it has been, and continues to be used, to shape policy and programs that act against indigenous identity and self-determination.

A4.2.3 The research standpoint: An indigenous research paradigm

Together, my values and ethical considerations arising from the concerns about research with indigenous peoples, shaped my approach to this study and set it within an indigenous research paradigm that, ‘comes from a fundamental belief

that knowledge is relational' (Wilson, S. 2001 p.176). Knowledge in this space not just derived from the interpersonal but also with creation. From an indigenous research standpoint my methodology traverses both political and ethical terrains. Knowledge is constructed here but how it has been constructed, to what ends, and with whose permission all very much counted.

In this space research is firmly situated in challenging truth claims that emerge from the dominant group (Carspecken 1996). Within an indigenous research paradigm, however, the researcher is asked to do more than this and become a collaborator in processes that respect Indigenous ways and aspirations. Attempting to operationalise ethical principles within Western Arrernte ways of thinking, doing and being in their world (Martin 2003), required I ground my work and its findings within Western Arrernte concerns and through Western Arrernte cultural practice. In its aim, its process and in the presentation of the study findings I have aimed to give expression to Western Arrernte identity, values, aspirations, and lived experience. Setting these within state interventions in their lives, the gaze is that of Aboriginal people. What is being interrogated from this position, however, are the policies and practices of the state (Evans et al. 2009).

Denzin (1997) sees the ethnographic assignment as a process of communicating multiple truths about the world; positioning truth and fact as always socially constructed through gender, race, power and culture. For Denzin (1989), it is the epiphanal moments in people's lives that are to be studied, as it is from these events that stories emerge that give insight to the meanings that people give to the world around them. The epiphany reveals the order of things in a way that is not usually seen; they are interactional situations that occur where trouble experienced by the individual becomes a matter of public interest and intervention. In this case, the trouble was reported child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (Wild & Anderson 2007). The public interest was the decision by the Australian Government to mount an Intervention that sought sweeping reforms to welfare payments, Aboriginal land rights, Aboriginal governance, and the servicing and legal status of all Aboriginal townships in the Northern Territory. In this context he sees the researcher's task is to,

‘...allow ordinary people to speak out and articulate the interpretive theories that they use to make sense of their lives’ (Denzin 1997 p.26).

By focusing on and using Western Arrernte narratives that portray the everyday feelings, concerns and practical realities of outstation lives during the first two years of the NTER, I have tried to find a way to engage the reader in an empathic understanding of life as it is lived at Tjuwanpa. My aim is therefore to shape our understanding of outstation experience but most importantly, also engender a consciousness and response to the terms for Indigenous engagement as enacted in Indigenous policy and by state authorities. In this way I have sought to challenge the construction of Indigenous identity by state authorities, which employ non-Aboriginal perceptions of Western Arrernte reality to determine what is best for outstation families.

A4.3 A methodology of relatedness

‘For indigenous and other marginalized communities, research ethics is at a very basic level about establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships, not just among people as individuals but also with people as individuals, as collectives, and as members of communities, and with humans who live in and with other entities in the environment. The abilities to enter pre-existing relationships; to build, maintain, and nurture relationships; and to strengthen connectivity are important research skills in the indigenous arena (Smith 2005 p.97).

Working within an indigenous research paradigm my study has not been a dispassionate encounter. It necessitated a relational process (Bull 2010; Smith 2005; Wilson, S. 2001). Entering into the world of ‘an-other’ was not achieved as an objective bystander. Relationality and subjectivity entered into the research and implied rights, obligations and responsibilities (Bishop 2005; Marker 2003). *Dadirri* – a deep listening and the sharing of experience was required (Atkinson 2002). Working within a Western Arrernte *way of knowing, doing and being* (Martin 2003) I spoke with people through relationships forged over time and through our sharing of the Commonwealth’s 2007 Intervention in the Northern Territory – an experience that turned all our lives upside-down and forced me to

reassess my research agenda.

In responding to the concerns about research with indigenous peoples the challenge I faced at Tjuwanpa was to accept that I no longer had an entitlement to know. Knowledge was a privilege of Western Arrernte relationship – it was not freely available provided the ‘right’ tools were employed as is assumed in academic enquiry (Smith 1999). Knowledge from an indigenous perspective, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes in research with Maori people, ‘can be gained only by its being given’ (1991 p.50). In the context of Western Arrernte people, knowledge is shared through relatedness, a position of trust and caring associated with a recognition of looking after another or a place (Austin-Broos 2009). I use the term *relatedness* to describe this central feature of my methodology. Relatedness embodies ‘an ethics of caring’ (Denzin 1997 p.276) that as the study shows, is at the heart of Western Arrernte values and everyday cultural practice. This has positioned how the research should proceed and demanded that I let go of my notions of how the study ought to be done, allowing for multi-layered reflexivity (Nicholls 2008) where outstation participants and I collaborated throughout. Bull (2010) describes this as authentic research relationship, which is committed to, ‘employing processes that allow the researcher to learn and be responsive to an Aboriginal mindset’ (p.17). This shaped the research agenda, what became known, and the means through which it became visible. In my work, relatedness created a space for shared learning and understanding and for hearing different voices. Relatedness was therefore the means I employed to work across the space between me as the researcher, and those whose knowledge I sought to make known.

Within relationships people began to feel comfortable with me, but it was through *relatedness* that people shared their thinking and feelings, and within which they demonstrated caring and recognised my caring for them. Relatedness underpinned every aspect of my study. It required that I find out about, understand and work within Western Arrernte cultural protocols, value systems, and rights of knowing and speaking. It insisted on shaping knowledge from an inside not an outside perspective. It accepted that I would share the research findings with, and be

accountable to, outstation families who are likely to be affected by its findings. I therefore sought permissions not only to use the dialogue from my transcripts but also for my interpretation of what was said, conscious that in seeking consent I needed to be held accountable to individuals and the broader community of families at Tjuwanpa. They needed to agree to how they would be represented in my world. Relatedness also shaped how I have developed the narrative for much of my dissertation. My methodology as I describe it here, is therefore the practice of relatedness in my work at Tjuwanpa.

A4.3.1 Time, trust and the growth of relatedness

Relatedness evolved through trust and took place in a context in which being useful was a demonstration of caring. Time was therefore of the utmost importance. In the field at Tjuwanpa I found the rules of the academy bore little resemblance to the rules applying to relations with the residents of Tjuwanpa's outstations. I quickly found I was not on a pre-set journey along the highway to knowledge, accompanied by my books and papers on qualitative research; but travelling a circuitous route along dark and dusty tracks, where I often got bogged or was left stranded.

My journal over the first six months of 2007 recounts my experience of this time as feeling excitement at the unique opportunity to be working in the Central Desert. It also reveals my absolute frustrations with the day-to-day realities at Tjuwanpa. Although I had discussed and had approval for a collaborative project focusing on housing services with the Tjuwanpa Committee of Management, again and again I would travel to Tjuwanpa only to find that a pre-arranged meeting or discussion was abandoned or forgotten as other events took over. It took me many months to appreciate that problems with bores, generators or pipes broken by horses searching for water were common events, requiring immediate action to ensure outstation homes had water or power. I also had to learn that funerals, family demands, shopping and sports carnivals all took precedence over any arrangements that people might have with me! I also had difficulties accessing the outstations. Either the promised car was broken down or being used by staff

for some other endeavor – sometimes work related and sometimes personal.

Despite these setbacks, by late May 2007 I had begun to feel quietly optimistic. After many meetings and weekly visits to Tjuwanpa, the Aboriginal staff were beginning to sit down with me and talk, a huge contrast to my earlier meetings where they had said little and were seemingly disinterested. Solomon in particular, seemed more comfortable talking with me and we agreed to a series of outstation visits late May and early June. Arriving at the Resource Centre the following week all plans went on hold. An outstation bore out west had gone down. This took Solomon and other men on the team out bush for several weeks. Following this Solomon took four weeks holiday. Again I rescheduled my plans, with the intention of undertaking the outstation visits early July. In the interim, the Intervention intervened. With the arrival of the Howard Government's Intervention in the Northern Territory, Tjuwanpa faced the prospect of closure due to funding changes. These circumstances forced me to let go of control of my research agenda and the plans I had to return home at the end of 2007.

In my early months at Tjuwanpa few people spoke with me. As an outsider who came and went, week after week over a period of more than two and a half years, however, I was eventually valued as someone who came back.⁷³ From a Western Arrernte perspective the fact that I returned again and again mattered enormously. To outstation people who knew me it signified caring or looking after, a characteristic of Western Arrernte relatedness requiring '... both being emplaced and the passage of time' (Austin-Broos 2009 p.130). For outstation families to leave and not return is to demonstrate a lack of caring.

Relatedness was not just a matter of regular visits and friendly conversations. Trust underpinned people's decision to share with me. Being useful was an important way in which this emerged. This happened in very ordinary ways, one of which I will recount here. This was the moment where my relationship with Thatha changed. As the Intervention unfolded at Tjuwanpa, Thatha had begun to

⁷³ I have continued to visit Tjuwanpa and the first comment that people often make when they see me is, '*Oh, you're back...kala* (that's good)'.

talk with me, endeavouring to understand what was happening with the NTER and how this would affect her work and her employment prospects. Up until this time, however, she had rarely engaged in conversation with me. On a hot day in October 2007 Thatha was informed that she less than two days to fill in almost 200 forms for CDEP participants. It was critical that she did this. Without the forms, CDEP workers could not be registered on the Centrelink system. If they were not registered they would not receive their Centrelink payment in two weeks time. Although Thatha was eight months pregnant at the time and was tired and weak with gestational diabetes, she felt the weight of this responsibility. As the Tjuwanpa Manager was away in Darwin, I sat with her and together we managed to get the job done that afternoon. As we walked home she thanked me for my help. Some months later Thatha recounted to me how my help on that day was the point where she began to trust me. My helping her, she said, had made her feel comfortable with me.

Over time others began to feel comfortable with me and this developed through simple acts of sharing and being useful. As information about the NTER reforms became available I used government documents and Ministerial media releases to prepare periodic Plain English briefs that I posted on the Resource Centre notice board. In everyday interactions I shared what I was learning about the reforms. What was important here was my sharing of knowledge about matters that were important to families. In this sense I demonstrated that I was caring. Aboriginal staff and outstation families then began to approach me wanting to know about this 'Intervention' and 'Shires thing'. As we talked they shared with me their feelings and understandings about what was taking place.

The trust embedded in feeling comfortable was also engendered when people saw me respecting matters that were important to them. I used English that people understood. I worked in the ordinary – the everyday places and events of life at Tjuwanpa. I cleaned the office kitchen, helped prepare food for BBQs, assisted staff with computers, made cups of tea, explained government communications and helped to fill out forms. I played with babies and children, and occasionally bought packs of cigarettes. A discussion with Solomon about research ethics,

however, was an important development that went beyond the humdrum of these everyday events. Understanding that I would not use what he told me without his permission, that we would work together on my findings, and that I was committed to working within Aboriginal ways of doing things, seemed to spark his interest. Following this conversation Solomon began to tell me what he was thinking. He would often sit with me at the end of the day, telling his sons they would have to wait a while before he was ready to go home because he wanted to have an important discussion with me.

For the Ranger group, the event that determined I was ‘alright’ was when I gave a dressing down to a visiting government official after hearing her bullying one of the staff in the office. This staff person was a man the Rangers held in high esteem. I was not aware some of the Rangers were in the next room – out of sight but listening and quietly cheering me on. Until that day, the men had been reluctant to engage with me. But after this incident the men would tease me, often waiting until I came within earshot and then calling in unison, ‘*Good morning Annie!*’ in the distinct tone that children use when the teacher enters the classroom. It was their way of telling me I was OK.

These repeated encounters, within which I demonstrated caring, increasingly opened opportunities for conversations that involved people’s feelings and opinions. My encounters with people reflected conditions in which people felt *comfortable and safe* – a term often used at Tjuwanpa to reflect a sense of emotional security with me. As this sense of trust in me grew, and I began to accept that I would not be going home at the end of 12 months, there were repeated interactions and an emotional connectedness. Over time I was able to contextualise stories and develop a more empathic understanding of the complexities and contradictions inherent in outstation life at Tjuwanpa (Denzin 1997; Guerin & Guerin 2007; Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008). Time also challenged me to reconceptualise what it was I sought to learn. New questions also emerged as my understandings of an outstation world began to deepen.

A4.3.2 Pass me around: Selection of research participants

In the context of remote Aboriginal communities, these small events taking place through time were part of this larger process of relatedness. I was subsequently '*passed around*' to three of the family groups that were linked to Solomon, Thatha and Lee. '*Why don't you talk with Ngulpa? She's over at my place now.*' Or Solomon would indicate that we were going out to see Jack or Sovariel's place. Only much later would I find out that this person was part of his kinship network. On some occasions, people I did not know were happy to talk with me. Again, it was often not until many months later that I would discover they were part of Solomon, Thatha or Lee's family. *Pass me around* recognises how kinship relations shape Aboriginal social life (Champion, Franks & Taylor 2008), and is a process similar to the snowball technique where researchers ask well situated people who else they should talk to (Patton 2002 p.237). At Tjuwanpa those who felt comfortable with me vouched for me (Vickery & Westerman 2004), indicating to other members of their family that I could be trusted.

Western Arrernte protocols determined who was appropriate for me to talk with in other ways. Before going ahead with any meetings I would ask several of the Aboriginal staff at the office who they recommended I invite. They would then offer a list of names, usually key outstation leaders that they thought were the right people in terms of seniority, interest, availability, and sometimes (although not always), their language capacity. At other times, they suggested I talk to all the outstation elders when they attended Committee of Management meetings. It was considered '*right way*' that I talk with older people who were considered leaders in the area.

Being a woman, younger Aboriginal men shied away from interacting with me although this was less problematic with older men or men of my age. I also needed to accommodate '*avoidance*' relationships, as Western Arrernte social protocols for the conduct of respectful relationships precluded direct contact with other family members such as mothers-in-law (Austin-Broos 2009). This did not affect

those I could talk with, but initially I could not understand the reluctance of some of my Western Arrernte colleagues to introduce me to others. As people's relationships were rarely explained to me, I learned to go with the flow of these events.

In this dissertation I primarily draw on the stories and conversations of eight men and women that I came into contact with on a regular basis, complementing their voices with others that shared their stories. Four of these central storytellers are women and four are men - aged from their early 20s to early 60s. Other narratives are drawn from 10 outstation leaders and Western Arrernte Resource Centre staff, representative of the same age span. The participants in the study were subsequently not selected by me. Who I spoke with emerged through my relatedness with three family networks who directed me according to Western Arrernte cultural preferences.

A4.3.3 Having a yarn: Collecting and recording stories

As the research process took the form of naturalistic inquiry (Patton 2002), discussions took place without being pre-determined. '*Yarning*' perhaps best describes a method that incorporates different kinds of conversational interactions I had with outstation people in the Tjuwanpa area. It is a common Aboriginal term, which represents narratives emerging from a process of two-way communication (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010). In Australia, a yarn usually refers to a story or tale, or describes a relaxed, informal conversation. Given Western Arrernte oral storytelling traditions and their preference for informal and less structured settings, I describe yarning as a method for the interactions that often took place spontaneously wherever people happened to be.

Yarning, through conversations, interviews and meetings happened in places that were comfortable for the people involved. This was usually on the veranda of someone's house, under the bough shelter in front of the Tjuwanpa office or depending on the weather, sitting on the ground in the shade or the sun.

Occasionally a trip to the 'Top Shop' for a litre of milk for a cup of tea would yield information about events taking place, or it would provide a chance to arrange to talk to someone at a later time. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) describe four different kinds of yarnning in the context of undertaking research with remote Aboriginal communities. *Social* yarnning reflects unstructured conversations or interactions that might include story telling, joking or passing on information. *Research* yarnning is more purposeful and is directed around a particular situation or event related to the focus of the study. *Collaborative* yarnning uses conversations where ideas are bounced around or shared in relation to the topic under discussion, and through which thinking evolves, is confirmed or new ideas emerge. *Therapeutic* yarnning involves a dialogue that is intensely emotional, where the researcher may focus more on listening or asking questions that help the person to either affirm or make sense of the experience they describe.

During my early months at Tjuwanpa I engaged predominantly in *social yarnning*, although this type of interaction continued throughout the period of the study. Initially social yarnning enabled me to get to know a little about people and for them to begin to feel comfortable with me, but as relationships deepened though time, social yarnning became the means through which people passed on gossip, opinions, jokes and information they knew I might be interested in. In this respect, the quality of social yarnning reflected a deeper intimacy through which people shared feelings and information.

As relationships formed at Tjuwanpa I began to ask people if I could use my digital recorder and through this was able capture detailed conversations as people responded to specific events in the government reform environment. Spradley (1979) notes that engaging in more structured conversations – or *research yarnning*, may not take place during the early part of a study as it can take a considerable period of time before people are happy to undertake a more prolonged encounter. On these occasions, where I directed conversation around government reform events, I would usually start by asking open-ended, 'grand-tour' questions (Spradley 1979; Stringer, E. T. 2007). This usually went something like, 'Tell me a bit about how you understand what's happening with X or Y or Z?' If I needed

to understand more, I would ask, 'Tell me a bit more about that'. As some people knew I was following the Commonwealth's reform processes closely, they would typically approach me with the question, '*What's happening at Tjuwanpa?*' Outstation residents therefore also initiated purposeful research yarning. The knowledge they sought from me was my knowledge of events taking place in the government reform environment.

Collaborative yarning would best describe a number of group discussions that took place between September and November 2007, where information and perspectives concerning the NTER were shared. Later in 2009, I used collaborative yarning as part of the process of confirming and analysing my findings. There were also times – although these were rare – when the research yarn would turn into the '*therapeutic*' yarn. On these occasions, such as the conversation with Elva, the government reform environment raised deep emotions and memories, and at these times I would simply listen quietly and affirm the teller's story.

The space created in the various kinds of yarning was therefore not neutral. As Fontana and Frey (2005) point out, an interview is a collaborative effort that is 'unavoidably historically, politically and contextually bound' (p.115). In the context of Maori research Bishop describes this as discourse spirals, in which 'the seeking of collaboratively constructed story is central' (2005p.122). Yarning was not bound by procedural restrictions on what could be said. Emotions were permitted. Memories were allowed to meander. Facts were reconstituted as experience. People said what is important to them. This approach permitted those affected by government provisions under the NTER the possibility of telling a truth that was real to them and unencumbered by formal meeting or survey protocols. As Phelps (2006) remarks, this kind of talk 'is an essential component of justice' (p.109).

Yarning was therefore a method that accorded with Western Arrernte cultural preference. As in other Aboriginal desert cultures, yarning allowed Western Arrernte outstation families to follow oral traditions of story telling that permitted a sharing of knowledge and a collaborative growing of what was understood

(Lieberman 1980b). It provided comfortable spaces – in places, at times and with people chosen in the context of Western Arrernte relatedness. It was during all of these moments of yarning that the outstation narratives used in this study emerged and enabled people to reflect on how changes and services were seen in the context of their lives on Tjuwanpa's outstations.

A4.3.4 Talking story: Developing the narratives

Denzin positions critical personal narratives at the centre of studies that seek an understanding of the intentions and meanings that underpin everyday actions enabling us 'to see the other's experience from their point of view' (1989 p.121). Through indigenous narratives, he sees the potential for decolonizing writing through production of 'counternarratives, testimonies, auto ethnographies, performance texts, and accounts that disrupt and disturb discourse by exposing the complexities and contradictions that exist under official history' (2008 p.454). When transcribed, stories therefore become narratives that interpret the meanings people themselves give to their actions. This situates the Western Arrernte storytellers in this study as the speakers, not the spoken for.

As qualitative studies draw on narrative accounts to construct meaning, Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) argue that the researcher needs to make explicit the epistemological choices underpinning how meaning has been constructed from transcripts, and how the researcher has determined what part of the story is told. I therefore elaborate here how the positioning of the study within an indigenous research paradigm has shaped the framing of the study's findings and its presentation. I also describe the efforts I made to ensure transcription processes remained trustworthy.

In the previous section I show how my study, positioned within an indigenous research paradigm, sought not only to avoid harm but had a transformative agenda. It thus seeks to reframe non-Indigenous understandings of outstation engagement with the state (Bishop 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008; Martin 2003; Rigney 1997; Smith 1999). The decision to draw extensively on outstation voices and position them in the first half of the dissertation therefore had two purposes. The

first was to turn away from mainstream Australian narratives of Indigenous disadvantage and difference by using Aboriginal narratives that give insight to the meanings given by people themselves to their actions. The intent here was to enable the reader to imagine themselves in the accounts of outstation participants (Bourdieu et al. 1999; Denzin 1997). Privileging Western Arrernte narratives in the first part of the dissertation is therefore a tool to help the reader imagine how things are and how they could be different. The use of narratives was therefore guided by the aim of creating an empathic understanding through the study (Chase 2008) and to use this understanding as the means to critique the actions of the state.

The second aim was to give voice to those who have been largely voiceless in Indigenous policy making. Enabling outstation voices to be heard through the textual presentation of the narratives gives outstation people as ordinary citizens, the possibility of being heard. The privileging of outstation voices in the first half of the dissertation is therefore a matter of justice (Phelps 2006; Ricouer 2006). Phelps argues that ‘storytelling, speaking about one’s life, manifests a capability that is an essential part of a broader and richer sense of what it means to be human and what it means to be just’ (2006 p.106).

In the selection and positioning of the narratives in the text, I sought to answer the question of whether the text selected ‘*captures something important in relation to the overall research question*’ (Braun & Clarke 2006 p.82). Patton describes this as a process of *inductive* analysis (2002 p.56). Here my analysis was not defined by a pre-set theoretical framework or coding, but emerged from my field data in response to broad research questions focusing on how Western Arrernte framed their engagement with the NTER reforms. I use the term ‘emerged’ consciously, as meanings were negotiated through many conversations and encounters at Tjuwanpa, ‘a process of storying and restorying, that is the co-joint construction of further meaning within a sequence of interviews’ (Bishop 2005 p.126).

There came the point, however, where these meanings needed to be embodied in text. In shaping the dissertation I used the three events that predominated in outstation conversations – the Hermannsburg lease, the changes to CDEP and

income management reforms. As the conduct of talk was frequently referenced in my discussions with outstation residents, I included this as the fourth of the narrative chapters. I then read each of the transcripts many, many times, listening carefully to each voice and selecting text that would give a particular insight or perspective to each reform. In doing so, a common framing of responses to events from a Western Arrernte worldview emerged. At the same time, each person's response was positioned within their own distinct analysis (Chase 2008). Thus, for example, the changes to CDEP were welcomed by some and opposed by others, but underlying these different positions were Western Arrernte concerns about their ability to maintain connectedness and relatedness to kinship networks and country.

Wellard and McKenna (2001) argue that although narratives are used extensively in qualitative research, few researchers reveal their transcription process. They maintain, however, that this is necessary to judge their integrity. I do so here. With the exception of Solomon – who was uncomfortable with my digital recorder, all of the narratives contained in the study are digital transcripts transcribed verbatim from conversations. Rehearing people's voices again and again through the transcription process embedded the nuance and rhythm of people's word. This enabled me to reflect the pauses, emphasis and tone of people's conversations as breaks and italics in the text. Later, when reading the transcripts, I could hear the words spoken and locate each conversation somewhere in the dust, the heat and the wind at Tjuwanpa. Verbatim transcripts also allowed me to capture words or phrases I sometimes missed during the conversation as children, dogs, wind, or background chatter often made hearing difficult. Most importantly the transcription process and my later reading and rereading of the transcripts, provided a deeper understanding of the meanings the storyteller was trying to convey. These were meanings I had sometimes missed or misinterpreted at the time of our conversations. Lapadat and Lindsay highlight the importance of this transcription process for interpretive thinking as, 'Analysis takes place and understandings are derived through the process of constructing a transcript by listening and re-listening, viewing and re-viewing' (1999 p.82).

In writing this dissertation, I introduced key sections of text using words and phrases often spoken by outstation participants. My intention here was to present findings in ways that reflected outstation expressions their experience of government reforms. This *bracketing* of essential elements of people's experience positions the analysis in outstation terms rather than through the lens of existing literature (Denzin 1989). In the context of studies involving Indigenous peoples, this approach reduces the risk inherent in *deductive* studies, where study findings are predominantly based on non-Indigenous categorisations of reality.

The narratives do not stand independently, however, as I use my voice to elaborate on the context and the angle that the stories emerge from. In Chapters 2 to 5, I deliberately avoid 'complex jargon' (Denzin 1992 p.167) and detailed the NTER reforms only so far as they contextualised outstation narratives. I also positioned discussion of the literature later in the dissertation. These measures aimed to minimise the risk of distorting the voices of those involved in the study. My role in these chapters was to bring my understanding of the outstation social setting and my knowledge of the storytellers – acquired through my long-term involvement at Tjuwanpa – to tell what was 'storyworthy in the narrators social setting' (Chase 2008 p.71). As such the narrative that unfolds is 'a joint production of narrator and listener' (p.65).

What is captured in these accounts is not *the* Aboriginal story of engagement with changes wrought by the state. The study does not attempt to essentialise Western Arnernte outstation stories that are located in a particular time and place (Kincheloe & Steinberg 2008). As Bishop (2005) points out, indigenous experience is diverse. Nor are outstation responses essentialised as merely proponents or opponents to the NTER reforms. Rather, I use the narratives to frame up what are common experiences, unique events and illustrations of Aboriginal engagement with the institutions and agents there to 'help' them. It is an outstation framing of the problems, solutions and experience regarding their engagement with the state from where they stand, with their voices working together with mine as an elaborator. As such, the narratives form a constitutive accounting of events from different perspectives.

From this position everyday people *actively* construct meaning. These meanings, however, do not sit in a static display awaiting the ethnographer's magic to untangle the code. For Denzin, ethnographies do not, 'capture the totality of a group's way of life. The focus will be interpreted slices, glimpses and specimens of interaction that foster an understanding of how cultural practices, connected to structural formations and narrative texts, are experienced at a particular time and place by interacting individuals' (Denzin 1997 p.247). The narratives therefore do not stand alone, as there is also my voice – my accounting of what was meant and my decisions about what was 'story-worthy' (Chase 2008 p.72), interpreted through the transcription process.

A4.3.5 Indigenous accountability and informed consent

A particularly critical and sensitive issue in indigenous studies is the risk that researchers employ ways of constructing knowledge that sit within non-indigenous epistemologies, subsequently distorting research findings. Research situated in an indigenous paradigm therefore demands the researcher be accountable to those who are expected to benefit from the study (Bishop 2005; Marker 2003; Wilson, S. 2001). Denzin also notes that critical collaborative studies 'makes the researcher responsible not to a removed discipline (or institutions), but to those he or she studies' (2003 p.258). Conscious of these considerations from the very early days of my work I took a number of steps to ensure that consent for the study not only met the requirements of the university ethics committee, but also met an ethic of accountability to outstation families at Tjuwanpa. My approach stood outside the 'standard' approach taken to research permissions. Within an indigenous research paradigm, the standards I needed to meet required that participants not only agreed participate in the study, but they also agreed to the focus of the study and the meanings derived from what they said.

Although a study topic was a requirement for my admission to the university, I was initially troubled by the question of whether it was in any way of interest to Aboriginal people living in remote areas of Australia. As there were early pressures to obtain university ethics approval before going into the field I sought

approval for a feasibility phase. This was undertaken over the period May 2006 to March 2007⁷⁴ and sought to refine the research topic around research interests of Aboriginal people and government representatives in the Northern Territory; to identify and reach agreements with research participants and co-researchers; to identify appropriate research methods, and to identify the logistical requirements and funding needed to undertake the study. In articulating these outcomes I hoped to find a way to position the research in collaborative, relational and cultural processes.

Once I had relocated to Alice Springs, I gained the support of the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre to work on a project that sought to strengthen outstation service delivery. The Tjuwanpa Manager facilitated meetings with outstation residents and local Tjuwanpa services staff to discuss the project. By early 2007 I had a formal agreement the Tjuwanpa Committee of Management. I had also brokered an agreement with an Alice Springs based training organisation for a participatory action research project involving the outstation services team. These agreements underpinned a second ethics proposal which was submitted to the university's Human Ethics Research Committee in April 2007.⁷⁵

In June 2007, the arrival of the Intervention at Tjuwanpa my study ground to a halt and eighteen months into my PhD my research project appeared doomed. In combination, the policy reforms meant the future existence of the Resource Centre beyond the middle of 2008 was extremely tenuous. In this context, there would be no outstation service delivery. My research project became irrelevant. What was relevant to people at Tjuwanpa, however, was the Government reform environment. By August 2007 it was apparent that outstation families were struggling to understand what was taking place. With the agreement and support of the Tjuwanpa Manager, I began the process of informing outstation residents about the NTER reforms. As I did so people began to reveal to me how they were understanding and engaging with the changes taking place. My study now took a

⁷⁴ Approval no. ECN-06-53

⁷⁵ Approval no. ECN-07-31

different turn. There was a strong desire on the part of those I had relationships with at Tjwuanpa to have their perspectives understood and communicated. As my work evolved I modified the research focus and in April 2008, requested a refinement of the research topic and new ethics approval.⁷⁶

In the context of my study I did not formally seek written permission from those involved in the study to use their transcripts until almost mid 2009. By that time a picture of the overall research findings had begun to emerge. I made this decision not to seek formal written consent during the early part of my fieldwork. Like others who have engaged with informed consent processes in Australian Aboriginal studies (McGrath & Phillips 2008; Russell et al. 2005) I found that for Western Arrernte people in this Central Desert context, reading a research information sheet and signing a sheet of paper had little meaning and was counterproductive to building the relationships that underpinned the study. I was also guided by my interpretation of indigenous research concerns about the need to be accountable to the people involved in the study (Bishop 2005; Marker 2003). To obtain meaningful consent therefore, people needed to be comfortable with me, have an opportunity to make sense of what I was doing, know what material I would use from our conversations, and feel reassured that there was no danger to themselves or their families as a consequence of their permission. My position reflected similar concerns in research with Maori people (Smith 2005) where, 'Consent is not so much a given for a project or specific set of questions, but for a person, their credibility' (Smith 1999 p.136). As I saw it consent would require both participant's knowledge of what our study would say, and their trust in me that I would act with respect and integrity. I therefore did not seek written consent until I was able to discuss the research findings with those involved in the study.

Prior to requesting written consent I undertook two steps. First I selected the parts of each person's narratives I thought I would use. I then discussed key themes that had emerged from the stories with a small outstation focus group. To arrive at this point I bracketed common storylines in the transcripts. I then used local language

⁷⁶ Approval no. ECN-08-033

constructions to form a preliminary mud-map of characteristics of the experience, behaviour and conditions underpinning outstation engagement in the reforms. This gave me the text that I would draw from as well as a broad schema of the meanings underpinning the text. Following this, I read each of the transcript excerpts to the storyteller concerned and together we discussed and agreed on what they had meant. At this time we also discussed the meanings emerging across all the narratives.

As transcripts were drawn from many different conversations that had taken place over the previous two years, reading the transcripts provided participants with an opportunity to rehear their own dialogue and engage in the process of interpreting the study findings. Interestingly all participants elaborated further on what they had previously talked about with me. These comments added substantial depth to, and at times reshaped my understanding of what the storytellers had previously conveyed. At this time participants were also given the opportunity to have me delete any part of their transcript. None chose to do so. It was only at the end of this process that I sought their written consent. At this time we also discussed their de-identification with participants choosing the name they wished to be known by in the study.

In short, university ethics approvals and informed consent were iterative processes. To remain responsive to local priorities, ethics approvals began with a preliminary feasibility phase. This led to agreement with the Tjuwanpa Committee of Management for my involvement in a study of outstation services. As the study emerged I modified the design and sought two further university ethics approvals. Formal written consents from the storytellers, however, were linked to agreements to use the meanings emerging from selected parts of individual's transcripts.

The importance of relatedness was critical to informed consent in a Western Arrernte context. For the participants, their permission was not reliant on rules of the academy as these had little meaning for them. Rather, participants' consent was granted first through elders agreement to conduct research at Tjuwanpa, then individual's decision to trust me with their stories, and finally, through agreement on the meanings of their narratives. Sharing of their knowledge and experience

was recognition of the trust, care and responsibilities to protect inherent in Western Arrernte relatedness.

A4.3.6 Participant Observation

By immersing myself in the day-to-day life of the Resource Centre on a regular basis I was able to observe outstation resident interactions with Tjuwanpa staff and with government or other visitors to the Resource Centre. Information obtained from my ongoing observation of events is woven through the text to give greater depth to participant narratives. This enables thick description in this study as the storytellers and their actions are contextualised, thus helping the reader to understand the meaning behind selected narratives (Denzin 1989 p.33).

Over the period June 2006 to May 2009 I spent approximately 180 days at the Resource Centre and on the surrounding outstations, with the most intense period of fieldwork occurring in the two years to March 2009. Using my journal I kept a detailed recording of the timing and nature of community and government events, and of outstation visits as they unfolded. I also participated in the occasional meetings of the Outstation Community Management Committee as well as government initiated community meetings at the Resource Centre and in nearby Hermannsburg. On these occasions I noted who attended, who spoke, how information was conveyed, where people sat, and the ways in which those participating interacted. With the Manager's permission, I also sat in on numerous meetings at the office involving official government visitors. In addition, I kept a log of key documents, media releases and fact sheets issued by government.

Together with information from document sources, my regular visits to Tjuwanpa provided thick description of the rhythms of outstation life. I was therefore aware of how funerals, gossip, or news coming through the grapevine of men out west gathering for cultural business played a role in the day-to-day events people were responding to. I learned to hear and understand Aboriginal expressions: '*Gotta do it right way!*', '*I grew them kids up you know*'; and also began to learn '*right way*' in my interactions with people. Angrosino (2008) highlights the critical importance of this in enabling, 'a rounded account of the lives of particular people

with the focus being on individuals and their ever-changing relationships' (p.177).

A4.4 'I am here!': Assessing the methodology

'The ethnographer discovers multiple 'truths' that operate in the social world – the stories people tell one another about the things that matter to them. These stories move people to action, and they rest on a distinction between fact and truth. Truth and fact are socially constructed and people build stories around the meanings of facts. Ethnographers collect and tell these multiple versions of the truth' (Denzin 1997 p.xv).

Research positioned from a critical, communitarian, feminist stand sees reality as always socially constructed from within spaces that are gendered, and historically and culturally defined. Those critiquing research in the indigenous domain stand in this space and challenge the power of research epistemologies that continue the colonisation of indigenous peoples through its shaping of the public narratives of indigenous people's experience and their representation in the world (Martin 2003; Smith 1999). They take the stand that research must be committed to a position where social justice and indigenous self-determination is its aim (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2008). They challenge knowledge claims that are derived outside indigenous epistemologies and cultural practice (Bishop 2005; Marker 2003).

In the early days of my study, the arguments of indigenous scholars and critical theorists made it clear to me that there was a great deal at stake in my research endeavour. How knowledge was constructed, by who, its aims, and who I was to be accountable to for the findings and analysis very much mattered. Claims to knowledge must therefore be accompanied by the ability of the research to answer to ethical concerns and moral imperatives about the authenticity of the study in terms of how it represents and serves the interests, experiences and knowledge of indigenous peoples, and how it is accountable to study participants. Here it is not only trustworthiness of the study or its rigor (Stringer, E. T. 2007) that must be demonstrated, but also the authenticity of its processes and outcomes. The criteria used to assess this are those of fairness, and ontological, educative, catalytic and

tactical authenticity (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Guba & Lincoln 2005). These criteria ask how we know whether the study,

‘ ... is faithful enough to some human construction that we may feel safe in acting on them, or, more importantly, that members of the community in which the research is conducted may act on them?’ (Guba & Lincoln 2005 p.207).

In indigenous research my position as an outsider in the context of Western Arrernte society and history also matters. Studies conducted in the indigenous domain must therefore also address questions about how the non-indigenous researcher has dealt with issues of meaning making inherent in the insider-outsider relationship (Bishop 2005; Jones & Jenkins 2008).

A4.4.1 The study’s trustworthiness

Trustworthiness examines the research from the perspective of the depth and adequacy of the study in reflecting different worldviews and the complexity of the issues being investigated (Stringer, E. T. 2007). It is established through assessment of the study against the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

‘Credibility’ refers to the extent to which the study is able to demonstrate participant trust in the integrity of the research processes and its findings (Stringer, E. T. 2007). In this study, this was achieved through a relational methodology involving prolonged engagement with outstation families at Tjuwanpa over a period of two and a half years. The knowledge shared through day-to-day encounters with members of family groups was deepened by conscious observation of outstation life noted in my journal. Triangulation of the study findings involved hearing multiple and nuanced outstation perspectives concerning the events taking place over time. It also involved outstation storytellers in reviewing their transcripts and discussing the meanings emerging from the study. This provided additional insights and enabled participants to verify and add to the story of their engagement with the state emerging from the research as a whole.

Rather than beginning the study from external theoretical positions, I used expressions from outstation accounts to frame the schema of the study, in this way providing ‘referential adequacy’ (Stringer, E. T. 2007 p.58) to ensure the study reflected outstation participants’ construction of their experience. Using this schema I later drew on studies and historical analysis from the Australian Indigenous literature to further illuminate these understandings. The rich description achieved in the context of this study also provides sufficient details of the events taking place and their context such that those outside the study area can determine its relevance in the context of their own experience and environment – its ‘transferability’.

From an indigenous perspective, credibility and transferability must also deal with the accountability of the researcher to those are involved in or are expected to benefit from the research. Carspecken (1996) argues that critical qualitative research positions truth claims in shared understandings of social reality constituted in subjective ontologies (states of mind, feelings); objective ontologies, (objects or events exist such that any observer will notice and agree on them), and normative-evaluative ontology (existing agreements on the rightness, goodness and appropriateness of types of activity). Truth claims therefore, require ‘consent given by a group of people ... that validates the claim’ (1996 p.21). If consent is a feature of the authenticity of shared understandings, then in an indigenous research paradigm set in a Western Arrernte context, this consent demands more than the affirmation of the participant that they agree to participate in the study. Consent requires that the researcher engage in authentic relationships (Bull 2010) and have, ‘relational accountability’ (Wilson, S. 2001 p.177) for what is said. For Western Arrernte families consent was activated through recognition of particular qualities in my relationship with them – in relatedness, through which they decided to share knowledge with me. This was later formalised through documented written consent once we had agreed on the meanings they wanted to convey, and the use of their voices to illustrate these meanings.

‘Dependability’ and ‘confirmability’ relate to the rigour applied to the research procedures and its documentation. The description of my methodology outlined

here in this chapter, details the procedural steps undertaken in line with university requirements for the design and conduct of the study, as well as those pertaining to work within a Western Arrernte cultural domain. These are documented in university ethics applications and reports, participant informed consent forms, and correspondence from Tjuwanpa supporting the research and its findings. Field data is detailed in verbatim transcripts taken from notes and digital recordings and in daily journal entries, complemented by a detailed chronology of events taking place and descriptive reports about outstation services.

A4.4.2 The study's authenticity

‘Authenticity’ in qualitative studies can be judged on two levels. Firstly the extent to which participant meanings, actions and social context are authentically represented and secondly, the congruence between the research paradigm and the research practice (Fossey et al. 2002). Guba and Lincoln use authenticity to assess the processes and outcomes of the study, and describe authenticity criteria as fairness – or balance; ontological and educative authenticity – a raised level of awareness; and catalytic and tactical authenticity – or the ability of research to prompt action (Guba & Lincoln 2005 p.207). There were two ways in which I sought to achieve this in the study. First was through the use of a culturally situated methodology of relatedness, which emerged from prolonged engagement in the field and found expression in methods based on Western Arrernte ways of doing things and being in their world. Second was my approach to the analysis and presentation of the participant’s narratives through which I endeavoured to raise our consciousness as non-Indigenous Australians of outstation lived experience.

Within the Tjuwanpa environment time, trust, emplacement, and caring enabled an environment in which relatedness emerged and residents felt sufficiently comfortable and safe to share their thoughts and emotions with me. Yarning, rather than formal interviews and predetermined questions was used. This took place according to Western Arrernte preferences regarding who should be involved, when and where. Repeated encounters engendered relatedness and

enabled me to hear different storytellers express themselves over time, to check my understanding of what they had meant, and to place outstation meanings in their social and historical contexts. 'Fairness' in the study was achieved through representation of different perspectives, claims and concerns regarding the events taking place thus ensuring an inclusive voice and balance in the presentation of the findings (Guba & Lincoln 2005). Extended time in the field also permitted me many opportunities to observe formal and informal interactions between visitors and outstation residents across time. This enabled me to draw directly from conversations and to contextualise them in participant's lives as well as the reform environment. The authenticity of the study is therefore drawn from rich and reflective data derived from my emplaced position at Tjuwanpa, privileged through Western Arrernte acknowledgement of relatedness, and derived through cultural practices that enabled people to feel comfortable and safe.

Authenticity, however, also requires 'verisimilitude' (Denzin 1997) – the ability to represent the real in a way that enables the reader to gain an empathic understanding of life through the experience of the text (Chase 2008). This then calls for a particular approach to the analysis and presentation of the narratives. Denzin argues that aim of the narrative is to understand – to hear the story as it was told, not 'turn the story told into a story analysed' (1997 p.249). Chase (2008) states that to do this the researcher has to orient themselves to the storyteller's position, listen carefully to the voices in each of the narratives for diversity within small and large themes, and to make clear the distinction between the researcher's interpretation and that of the storyteller. This required careful listening and reading throughout the transcription process, enabling me to locate multiple voices, differences of opinion and nuanced perspectives of reform events. I subsequently wove these together across common themes using participant expressions to mark central ideas. Excerpts from the stories that emerged in this way were then discussed with participants as a means of checking that I had understood their intended meaning.

The decision to also make extensive use of outstation voices in the text, to position them in the first half of the dissertation, and to use my voice in these chapters only

as a means of contextualising the narratives; was also intended to engage the reader with the storytellers' understandings and perceptions of events and to use my voice and the literature to later expand on these understandings. The ontological and educative authenticity of the study therefore sit in the ability of the study to engage both participants and the reader in a moral critique (Guba & Lincoln 2005) of the events taking place at Tjuwanpa during the first two years of the NTER.

'Catalytic and tactical authenticity' concerns how the study engenders action (Guba & Lincoln 2005). Indigenous writers and others engaged in indigenous research around the world call for transformative studies that,

' ... involves unmasking and deconstruction of imperialism ... alongside a search for sovereignty; for reclamation of knowledge, language and culture; and for the social transformation of the colonial relations between the native and the settler' (Bishop 2005).

Smith describes this as 'the space which create spaces for dialogue across difference; to analyze and make sense of complex and shifting experiences, identities and realities; and to understand little and bid changes that affect our lives' (2005 p.103). Assessment of the value of the study therefore concerns its potential as a transformative act where a consciousness of outstation lived experience (Christians 2005) becomes the means to open the door to an alternative view of what is needed within state Indigenous engagement policy and practice . This view then sets the terms for Indigenous engagement within Western Arrernte values and cultural practice.

The value of the study lies in its potential to reshape our understanding of what it means to be a Western Arrernte mother, father, aunt or grandfather encountering state actions – to feel what it might be like to suddenly find our job in jeopardy; to face the prospect that we may no longer be able to live in our homes; to experience hope, anxiety or confusion as previous understandings and agreements about what was considered best for our families and our children's futures suddenly changes. By giving voice to this experience the study enables us to hear a different

discourse - to feel across difference, to reshape our views of Aboriginal Australians as less than, as failures represented as a 'gap' between us and them. Outstation families are no longer, 'objects of curiosity, and subjects of research, to be seen but not asked, heard or respected' (Martin 2003 p.203). In hearing what they have to say there is practical wisdom about how we might reshape the ways that things are done. In this there is the hope that we might begin to reconstruct the terms of engagement, learning from the experience of those on the '*other*' side of the fence about how *we* might change (Jones & Jenkins 2008).

A4.4.3 Risks inherent in the study

In discussing the research limitations I will focus here on the key risks to the authenticity of my work. Set within a critical indigenous epistemology, the study is not directed at predictive theorising but at understanding local, grounded meanings emerging within a particular social, historical and cultural milieu (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Smith 1999). In this context, there are risks relating to my status as a non-Indigenous researcher. I am a member of the colonising group and an outsider in terms of outstation history and social experience.

From the perspective of those concerned with research in indigenous contexts, the risk is very much about the difference that difference makes – that as a non-indigenous outsider my study creates an 'othering' of outstation people's experience – as people spoken about (Bishop 2005; Evans et al. 2009). There is also the risk that the study attempts 'to *erase* the hyphen' of difference through efforts to demonstrate sameness (Jones & Jenkins 2008 p.474), thus denying indigenous people their 'political, practical and identity survival as *indigenous peoples*' (p.475).

Smith (1999) does not discount the difficulties for non-indigenous researchers, and argues that to counter this risk non-indigenous researchers must focus their work in ways that reshapes colonial notions of where problems lie in the indigenous-colonial encounter. The researcher must also work through methodologies that engage with indigenous systems of knowledge production and authority (Bishop 2005). This implies 'a reframing of the research gaze' (Evans et al. 2009 p.899) so

that the view is that of indigenous people and their interrogation of the policies and programs of the state. In the context of the non-indigenous researcher, Jones and Jenkins (2008) point to the need to orient research to the relationship inherent in the space between. This positions the researcher in projects that seek a deeper understanding of ourselves in relationship to the 'other', rather than focusing on the difference of the 'other' or dismissing the existence of difference.

In this study I sought to do this in two ways. First, by positioning my work in terms of what could be learned from outstation people about the problems for them in engaging with Indigenous policy and programs, and from this, to also learn what the terms of engagement with the state might be from a Western Arrernte perspective. Second, I sought to learn and share through a Western Arrernte methodology of relatedness – being outstation ways of knowing, sharing and respecting.

This position, however, does not dismiss the difficulties inherent in my status as an outsider in Western Arrernte history, culture and society. In discussing the question of cross-cultural criticism, Crocker (2004) outlines the strengths and limitations of insider and outsider positions and urges an insider-outsider combination that permits each to learn from the other, 'and develop a clearer understanding of the limitations in one's own group and its ways of doing things' (Crocker 2004 p.6). Young (2005) similarly explores the insider-outsider question. She makes the point that these positions change in response to context, but that there can be value in studies that position the outsider on the inside. This enables the researcher to locate the voices of those affected by state actions, voices that are often silent in mainstream discourse, and to use their position on the outside to create the space within which they might be heard. As Bishop (1998, 2005) notes, however, I needed to do so on Western Arrernte terms constituted within local relationships and obligations.

As a non-Indigenous researcher I remained an outsider in the context of Western Arrernte history and society. Experience as the 'outsider' in the context of being immersed on the 'inside' at Tjuwanpa, however, helped me establish the relationships within which I could locate who it was that I should work with, and

how I should proceed. It enabled me to operate respectfully within gendered encounters and with those who held seniority. I therefore worked as a non-indigenous outsider within Western Arrernte kinship norms and social practices, enabling me to learn from the voices that are closest to the problems of Western Arrernte engagement with the state. Being linguistically and socially privileged within the outsider culture, I have the opportunity to make public these voices – voices that as the study shows rarely have the capability to be speak and be heard.

This positioning does not imply that there is a diminishing of my position as a privileged, non-Indigenous outsider. I do not claim that it puts me in the same place as those who are part of this study or that I understand the complexities of Western Arrernte lived experience. Rather this outsider on the insider position enables a collaborative process, ‘based on learning (about difference) *from* the Other, rather than learning *about* the Other’ (Jones & Jenkins 2008 p.471) where I endeavoured to use my position of privilege on the outside as a means of sharing what is learned. I also hold a position of privilege as the outsider on the inside, as it was through my relatedness to the storytellers in the study, which gave me their permission to tell what I had learned from them.

A4.5 Conclusion

Two common themes run throughout the indigenous research literature. First is the need to challenge colonial constructions of indigenous identity through research that works with indigenous aspirations and focuses on the structures that maintain indigenous inequality and oppression. A second feature of the literature is the emphasis on culturally appropriate relationship as a cornerstone of methodological processes. Through these relationships research methodologies can emerge that are responsive and accountable to indigenous interests and ways of being.

Positioning my work within an indigenous research paradigm I sought to frame my study as a response to Tjuwanpa outstation concerns about the ways in which governments and other outsiders understood what was important to them for their wellbeing, and how they might have a voice through which they could

communicate and negotiate their position. Through a methodology of relatedness people made known what they wanted to share about their responses to the NTER, agreed to how it would be interpreted, and gave permission for me to share what had been learned.

Positioning my study within an indigenous research paradigm my work did not fit neatly into the rules and practices of the academy. Ethics approval processes assumed a lineal, deductive approach to research – a formulating of aims, elaboration of the topic, and description of methods that privileged institutional priorities and practices. University permission requirements sat uncomfortably alongside ethical principles for the conduct of research with indigenous peoples (Smith 2005), preferencing consent that ignored my accountability to participants for the meanings drawn from the study (Bishop 1998; Marker 2003; Wilson, S. 2001) and the different ways in which Western Arrernte participants enacted informed consent. Increasingly universities in Australia are also bowing to utilitarian and cost pressures that demand that researchers produce works that accord with economic rationalism, in turn assessing research value in terms of published work and completion deadlines. These pressures and processes pose risks to the authenticity of research and its value in providing an avenue for Indigenous citizens to have a voice whereby they might shape their identity and futures on their terms.

In research conducted in the Australian Indigenous domain, I argue that what is needed is a sound grasp of the ethical and epistemological principles underpinning indigenous research so that the study methodology is *responsive* and *accountable* to the field in which it is situated. In the context of Western Arrernte people, this necessitates the researcher have an orientation to a worldview in which relatedness guides the research methodology. It also implies that the aim of the study is to illuminate and inform the practice of Indigenous policy through understanding what is real from the perspectives of those who are impacted by it. Notions of the dispassionate, objective encounter have no place here.

Relatedness, however, rarely conforms to timetables. It cannot be presumed, demanded or controlled according to the exigencies of academic or research

institutions. It is not mirrored in consent forms and information sheets. Research plans and timetables therefore need to remain flexible; the research process emergent and open to change as relationships develop. Consent processes must demand accountability to those who are impacted by the research. This is achieved by grounding the research aims and methodology in the researcher-‘other’ relationship, where difference is valued and offers a means to learn and transform. This also engenders approaches that value trust, caring for and feeling comfortable in the research relationship as well as a commitment to sharing what is learned. It also demands accountability to indigenous people before disseminating what has been understood.

Appendix 5: SCU HREC Ethics Approval

The following Southern Cross University ethics approvals were obtained for the conduct of this research.

Date	Ethics Approval No	Project Name
19 May 2006	ECN-06-53	The effect of increasing household ownership and expanding community government partnerships on extending the lifecycle of desert housing and infrastructure.
20 April 2007	ECN-07-31	The effect of increasing household ownership and expanding community government partnerships on extending the lifecycle of desert housing and infrastructure.
18 April 2008	ECN-08-033	Aboriginal engagement in basic services to very remote outstation communities in the Northern Territory. <i>Previously: The effect of increasing household ownership and expanding community government partnerships on extending the lifecycle of desert housing and infrastructure.</i>
28 May 2009	ECN-09-066	Aboriginal engagement in basic services to very remote outstation communities in the Northern Territory.

Appendix 6: Research Information and Consent

2007: Plain English Informed Consent Form



Tjuwanpa Research

Informed Consent Agreement



Title: The effect of increasing household ownership and expanding community government partnerships on extending the lifecycle of desert housing and infrastructure

Researcher: Annie Kennedy
Southern Cross University
Mob 0408 552 790

Email: annie.kennedy@westnet.com.au

1. I, (please print name) wish to take part in the research project entitled "*The effect of increasing household ownership and expanding community government partnerships on extending the lifecycle of desert housing and infrastructure.*"

2. I have read, or had explained to me, the Information Sheet prepared by Annie Kennedy called *the Tjuwanpa Research Information Sheet* that explains what this project and the research is about.

3. Annie Kennedy has talked to me and told me what I want to know about the project and the research.

4. I agree to take part in the project. I know I can say yes or no. I don't have to answer any question I don't want to. I know that I can change my mind and stop at any time. I also know that I can decide later on not to take part in the research and I don't have to give a reason.

5. I have been given the chance to have a member of my family or a friend with me while the project was explained to me.

6. I agree to have this interview/meeting taped

Or

I agree that Annie Kennedy can write what I say.

7. I agree that information gathered for this project may be published but that my name or other information which might identify me is not used unless I say OK.

8. I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher unless required to do so by law.

9. I understand I will not receive any personal benefit from taking part in the project.

10. I know that the Southern Cross University has said OK to this project.

11. I will be given a copy of this Consent Form and the Information Sheet to keep.

12. I am aware that I can contact Annie Kennedy at any time after the interview. If I have further questions about the study I am free to contact Dr Kurt Seemann who is Annie Kennedy's supervisor at Southern Cross University, on 0427 099 439.

.....
(Signature of participant) (Date)

WITNESS

I have described to
.....
(name of participant)

the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and possible outputs of the research (including publication of research results). In my opinion s/he understood the explanation.

Role in project:
.....

Name:
.....

.....
(signature of Witness) (date)



Tjuwanpa Research Information Sheet



The Research Topic

**“The effect of increasing household ownership
and expanding community government
partnerships on extending the lifecycle of desert
housing and infrastructure”**

Researcher: Annie Kennedy

Southern Cross University

Mob 0408 552 790

Email: annie.kennedy@westnet.com.au

Who are we?

My name is Annie Kennedy and I am working with (names deleted) from the Tjuwanpa Resource Centre and also with (name deleted) from the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT). I am doing research with Dr Kurt Seemann. He is my supervisor and the main researcher. The research story is part of my PhD studies at Southern Cross University and I am interested in learning about how government and communities can work together better. My research is also part of work being done with Dr Mark Moran at the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research. They have a project called *Services that Work* and this project is trying to find ways to improve government services to remote communities in Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia.

What are we doing?

Since last year I have been talking with the team at Tjuwanpa Resource Centre and with CAT about how we can improve the housing and essential services to Tjuwanpa outstations. We also want to try to employ more Tjuwanpa people to fix

things. It all started when (name deleted) went to CAT to ask them for training to help with fixing houses, bores and machines in Tjuwanpa. CAT agreed to send Aboriginal trainers to Tjuwanpa so that (names deleted) could learn to be trainers. The idea is that CAT will train a team of Aboriginal people here in Tjuwanpa, and then the Tjuwanpa trainers will train people on the outstations to do basic repairs and maintenance work.

CAT and Tjuwanpa asked me to help with planning the project and to tell the story about what we are doing and learning. My job is to write down what we are learning about the needs of the outstations for services and what people on the outstations can do for themselves. I will also tell the story about how we are doing the training and how we are involving Aboriginal people in the repair and maintenance of outstations in Tjuwanpa. The Tjuwanpa Board of Management is very interested in this project and what we can learn. They said OK to the project in December 2006.

When the story is written we want to share it with government and other people so that they understand the situation in the outstations better and so they hear the story about how we worked together.

The Northern Territory government is already interested in hearing about the Tjuwanpa story. They are looking for ideas about how government can work with Aboriginal communities and think that the Tjuwanpa experience might be helpful. We will share our story with them from time to time if the Tjuwanpa Board of Management says OK.

How will we work?

Our team will visit each outstation to talk to you about what needs fixing and what you already do to fix things. We also want to talk to you about your plans for living on your outstation and what help you need when things break down. What you tell us will be very important in helping us plan the training and the services in Tjuwanpa. a group of about 12 people who are interested in learning about how to fix things.

We will bring the group of learners with us when we visit. They will help to fix some of the problems that you tell us about. They will be supervised by (names deleted) who will be the people responsible for the work that the learners do. We can't fix everything at once so we will need to come back to your outstation from time to time. When we come back we would also like to hear what you think about the work that was done. We will agree on the time for the next visit with you.

When we go back to the Tjuwanpa Resource centre we will use the information and the stories that you tell us to help us plan our next steps. We will also use it to improve the training and the work that the trainers and the learners are doing. We will also record this information as part of the story we are writing about the project.

The people on the team who will visit your area are (names deleted) and me, Annie Kennedy.

How will you know what is happening?

So that everyone knows what is happening we will be preparing a newsletter that will go out to every family in Tjuwanpa every two months. This will give you information about any new visits that are coming up or new training that is planned. The newsletter will also give you information about what we are learning. We also hope to include information about the changes that are happening in government housing programs.

Permissions

The Tjuwanpa Board of Management and CAT have given permission for their staff to be involved in the research. The Southern Cross University has also given me permission to do the research.

To show that you agree to work with the team and with me you will need you to sign a paper. When you sign the paper it is like saying that you agree to let me use the information you tell us about your house and your outstation as part of our Tjuwanpa story. I may ask to tape some of our conversations but will only do this if you say OK. You can change your mind any time and decide that you don't want me to tell your story. That means you can decide not to join in the research at any time and you don't have to give me a reason. If you change your mind I won't use what you tell me.

I have to sign that paper too. And when I sign the paper it means that I agree only to write what you feel OK about. I can't use your name in the story unless you want me to and I won't write what you say unless you want me to. I will keep the information you give me very safe.

Any Questions or Worries

Dr Kurt Seemann at Southern Cross University is helping me do this study. If you have any questions about what I am doing you can contact Dr Seemann on 0427 099 439.

Thank You

Annie Kennedy (Researcher)

Southern Cross University/ Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre

The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Southern Cross University
has approved this study. The Approval Number is **ECN-07-31**

If you have any problem about the way this research is done contact Ms Suze
Kelly on:

Ph 6626 9139; Fax 6626 9145 or by email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

We will check out the problem but we will not tell anyone your name.

We will also let you know what we find

Plain English Consent Form 2008/2009



Tjuwanpa Research

Informed Consent Agreement



The Research Topic

“Aboriginal engagement in basic services to very remote outstation communities in the Northern Territory”

Researcher: Annie Kennedy

Southern Cross University

Mob 0408 552 790

Email: annie.kennedy@westnet.com.au

1. I, (*please print name*) wish to take part in the research project entitled “Aboriginal engagement in basic services to very remote outstation communities in the Northern Territory

2. I have read, or had explained to me, the Information Sheet prepared by Annie Kennedy called *the Tjuwanpa Research Information Sheet* that explains what this project and the research is about.

3. Annie Kennedy has talked to me and told me what I want to know about the project and the research.

4. I agree to take part in the project. I know I can say yes or no. I don’t have to answer any question I don’t want to. I know that I can change my mind and stop at any time. I also know that I can decide later on not to take part in the research and I don’t have to give a reason.

5. I have been given the chance to have a member of my family or a friend with me while the project was explained to me.

6. I agree to have this interview/meeting taped

Or

I agree that Annie Kennedy can write what I say.

7. I agree that information gathered for this project may be published but that my name or other information which might identify me is not used unless I say OK.

8. I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher unless required to do so by law.

9. I understand I will not receive any personal benefit from taking part in the project.

10. I know that the Southern Cross University has said OK to this project.

11. I will be given a copy of this Consent Form and the Information Sheet to keep.

12. I am aware that I can contact Annie Kennedy at any time after the interview. If I have further questions about the study I am free to contact Dr Kurt Seemann who is Annie Kennedy's supervisor at Southern Cross University, on 0427 099 439.

.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

(Date)

WITNESS

I have described to

.....

(name of participant)

the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and possible outputs of the research (including publication of research results). In my opinion s/he understood the explanation.

Role in project:

Name:

.....

(signature of Witness)

.....

(date)

Plain English Information Sheet 2008



Tjuwanpa Research Information Sheet



The Research Topic

"Aboriginal engagement in basic services to very remote outstation communities in the Northern Territory"

Researcher: Annie Kennedy

Southern Cross University

Mob: 0408 552 790

Email: annie.kennedy@westnet.com.au

What has been happening?

Hello. Many of you know already that my name is Annie Kennedy and I am a researcher with Southern Cross University. I am working with (names deleted) from the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre. Together we are looking at what the people from the Tjuwanpa Outstations think about services that you get on your outstations.

Since last year I have been talking with the Tjuwanpa staff, outstation leaders and also with CAT about how we can improve the housing and essential services to Tjuwanpa outstations. We have been looking at how we can employ more Tjuwanpa people to fix things. CAT has been helping by sending trainers to Tjuwanpa to train up people. CAT is also helping (names deleted) learn to be trainers. The idea is that CAT will train a team of Aboriginal people here in Tjuwanpa, and then the Tjuwanpa people can work on the outstations when things have to be fixed.

This was the idea until July last year. Then we heard that CDEP was stopping at Tjuwanpa. We also heard last year that the new Shires are coming in. These two changes mean that we don't know what will happen to Tjuwanpa after June, 2008. So we don't know how services will be organised for the outstations and

Government isn't sure yet too. We also know from you that many people at Tjuwanpa are thinking about what will happen.

What are we going to do now?

Because we don't know how your services to the outstations will be organised in the future, Tjuwanpa has asked me to work with you to help write down what is important for you. We are doing this so that we can tell government what you think. The things we want to talk to you about are:

- Your ideas about your future plans at your outstation,
- What you think about the help you get now from Tjuwanpa,
- What problems you need help with at the outstation,
- What things you and your family can do for yourself at the outstation,
- What ideas that you have that could improve the way things get done at your outstation.

So far we have listened to some of the outstation leaders and Tjuwanpa staff about what is important for outstation families. We also have some ideas about what training is important for people here and how it should be done. And we also have some ideas from people about better ways to do things. But we want to try to include every outstation in the discussion. So we will be talking more to people over the next couple of months and we would like you talk with us and say what you think.

What will we do with the story you tell us?

The outstation leaders on the Tjuwanpa Board of Management are very interested in what you tell us during the research talks we have with you. It will help them to tell government what outstation families think. It will also help government understand what we are learning about the way to do training with Aboriginal people here.

I will also use what you tell me as part of a story I am writing for my PhD studies at Southern Cross University. A PhD is a bit like writing a book but a bit harder. In my story I want to write about what you say is important for Aboriginal people living on outstations. I am hoping that your story will help government people understand better about how to work with Aboriginal people in the desert. There are some other people in other parts of Australia who are writing about this kind of story too. They are with the Desert Knowledge mob and they are talking to Aboriginal people in Western Australia, Queensland, Ali Carang and to the Pitjantjarra mob in South Australia. We are all hoping that if we can tell your story, the government will understand people in the desert better.

How will we work?

Our team will visit each outstation to talk to you. We are going to listen carefully to what you say and write it down. Then we are going to put all of your ideas together. Before we write the story we will check with the outstation leaders and Tjuwanpa that the story we have is the same one you told us. If they give us the OK then we will talk with government people about what you say.

How will you know what is happening?

So that everyone knows what is happening we will be preparing a newsletter that we will put in your mailbox and on the notice board at Tjuwanpa and at the Top Shop in Ntaria. We'll do this every couple of months. If we want to make any new visits or tell you about any special meetings we will put a notice on the Tjuwanpa board and in your mailbox.

Permissions

I will ask to tape some of our conversations but will only do this if you say OK.

If you agree to let me use the information you tell me as part of our Tjuwanpa story you will need to say OK. If later on you are not sure, you can change your mind and tell me you don't want me to write your story. Or you can ask me to leave special bits out that you don't want other people to know about.

It's important that you understand that you can decide not to join in the research at any time and you don't have to give me a reason. If you change your mind and don't want me to tell your story I won't use what you tell me. I can only write what you feel OK about. I can't use your name in the story unless you want me to and I won't write what you say unless you want me to. I will keep the information you give me very safe.

Any Questions or Worries

Dr Kurt Seemann from Southern Cross University is helping me out and checking on my work. If you have any questions about what I am doing you can call Dr Seemann on 0427 099 439.

If you have any problem about the way this research is done contact Ms Suze Kelly on Ph 6626 9139; Fax 6626 9145 or by email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au. We will check out the problem but we will not tell anyone your name. We will also let you know what we find.

The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Southern Cross University has approved this study. The Approval Number is **ECN-08-033**

If you have any problem about the way this research is done contact Ms Suze Kelly on:

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We will check out the problem but we will not tell anyone your name.

We will also let you know what we find

Appendix 7: Glossary of Terms

‘uwa’	‘Yes’; ‘That’s right’.
Basics card	The Basics Card is an Eftpos card that enables Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to access income managed Centrelink benefits. It was introduced in 2008 and its use is restricted to particular retail outlets.
Book-up	A common practice in many Aboriginal communities where grocery items and fuel are purchased on credit at the local store.
‘cheeky’	To be badly behaved, rude or aggressive.
‘flash’	As in flash car or flash clothes. This is slang for fancy, expensive or designer consumer goods.
‘gamen’	Not being truthful/honest
‘grannies’	Grandchildren
‘growl’	To growl at someone is to get cross or angry with them.
holiday camps	From time to time the Lutheran Missionaries used to organise holiday camps, which enabled Aboriginal people to take leave of the Hermannsburg settlement to camp on their homelands.
‘humbug’	Annoying or pestering behaviour, usually associated with requests for cash or other goods or favours.
‘humpy’	Aboriginal shelter made of available materials – commonly of tree branches and sheets of corrugated iron.
Kaporilya Day	Held on the first weekend in October, Kaporilya Day is an annual event that celebrates the day the water flowed through the five-mile long pipeline from Kaporilya Springs to the Finke River

	Mission in Hermannsburg.
‘mara’	‘Good’; ‘alright’.
ngura	Country to which people belong. They may use this country provided they are able to take care of it (<i>kanyintjaku</i>).
‘pituri’	Leaves of a shrub containing nicotine which have a long history of use as chewing tobacco in Aboriginal society.
ration days	Rations were distributed to Western Arrernte people from the early days of the Lutheran Mission. Later government policy used rations to contain Aboriginal people to designated settlement areas. Ration days is a term symbolic of Aboriginal dependency and powerlessness before the granting of citizenship rights in the 1967 referendum.
Remote Area Exemption	A Centrelink ruling, which exempted Aboriginal people classified as living in very remote areas from seeking work and relaxed the rules pertaining to when clients were required to submit Centrelink forms.
‘ridin’	Putting pressure on someone.
sorry-business	Activities and rituals associated with a person’s death are called sorry business. This involves responsibilities such as visiting the affected family, attending the funeral or moving away from the place where the person lived. It can also mean that family set up and reside in camps on clan land, sometimes for many months.
swag	Bedroll, where the mattress and sleeper are enclosed in a canvas cover.
tjurrunga	Depending on the context in which it is used, tjurrunga are the sacred objects or rituals representing the ancestral beings, or the rituals used to maintain the orderly functioning of the world. The

	tjurrunga sets down the general rules or laws for social and ritual behaviours.
top-up	Top-up was income earned from any paid work undertaken over and above the compulsory 15 hours of CDEP work.
up Top	The northern region or Top End of the Northern Territory
walytja	The system of extended kinship, which determines roles, authority and pathways for communication and obligation. Also referred to as <i>walytjatjuta</i> .
Yeperenye	One of the shopping malls in central Alice Springs.
‘kadaicha’	Frightening Aboriginal spirit – <i>Kaidaicha man</i> (also sometimes spelled as kadaitcha).
‘kanyini’	Our capacity as individuals to respect and care for people, country and animal life. To be mindful or to attend to something spiritually (Also <i>Kanyinjaku</i>).
‘kanyintjaku’	Embodies the practice of taking care of country.
‘karunpa’	A person’s life force.

Appendix 8: List of Acronyms

ABA	Aboriginal Benefits Account
ABTA	Aboriginal Benefits Trust Account
ALRA	Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. This Act preceded the Native Title Act . The Commonwealth effectively used its powers in the Northern Territory to grant Aboriginal title over Aboriginal reserves, the Hermannsburg and Santa Teresa missions in Central Australia, and the Delissaville area near Darwin. Land Trusts hold title on behalf of the Traditional Owners. Title is inalienable and equivalent to freehold title. Reflecting customary practice, however, land is held communally. The ALRA also provides for Land Councils who represent traditional owners on matters relating to Aboriginal lands.
APO NT	Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory
APSC	Australian Public Service Commission
ARDS	Aboriginal Resource and Development Service
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program (Commonwealth Government)
Cert IV	Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. A nationally accredited training program for people wanting training qualifications
Centrelink	The Commonwealth agency responsible for family and income support payments

CHINS	Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey
CHIP	Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (Commonwealth Government)
CLC	Central Land Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (Commonwealth Government)
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training (NT Government)
DK CRC	Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre
FaCS	Department of Families and Community Services (Commonwealth Government). An earlier name given to the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
FaCSIA	Department of Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth Government). This title depicts the addition of Indigenous Affairs under the Department as a result of the abolition of ATSIC.
FaHCSIA	Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth Government). Indicates incorporation of housing under Departmental arrangements, introduced by the Rudd Government in 2008.
Hermannsburg	The name given by the Lutheran Finke River Mission to the settlement established around the mission and known locally as Ntaria.

Homelands	Small decentralised communities of close kin, established by the movement of Aboriginal people to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them. Also known as outstations.
IBA	Indigenous Business Australia
ICC	Indigenous Coordination Centre (Commonwealth Government). Established to facilitate coordination of Indigenous programs funded by Commonwealth Government departments.
ICHO	Indigenous Community Housing Organisation. Until 2006 remote area Indigenous housing was primarily the responsibility of local housing organisations funded under the Commonwealth Government's Community Housing and Infrastructure Program through various State and Territory entities.
IHANT	Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Government)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator. The term is applied to the conditions that are required to be met under Commonwealth grant funding
NAATI	National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters
NAHS	National Aboriginal Health Strategy
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap), June 2009. Represents agreement by the Council of Australian Governments on the measures and framework to implement the <i>Closing the Gap</i> on Indigenous disadvantage policy.
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NTAIS	Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response. Announced by the Howard Government on June 21, 2007 and underpinned by legislation

promulgated in August, 2007.

NT Emergency Task Force	The group tasked with overseeing the implementation of the federal government's Emergency Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.
NT	Northern Territory
Ntaria	Western Arrernte name for the Hermannsburg township located 130 kilometers to the south-west of Alice Springs.
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. An organisation of 30 developed countries committed to the principles of representative democracy and the free market economies.
OIPC	Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (Commonwealth Government)
Outstation	Small decentralised communities of close kin, established by the movement of Aboriginal people to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them. Also known as homelands.
PMC	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
Remote Area Exemption	Until July 1 2007 Centrelink clients receiving Newstart and Youth Allowances were exempted from normal Centrelink provisions which required that these clients demonstrate efforts to seek work and comply with work participation requirements. These provisions had recognised difficulties in fulfilling these requirements for those people living in remote and very remote communities.
RIAS	Remote Indigenous Accommodation Service
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
Sorry camp	An area where people gather after the death of a family member. Houses or outstations may be emptied and left vacant following a

death and the term sorry camp may also be applied in this instance. Houses and outstations can sometimes remain unoccupied for many years.

SCU	Southern Cross University
SRA	Shared Responsibility Agreement
tjukurpa	The bonding of people to each other, the land and everything that inhabits the land. Also referred to as the Dreaming.
TO	Traditional Owner. This term is given to those who are the registered owners of the land under the NT Aboriginal Lands Rights Act, 1975.
Top Up	Top up payment is a colloquial term used to describe wages paid to CDEP participants above the Average Per Participant payment rate
TORC	Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Incorporated

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