

Service Value and Exchange Models in the Ethnographic Literature

SECTION 3.1

Introduction

This Chapter develops the thesis by clarifying a number of important interpretive and methodological issues involved in theorising service relations cross-culturally. In the last Chapter, I outlined a significant homology or correspondence between service conceptions in liberal-democratic political theory and Myers' analysis of the Western Desert ideology *kanyininpa* [as looking after]. In exploring this connection, I considered Myers' claim that the Pintupi were inclined to think highly of White 'bosses' who 'helped' and 'looked after' them. Following Hamilton (and Myers), I interpreted Aboriginal attributions of boss-ship as part of a more general strategy aimed at incorporating Whites within an economy of service exchange: the same structured field of reciprocal obligation Myers identified with Western Desert constructions of relatedness. However, rather than pursue the idea that some White 'bosses' did understand or appreciate the rudiments of a service economy based on nurturance and generosity, Myers found that Western Desert and European concepts of authority were irreconcilably opposed, incommensurable and 'lacking in co-ordinate concepts of value'.

This Chapter challenges the view that shared concepts of value and equivalence are necessary for coordinated social interaction and exchange. Section 3.2 begins this critical process by comparing Myers' ethnography with Sackett's interpretation of 'welfare colonialism' at Wiluna, describing some of the ways in which the two authors depict non-Aboriginal agency and its bearing on Aboriginal autonomy. In reviewing Sackett's account, I follow Paine in stressing the importance of distinguishing patronage from brokerage in postcolonial situations, particularly where issues of 'power', 'value' and 'interests' are being examined. The failure to distinguish the roles of patron, broker and client situationally is not uncommon in the ethnographic literature, leading in some cases to the categorical alignment of 'non-Aboriginal interests' (or Whites or some other diacritic of European ethnicity) with forms of administrative and colonial power deemed harmful to Aboriginal interests and autonomy. The discussion presented in Section 3.2 of this Chapter, however, indicates that concepts of power, value and autonomy should not be confused, or aligned too closely, with issues of cultural identity, as what is valued in exchange (from a transactional perspective) may not always be adequately understood or explained in racial or ethnic terms.

Section 3.3 takes up Merlan's call for the development of a 'service framework for understanding value in Aboriginal social contexts, one in which being for, doing and giving are valued as "help"' (1991:259). Unfortunately, Merlan fails to extend her discussion to include the participation of Whites in Aboriginal service economies, presumably because her analytical focus was on Aboriginal practice, not on the dynamics of social interaction from a cross-cultural perspective. Nor is she alone in this regard. Most anthropologists who have examined the issue seem content to leave Whites outside Aboriginal service economies, the effect of which has been to reinforce the impression that there are no significant points of articulation between Aboriginal and administrative constructions of power, value and authority.²⁰

Section 3.4 approaches the issue of conjunctive power relations from a transactional perspective, using Paine's critical review of Barth's *Models of Social Organisation* to highlight key assumptions in Barth's theory of brokerage and cultural integration. Paine argues that Barth's transactionalism is predicated on assimilationist logic: the idea that interaction between people of different cultural backgrounds 'both requires and generates a congruence of codes and value' (Barth 1966; cited in Paine 1974:24). Paine, on the other hand, maintains that, in many instances, 'a broker is interested in sustaining a level of *value-differences* between his clients, not in eliminating them' (1974:24). In support of this proposition, he invokes Wallace's (1964) theory of cultural integration, outlined in *Culture and Personality* in the early 1960s.

Unlike Barth, Wallace maintains that social interaction and exchange need not, as a rule, generate 'cognitive uniformity', shared understandings or common value-orientations. Nor, in his view, should shared understanding or common value-orientations be considered essential prerequisites for coordinated exchange behaviour. On the contrary, Wallace argues that human beings have an inherent capacity to interpret and understand overt behaviour without fully comprehending one another's motives or value-orientations. On the whole, Paine supports Wallace's contention, that cooperative relations may be sustained by 'complexly linked equivalence structures that make behaviour mutually predictable even when it is not fully understood' (quoted from Paine 1974:6). This leads Paine to conclude that the measure of a broker's success may not be the elimi-

20 There are exceptions. Rowse, for example, examines 'paternalism's changing reputation' in the Northern Territory cattle industry, arguing that cooperative exchange relations between White pastoralists and Aboriginal stockmen were, in many instances, sustained by a sense of fairness, balanced reciprocity and familiarity. For Rowse, recognition of mutual obligation and a sense of reciprocity governed by something more than just monetary considerations seems paramount. His position on the issue of conjunctive exchange relations, however, becomes clearer when he sympathises with another writer (McGrath) for trying to 'find the dynamics of cultural continuity under permissive pastoral colonialism' [ie. in the form of benevolent paternalism]. Here, I take a similar approach by theorising exchange modalities that accommodate different constructions of value, the effect of which, in Bourdieu's terms, would be to 'euphemise' forms of administrative power in ways that, on the surface at least, appear compatible with both Western Desert and liberal-democratic concepts of authority (as looking after).

nation of value-differences or cultural assimilation, but the capacity to exploit significant points of articulation between different spheres of value without offending the intrinsic values that define a person's social and cultural identity most conclusively.

In Section 3.5 I review Gouldner's seminal paper, 'The Norm of Reciprocity', written a year before *Culture and Personality* was first published in 1961 (1960:161-78). Like Wallace, Gouldner concerns himself with instrumental acts and exchange practices, claiming that reciprocity norms perform important functions as 'starting mechanisms' in all societies. However, unlike Wallace, Gouldner's critical revision of Parsonian functionalism takes power differences as given, enabling exploration of some the ways in which very general and *culturally* non-specific 'reciprocity norms' engender feelings of obligation and indebtedness, thereby inhibiting 'the emergence of exploitative relations which would undermine the social system and the very power arrangements which [make] exploitation possible' (1960:174). Here, Gouldner employs the notion of 'compensatory mechanisms', cultural norms and prescriptions that stabilise social systems by controlling endemic tensions resulting from perceived breakdowns in reciprocity.

Gouldner's concept of compensatory mechanisms, stabilising power relations and resolving endemic tensions recalls Bourdieu's notion of 'euphemised' power, where we are reminded of the importance, for those interested in maintaining any given system of power, of converting formally-designated and officially-sanctioned authority into forms of 'symbolic capital' (i.e. socially recognised forms of status, value and exchange) not yet 'dominated' or 'appropriated' by the capitalist market system (Bourdieu 1977:179,191). For Bourdieu, this makes exchange across different domains of value intrinsically ambiguous and equivocal, simply because the meaning or significance of a transaction need not conform to the instrumental logic of any particular domain of practice (cf. Gregory 1982). In this sense, what makes service relations between people of different cultural backgrounds inherently equivocal are the different meanings people attribute to transactions, not only from their own distinctive cultural viewpoint but from the point of view of the different subject positions they occupy within their own social milieu. Perhaps the most appropriate analogy here is of multiple spheres or regimes of social value, each sphere lending a different complexion or valence to practices that, from the point of view of any one subject position, seem relatively unproblematic. The problem with this analogy, however, is that people operating in cross-cultural contexts rarely confine themselves to social situations that conform to their own cultural expectations. More often than not, they move between (or across) different spheres of value, bringing their own cultural preconceptions to bear on a world that, as Sahlins (1985:145) put it, 'has its own reasons' for being.

Section 3.6 notes similarities between Sahlins' phenomenology of symbolic action and Wallace's view that innovative culture change involves some form of redefinition or recombination of existing cultural models in practice. Both writers view systemic change as a novel recombination of existing cultural elements, brought about by 'the quasi-independence of perception from the "objective" reality of

nature' (Sahlins 1985:122). In Sahlins' model, this perceptual autonomy gives rise to semantic slippage as conventional cultural categories and symbolic forms undergo 'practical reevaluation' over time. Consequently, Sahlins' theory of symbolic action is well able to account for the manner in which service conceptions and *kanyininpa* (or 'looking after') are transposed into different spheres of social action, leading in some cases to novel and innovative cultural transformations. Section 3.6 concludes this Chapter by summarising the general framework of Sahlins' model with a view to discussing its broader implications for the thesis in Chapter Eight.

SECTION 3.2

Administrative patrons or cultural brokers?

Exchange models and the depiction of non-Aboriginal agency in the ethnographic literature

In describing developments at Wiluna through the 1970s Sackett argued that White Advisers, Project Officers and administrators were instrumental in contributing to the fragmentation of the Ngangganawili Aboriginal community. Historically, he portrayed the departure of Wiluna's mission regime and employment of Whites under government self-management policies as a change of command, a shift from 'domination by "bosses" [missionaries and pastoralists] to regulation by advisers and administrators' [non-Aboriginal employees of Aboriginal community organisations] (1990:202). Unlike the Seventh Day Adventist missionaries who administered Wiluna before self-management policies were introduced in the 1970s, White Advisers and community workers were either employed directly by the Ngangganawili Community or by government agencies charged with developing enterprises at Wiluna. Yet according to Sackett, contrary to government expectations, the new policies and administrative arrangements failed to produce the beneficial effects intended. Rather than increasing Aboriginal autonomy and economic independence, the new policies fostered community reliance on welfare subsidies and outside expertise, setting 'whites and Aborigines against each other in new ways' (1990:202). As a result, Whites responsible for overseeing the development of Wiluna's promising horticultural and emu enterprises were pitted against one another and their Aboriginal clients in competition for government funding and support.

Sackett's interpretation of conflict and competition at Wiluna is indicative of a wider anthropological corpus that is critical of the way successive Australian governments implement and promote self-management policies as essentially liberating.²¹ Sackett argues this overly optimistic and somewhat cynical exer-

cise in self-promotion could not be further from the truth. As State-sponsored development agents, Whites employed at Wiluna adhered to a paternalistic ethos that undermined Aboriginal autonomy, fostering values and practices that were inconsistent with the people's traditional lifestyle. Hence, while the expulsion of a member of the community in response to a dispute over splitting the organisation's finances resolved a major rift between Aboriginal employees and their White bosses, the resolution of the crisis took a characteristically non-Aboriginal turn: 'For the first time in the community's history an individual was expelled from the group' (1990:213). For Sackett, the man in question was just 'another casualty in the internecine jockeying among all community employees' (1990:213), his expulsion being a direct result of competition for control over economic resources. Rather than enjoying the benefits of economic independence, the Ngangganawili community had unwittingly become a 'victim of the operation of machinery allegedly put in place to rescue and serve it' (1990:214).

Sackett's description of events before the man's departure from Wiluna suggests an alternative explanation for the community's actions. The proposal to split the community's finances had been mooted by a non-Aboriginal Project Officer supervising the Desert Farms' enterprise. Not long after he aired the proposal, a meeting was called to discuss the matter and, according to Sackett, almost everyone who attended opposed the motion. In what must have been the final word on the matter, an Aboriginal man from the Village stood up and affirmed the meeting's resolution. Sackett's hapless victim, the only dissenting voice, expressed his objection angrily, physically threatening those who spoke openly against the proposal. Needless to say, his threats and disregard for the consensus decision reached caused considerable indignation and anger. As Sackett recalled, his subsequent expulsion was interpreted by many Whites and Aboriginal employees after the meeting as an appropriate response: 'Allocating blame and castigating a culprit were interpreted as discovering and implementing a resolution' (1990:213).

Myers' (1986a) account of a similar meeting at Papunya in 1981 suggests an alternative explanation for the Wiluna mob's reaction. On this occasion, a meeting of the Papunya Council had been called to discuss the establishment of a separate administrative body for Pintupi people living in surrounding outstations. Those who called the meeting wanted to sever financial links with the Papunya Council and establish funding and bank accounts of their own. The proposal had already been floated prior to the meeting, but the Pintupi wanted to air their intentions in the presence of officers from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and members of the Papunya Council. When the meeting eventually took place, Myers was struck by the reluctance of older Pintupi men to state their case. Rather than offend their official guests and relatives from Papunya, they played down their desire to establish a separate administrative body, emphasising instead their continuing allegiance to the Papunya Council.

Myers argues the Pintupi did not see this apparent lack of assertiveness as a back down. As one man explained to him afterwards, they fully intended to pursue their development goals later on, with or without the support of the Papunya

21 Given the wide-ranging nature of this corpus I can only point to some of the material available (cf. Tonkinson and Howard 1990; Palmer 1990; Stanton 1990; Howard 1982; von Sturmer 1982; Rowse 1992).

Council. Yet to pursue them openly and wilfully, without regard for others, would constitute a serious breach of Pintupi etiquette. Such flagrant disregard for the feelings and interests of others in a meeting would not only be impolite, it would be tantamount to 'setting up a fight'. When one man finally stated that the community really wanted 'separate money, separate banking', Myers interpreted his actions as a 'violation of common meeting practice' (1986a:430).

Myers' analysis highlights the overriding importance Pintupi elders placed on 'sustaining relatedness' in the settlement context, where development issues continually threatened disunity:

To understand the significance of meetings – the work they do – we must begin to place them within the social relations of their use. The tension between 'relatedness' and 'differentiation' (as expressed in conflict and violence) defines the central dilemma for Pintupi life and is the field in which meetings are to be understood...So great is the emphasis on open sociality that it comes to dominate the ability of any group to define itself as a bounded entity ... Conflict and intimidation are regular occurrences in Pintupi communities as individuals try to influence each other...Fighting is not so much an attempt at dominance as an assertion of autonomy. In this sense, *conflict and relatedness define each other structurally as values. Ultimately, they are two different trajectories of autonomy* [my emphasis]. Thus, fighting and threat are commonly understood as responses to the rejection of relatedness (1986a:434).

Myers' emphasis on 'relatedness' as a central value in Pintupi politics suggests an intriguing alternative explanation as to why the Wiluna mob responded so forcefully to one man's flagrant 'violation of common meeting practice'. Rather than being a reflection of 'factionalism' or 'fragmentation' caused by non-Aboriginal interventions (in this case, the administrative requirement that Western Desert groups incorporate separately in order to achieve desired development objectives), Myers' analysis suggest his actions may well have been interpreted as a rejection of 'relatedness', as an indication of his stubborn and wilful refusal to accept the consensus decision reached. This explanation seems consistent with Myers account of Western Desert decision-making conventions and Sackett's own account of the meeting's resolution.

That Myers and Sackett offer different interpretations for similar phenomena should not seem surprising. While Sackett focuses on the social and political repercussions of externally derived development initiatives, Myers emphasises continuities in Aboriginal cultural politics and the problems that Pintupi encounter in representing their interests to outside agencies. Consequently, despite the fact that both writers view conflict as endemic in the settlement context, they adopt essentially different perspectives on what the most likely causes of that conflict are. In the case described by Myers, for example, the political and financial conditions of outstation development (i.e. the requirement that Aboriginal groups legally incorporate in order to receive government financial

assistance) required the Pintupi to act in unaccustomed ways. However, in the final analysis, their adherence to 'common meeting practice' led to a different outcome from that described by Sackett at Wiluna. By stressing their common allegiance to 'one country, one Council', the Pintupi established a degree of good will that enabled fruitful discussion of a difficult issue later on.

We can only conjecture why things turned out differently at Wiluna.²² Most apparent are the different analyses each writer brings to bear on similar phenomena. Sackett's focus on the disintegrative effects of government policy and non-Aboriginal interventions suggests a different perspective on local-level politics from that presented in *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*. As we saw in Chapter Two, in Myers' book White Advisers, Project Officers and the like are characterised as 'instruments of the local system' (1986b:285). As outsiders, they suffered at the hands of Pintupi councillors, many of whom skilfully avoided political responsibility for their actions by asking their 'boss' to ratify unpopular Council decisions. Sackett, on the other hand, portrayed the Wiluna mob as hapless victims of interventions that were essentially undermining community autonomy and increasing Aboriginal dependence on White outsiders.

In helping make sense of these theoretical differences, Rowse (1993a) describes two romantic views of Aboriginality: the first constitutes a state-centred framework in which Aboriginal politics is seen as an artifact of externally-induced change; the second, 'owes its existence not to modes of colonial power but to 'Aboriginal life' itself, function[ing] as a kind of authentic critical reference point' from which state-centred accounts of Aboriginal political life can be examined (1993a:57). In these terms, Sackett's interpretation belongs to the first category of inquiry and Myers' to the second.

As Marcus and Fischer (1986:77) point out, combining the best of interpretive ethnography with political economy perspectives promises useful insights into the way local cultures and political processes are structured and transformed by larger impersonal systems of power. If Sackett's analysis were applied to Myers' account, for example, it would seem plausible to argue that one of the two different 'trajectories of autonomy' Myers refers to (namely, the potential for conflict) is conditioned by political and economic circumstances over which the Pintupi have very little control; the requirement, for example, that groups legally incorporate and set up separate administrative arrangements in order to achieve development objectives. Nevertheless, Myers' ethnography demonstrates how the Pintupi resolve potentially divisive issues by diplomatically reaffirming the value of 'relatedness' in decision-making contexts. This implies that 'relatedness' as a value-system is maintained largely intact despite pressures emanating from the wider society.

²² From Sackett's work and observations made during the course of my own research, Wiluna's social history, demography and economic value from the point of view of development agencies (eg. the area has ample underground water, is close to mining and pastoral areas and operated as a rail depot in the past) is far different from the situation at Yayayi where Myers conducted much of his fieldwork. This perhaps explains the enthusiasm shown by government agencies for enterprise development at Wiluna.

That Myers stresses cultural continuities and Sackett focuses on externally induced change underscores the radically different theoretical orientations each writer applies to power relations and conflict locally. In Myers' account, Aboriginal autonomy does not seem constrained, limited or thwarted by external influences. In the opening chapter of *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, for example, he argues that 'a particular set of historical circumstances ... governed [his] encounter with the Pintupi - namely, that the introduction of self-determination policies led to 'the withdrawal of government authority over settlements'. Hence, the Pintupi 'were now living in an autonomous community without government supervision' (1986b:21). In contrast, Sackett presents the reader with an image of total encapsulation, implying that Aboriginal autonomy and practice are ultimately determined and conditioned by government policy and non-Aboriginal agency.

Consider for a moment the model of postcolonial exchange relations implied in Sackett's account. His depiction of White missionaries, administrators, employees and public servants as administrative patrons and agents of externally-induced change posits two opposed systems, one indigenous, the other Euro-Australian, establishing the sense in which core values, interests and practices belong essentially to one or the other ethnic category. Access to and control over these values are attributed to those who, in racial or ethnic terms, are most readily identified with them. Non-Aboriginal agency, in this sense, is a function of an analytically-defined and imperative ethnic identity, and the role of White brokers or intermediaries standing *between* two cultural systems, enabling a *two-way flow of value*, is pared down to the role of White patrons transacting goods and services over which only they have access and control.²³

This apparent failure to distinguish patronage from brokerage is common in the ethnographic literature. Paine (1971:8,15), however, points out that the distinction is crucial to an understanding of exchange relations in postcolonial situations, noting that a patron's capacity to determine which values 'circulate' in relationships with clients enables them to manipulate the terms of exchange in accordance with their own interests and outlook. Brokers, on the other hand, stand between two value-systems as intermediaries, transacting values over which they have limited access and control. Consequently, brokers are often constrained by their structural position (*viz.* that, from the perspective of clients, the values they help secure are not their own and derive ultimately from some other source).

23 In reviewing the anthropological literature on interethnic relations in Fourth World contexts, Paine (1980:6) glosses Barth's view of ethnic identity as 'an 'imperative status', an attribute of person that exists despite alternative definitions of the situation. In using the term 'imperative ethnic identity' here, I mean to suggest that Whites are depicted in Sackett's account as inextricably tied to a definition of their role as cultural outsiders pursuing objectives consistent with the political and administrative aims of colonial agencies. Later, I take issue with this position, arguing that long-serving Whites may be better characterised as brokers (rather than patrons) operating across cultural boundaries. Theories of patronage seem well suited to an analysis of colonial power relations and theories of welfare colonialism generally. I doubt, however, that they fully explain power relations in postcolonial contexts where the sympathetic mediation of cultural differences is actively encouraged by government agencies and Aboriginal organisations.

Nonetheless, they may make 'purposive changes of emphasis and/or content' (Paine 1971:21) and have an interest in ensuring the continual flow of goods and services between different spheres of value and exchange.

It would be interesting to speculate further as to why Sackett's identification of Whites with patronage is particularly well suited to a theory of welfare colonialism. However, it is perhaps sufficient to note here that if either Sackett or Myers had rigorously applied Paine's transactional model they would have been forced to acknowledge, as numerous other anthropologists have done, that for pragmatic reasons Whites often need to distance themselves from a presumption of patronage. Brody (1977:206-7) argues that this feature of postcolonial administrative practice is critical to an understanding of power relations in Fourth World indigenous settlements.²⁴ Unlike Sackett, he leaves no doubt that 'role selectivity' constitutes an important facet of administrative practice, such that the roles of patron-broker-client depend 'upon the situational context for their recognition' and 'may be embraced alternatively or even in combination by the same person' (Brody 1977: 207; cited from Paine 1971).

Sackett's theory of welfare colonialism contains an implicit notion of what Aboriginal clients and White patrons 'value' in exchange; namely that, despite obvious and significant differences in cultural outlook and economic position, both parties share a common overriding 'interest' in the fruits of economic development. For Sackett, this shared 'interest' in 'development and the resources accompanying it now constitutes a major new arena of disputation, as Aboriginal clients gossip and argue over perceived special privileges and perquisites one or another coterie supposedly receives to the exclusion of others'. Hence, '... project officers and managers can and do use their patronage positions in attempting to influence things to their own advantage', threatening loss of 'jobs or equipment' as a way of maintaining loyalty to themselves and the enterprises they control' (1990:210). The effect of this manipulative strategy, it seems, has been to create emerging divisions or 'horizontal splits' in the community based on factionalism:

Just as all workers in the community have affiliations with a particular workplace, so they have special relationships with their bosses. In the same way the officers and managers have come to trust workers to perform tasks in an established manner, so labourers look toward their 'boss' with certain expectations. Importantly, they frequently call upon them for assistance of one type or another. For instance, if employees want to obtain positions for visiting kin, they will not, if they work at Emu Farm, go to the Project Officer or manager of Desert Farms, but rather they will approach their own 'boss'. Likewise, if they need a salary advance, they will speak to the officer who heads the scheme where they work (Sackett 1990:210).

24 This is more or less Brody's point, although he starts by acknowledging that Whites working in Inuit settlements in the Canadian East Arctic are both patrons and brokers, since they stand between government patrons and the Inuit, yet their institutional authority and influence are so critical to the Inuit that they are often treated as patrons.

Had he examined the strategic implications of brokerage (e.g. how Whites conveniently distance themselves from expectations of patronage, often by claiming their hands are tied by council and government regulations) or examined the broader social and cultural significance of 'boss-ship' (e.g. do all White 'bosses' limit their obligations to the work sphere or do Aboriginal attributions of boss-ship reflect expectations generated in other contexts?), Sackett may have shed further light on the way different cultural constructions of value, identity and social worth articulate with and support wider structures of power. One consequence, for example, of his apparent conflation of boss-ship and patronage is that the predicaments of White boss-brokers, balancing the competing and often conflicting expectations of government and community, do not figure strongly in his analysis. Nor is there any sense (as there is in Myers' ethnography) in which the Wiluna mob sustained 'relatedness' as a value-system by making Whites 'instruments of the local system' (1986b:285). Rather, Sackett presents an image of total encapsulation, leaving readers with the impression that Aboriginal relatedness and autonomy are being systematically undermined by non-Aboriginal agency and Aboriginal people's desire for 'goods' circulating within the local cash economy.

SECTION 3.3

Service value and service modalities of exchange in the ethnographic literature

I would like to clarify my critical summary of Sackett's theory of welfare colonialism at Wiluna by raising a central issue that has emerged in more recent accounts of Aboriginal political life. The issue concerns the significance of European concepts of value for political relations between Aborigines and the State. Rowse, for example, discusses Gerritsen's work among Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, where he speaks of an 'ethnocentric or, at best, ill-considered concept of "goods"' (1992:26). For Rowse, Gerritsen's depiction of organisational politics in south-east Arnhem Land suggests people in the region have adopted a 'cargo' mentality, struggling over material goods, rather than something that belongs, quintessentially, to Aboriginal tradition:

'Goods' originating within the Aboriginal domain do not figure in his account of politics. That is, his account of Aboriginal politics seems to rest on an unargued assumption that what is at stake in politics is the flow of material goods. Although he concedes that it is the prestige and status which goods confer, not just their utility or monetary value, which excites Aborigines' competitive interest, he is nonetheless fixated on those goods which flow from government patronage (1992:26).

Like Rowse, Francesca Merlan claimed that ethnographic accounts which make 'assumptions about the centrality of material objects, or goods, as bearers of value'

rarely convey the social significance of exchange from an Aboriginal perspective. In her view, anthropologists would be better served adopting a 'service framework for understanding value in certain Australian Aboriginal contexts', one in which 'being for, doing and giving are valued as "help"' (Merlan 1991:259; cf. Sansom 1988a). Citing Myers' study of Pintupi politics and Sansom's paper, 'A Grammar of Exchange', Merlan underscores the importance of 'nurturance' and 'looking after' as the 'fundamental idioms' of exchange in Aboriginal society. The question of how individuals gain social recognition and esteem by showing active concern and regard for others is thus central to her analysis. In kin-based societies of this kind, where relations of intimacy and familiarity are conducted in a spirit of reciprocity, mutuality and family obligation, Merlan sees publicly attested acts of sharing, giving and concern as important stores of social value. In this regard, her analysis generally accords with Myers' (1986b) account, where 'relatedness' depends on how 'close' or 'distant' one is to others; the most significant acts of service being those that refer directly to the needs, wants, and well-being of family and kin.

Merlan's (1991:262) discussion draws heavily on Sansom's work among Darwin fringe-dwellers, where, once again, the 'virtual polarity of Western and Aboriginal regimes of value' is emphasised. Stressing cultural continuities rather than any sense in which Darwin fringe-dwellers have lost touch with their distinctive traditions, Sansom argues that the Wallaby Cross Mob developed different forms for the definition, generation and allocation of value than those commonly found in a cash-based market economy. Sansom (1988a:160) saw these distinctive registers of value as part of an internal economy of exchange, an economy in which service to others constitutes a 'philosophy of voluntaristic social action' in direct contrast to Western forms of monetary exchange. In this system, where social debts are measured according to 'the quality and urgency of a recipient's need' (Sansom and Baines 1982:58),²⁵ not by some utilitarian calculus where value 'is expressed only in terms of another thing given up to get it' (Emerson 1987:13), Aboriginal people assign value to personalised acts of service:

Aborigines participate in a service economy and recognise service value. The dynamic of the system allows the organisation of service value into social worth. This, in turn, makes economic action intensely political because when service value is organised into social worth, each original gift of service finds its recompense in allocations of socially ascribed identity (Sansom and Baines 1982:34).

²⁵ Such calculations, Sansom maintains, are often contingent on circumstances yet to unfold. It is difficult, in other words, to know in advance what the import of one's helpful interventions will be, even more so in cross-cultural exchange where contextual information as to the 'quality and urgency' of another person's need may be either poorly understood or absent. Yet this need not preclude comparative analysis of service modalities and helping practices as important points of articulation between Aboriginal and European modalities of exchange more generally. As Paine notes in his critical summary of Barth's transactionalism, the sympathetic mediation of different 'spheres' or regimes of value constitutes an important element of a broker's role in cross-cultural situations.

Sansom also found the patron/broker distinction useful in describing relations between Darwin fringe-dwellers and White 'boss-brokers' in the hinterland economy:

Here I treat patrons as individuals who in inter-racial dealings mobilise assets, dictate the values that will enter into their transactions with clients and, above all, demand the client's *conversion*. Brokers, in contrast, are mediators who in negotiating between social spheres do not determine values but make 'purposive changes of emphasis and/or content (cf. Paine 1971:21)'. This distinction is one in which the patron makes the reforming of the basis for relationships part of the price for his services whereas the broker works within an established setting as an enabling mediator (1980:182).

In these terms, it is patrons (not brokers) who make services to clients conditional. Assuming they are able to consolidate their access to and control over the distribution of valued goods and services, they are far more likely to be in a position to persuade, cajole or coerce clients into accepting terms consistent with their own (social and economic) interests. While this form of patronage need not negate a client's interests *per se*, it does point to the potential threat this type of relationship poses to a client's autonomy over time.

Among the category of officials from which the fringe-dwellers drew 'bosses', Sansom found there were 'teachers, educators, nurses, doctors, lawyers, surveyors, welfare officials, foresters and conservation officials and research workers who go bush' (1980:181). As a rule, those Whites who earned the 'boss-broker' title showed very little interest in reforming Aboriginal life style and behaviour. As 'enabling mediators' they realised their status momentarily, as long as their role and performance as a broker was at issue (i.e. situationally relevant):

On the fringe a white broker will always (when he is broking) be called 'boss' to his face, and further, when his broking is discussed will be referred to as a boss, may be lauded as somebody 'always helpin', and can be complimented in his presence or praised in his absence as a 'goodfella'. The boss-broker is no patron which in local parlance means that he is 'notta missionary'. On the other hand, any white who mediates between Aborigines and white others and, in performing this service, calls for change in any aspect of fringe style, earns the missionary epithet. Help rendered with a call for changed ways is not disinterested: it is recognised as the converter's ploy. Fringe dwellers work to establish relationships with bosses whose help will be repaid with anything mob members may have to offer save conversion. Those recognised as missionaries act as exemplars of some 'whitefella' style and in dealings with blackfellas, attempt to convert them to the style they represent (1980:182).

Although Sansom's view of White 'boss-brokers' is clearly instructive, his account is not based on any detailed assessment of how Whites construe their relationship

with fringe-campers or the strategies they adopt in dealing with them generally. For the most part, 'relationships between mob members and ... whites who enter the fringe dweller's ambit ... lend themselves to stereotyping' (1980:176), and very few White 'bosses' stay long enough in the camps to consolidate their place in an economy of service exchange. However, where well-established 'boss-client' relations did exist, they were jealously guarded and constituted a scarce and valuable 'commodity' (1980:183).

Consider Sansom's description of the strategies fringe-dwellers employed in their encounters with the bureaucracy, where those 'charged to work professionally to promote Aboriginal interests...act single-mindedly as a functionary or bureaucrat' (1980:183). On such occasions, assuming the official in question puts his duty to employers before his obligation to clients, fringe dwellers utilised the services of a well-known intermediary, a 'Whitefella' who could be trusted to conduct their business faithfully. For those Whites who did extend 'help' in this way, attributions of 'boss-ship' (and other forms of social recognition) served the useful purpose of marking the value and significance of a boss's 'help' in terms that both parties valued and understood.²⁶

Sansom's description of the way Darwin fringe-campers attributed boss-ship to Whites in return for 'help' in dealing with officialdom suggests one possible point of articulation between Aboriginal and European conceptions of service; namely, shared recognition of the value attributed to helpful interventions within an economy of service exchange. However, Sansom's discussion of Aboriginal service modalities was clearly not developed with this sort of analysis in mind. Like Myers, he saw Aboriginal and European regimes of value as incommensurable, grounded in fundamentally different modalities of exchange.²⁷

This same presumption of incommensurable values and cultural difference informs Gerrard's (1989) discussion of the Aboriginal practice of 'humbugging' Whites working in Western Arnhem Land settlements. Humbugging 'whitefellas', Gerrard argued, involved combinations of subtle (e.g. 'emotional blackmail') and

26 This assumes Whites understand and acknowledge Aboriginal attributions of boss-ship as a mark of their helpful interventions. In Chapter Seven and Eight, I develop a discussion based on Aboriginal attributions of boss-ship and social worth in more ethnographic detail, arguing, with Emerson, that giving status recognition in power-dependency relations is in itself a form of ego-reward that service providers appreciate and understand *in their own terms*. This says very little about the 'real' intentions or motivations Whites have for extending help to Aboriginal people. It could be, for example, that a desire to 'save' Aboriginal people from deprivation and despair is a principal motivation, or alternatively, the fulfilment of a deep-seated moral conviction which, although not manifest in any missionary zeal to change Aboriginal lifestyles or behaviour, makes service to others a virtuous and noble pastime: for example, the Christian adage 'there but for the grace of God go I', suggests a humanist and empathic desire to translate the Christian commandment 'do unto others' into practical effect by helping people in need.

27 Appadurai (1986) coined the phrase 'regimes of value' in his introduction to the edited volume *The Social Life of Things*. I use the term here because it sits comfortably with 'domain' concepts and the notion of identifiable 'spheres of exchange' in economic anthropology.

not so subtle (e.g. violent threats) techniques aimed at gaining access to valued resources held by staff (e.g. vehicles, services or cash). Gerrard then contrasts this strategic emphasis on humbugging with an Aboriginal economy of service exchange (i.e. with relations of intimacy and familiarity forged between kin). In her view, the vast majority of Whites working in Arnhem Land settlements operated 'outside a system of exchange based on social investment':

As potential creditors within a service economy, Europeans in Arnhem Land ... abscond regularly. A few of them ... remain for long periods of time: these few people may be married to Aboriginal people; they may be missionaries (or lay Christians who feel a call to work among Aborigines), they may simply be attracted to settlement life. The great majority, however, are transients. Two year contracts are common for tradesmen and teachers, and few Europeans remain for longer than four years; some stay as little as six months or for even shorter periods. Long-term reciprocity between Aborigines and Europeans, within a service economy, is therefore largely precluded. The only way to overcome the structural difficulty created by European transience would be for Aborigines to orient toward Europeans' occupational roles rather than Europeans as individuals. And even though there is time - within four years or two years or even within a few months or weeks - for social debts and credits to build up between Europeans and Aborigines in Arnhem Land, I would suggest that the fact that Europeans do not have the intention of ever really belonging positions them outside a system of exchange based on social investment (1989:108-9).

In a more recent paper, Martin reaffirms Gerrard's claim that no significant relationships of long-term reciprocity exist between Aborigines and Whites working in remote North Australian settlements. Comparing forms of mission patronage in the past, founded on what he calls 'a form of quasi-personalised reciprocity', with the narrow vocational concerns of itinerant staff today, he writes:

In the contemporary township ... *staff essentially interact with Aboriginal people in terms of their formal work roles, and no ... personalised reciprocity or social relationships of any depth exist between them* [my emphasis]. Paradoxically, therefore, despite the increasing penetration of the institutions of the wider state into Aboriginal society in even this remote region, *Aboriginal people have a higher degree of autonomy from non-Aboriginal staff at the level of day-to-day interaction than in the past*. In contrast with the mission system, and with that operating in the past in many areas in the pastoral industry, *the advent of the welfare-based cash economy has meant that access to cash incomes and to the goods and services they can purchase is no longer mediated through any such system of personalised relationships, either with administration staff or most significantly within the Aboriginal domain* (1995:13-14)

At the very least, Martin's observations appear seriously misleading. If Aboriginal access to cash (and the goods and services it can purchase) is not mediated

through personal relationships, then how is it mediated? Surely it is naive to assume that personal considerations, feelings of indebtedness or obligation have no bearing on administrative conduct whatsoever. And what of credit lines that are not strictly monitored by government agencies or 'predicated upon a person's rights as a citizen of the wider state' (Martin 1995:14)? A large percentage of Aboriginal people in remote Aboriginal communities, for example, work for the dole on local Community Develop Employment Projects (CDEP), a scheme that affords Aboriginal organisations and their administrative staff a good deal of discretion in the allocation of wages (Rowse 1993b). Disposable weekly incomes, for example, are often closely related to how much debt people have to repay at the local store. These credit lines, in turn, fluctuate according to assessment by the Store Manager (or some other staff member) of the credit-worthiness of debtors and the extent of their perceived need. This, in turn, often makes credit transactions intensely political, as who helps who get what provides a useful indicator of a person's liquidity within the local cash economy.

The foregoing discussion indicates that in presenting their detailed accounts of Aboriginal social and political life, a number of anthropologists have sustained a somewhat misleading impression that there are no significant points of articulation between Aboriginal and European modalities of exchange.²⁸ In some respects, this impression is consistent with Tonkinson's account of the enormous divide that separated the Mardu from Apostolic missionaries at Jigalong in the early 1970s. Tonkinson, however, interpreted Aboriginal withdrawal from interaction with the missionaries (and their cultural autonomy more generally) as a defensive response to forms of patronage that threatened customary Law. Similarly, Sansom's description of Aboriginal fringe-dwellers' rejection of Whites who make offers of help conditional on modifying 'fringe-style' suggests a form of resistance to Whites critical of Aboriginal cultural beliefs and social practices.

From an exchange perspective, Tonkinson's account of the historical disjunction between 'mission' and 'camp' domains at Jigalong is noteworthy. Consistent with acculturation studies at the time, he presents an image of the Mardu struggling to achieve advantageous outcomes in a situation of colonial dependency. Having established that the Mardu preserved a measure of autonomy free from mission interference in the religious life, Tonkinson (1974:5) turned to strategies of resistance and accommodation in the administrative domain, where councillors and community leaders performed important functions as intermediaries. His use of the term 'adaptive strategy' traded heavily on transactional idioms, the notion of an intentional subject exploiting confused and ambiguous

²⁸ Rowse has already said as much in noting that 'Anthropologists, with some exceptions, have maintained a notion of the Aboriginal domain as a "cultural isolate"' (1992:57). One notable exception is von Sturmer (cited in Rowse 1992:41) who argues that the only real point of articulation between Aboriginal and European cultural systems is through 'individual sponsorship and patronage'. However, like Weber, von Sturmer saw this form of convergence as anathema to bureaucratic modes of authority that place a premium on social detachment, an issue that I discuss further in Chapter Eight.

information, dilemmas of choice and a kind of least-cost analysis of Aboriginal adaptation to the presence of missionaries intent on changing Mardu lifestyle and behaviour.

Among the 'whitefellas' with whom the Mardu had dealings, Tonkinson noted three principal categories; station workers, government officials and the Apostolic missionaries who administered Jigalong since 1946. Not only did station workers and missionaries hold disparaging views of one another, their mutual antipathy and different value orientations provided the Mardu with a basis for differentiating 'whitefellas' from 'Christians'. In the absence of swearing, blaspheming, smoking and sexual innuendo, the Mardu were safe in assuming local Whites were Christian in outlook and behaviour (1974:118-19). For their part, station workers and Christian missionaries held essentially different attitudes toward Aboriginal customs and behaviour. While the missionaries persisted in trying to convert the people to their own way of thinking, there were many other 'whitefellas' who were not so inclined (1974:119).

More recently, Tonkinson has argued that self-management policies have altered the tenor of relations between local Whites and the Mardu irrevocably. A new category of Whites, more sympathetic and supportive of Aboriginal cultural beliefs and social practices, now mediate the critical junctures between Aboriginal and administrative domains locally. This new type of 'whitefella' (fairly benign compared to Jigalong's Apostolic mission patrons) seems more like Paine's brokers, making 'purposive changes of emphasis and/or content' (Paine 1971:21) in representing Aboriginal 'interests' to government locally. It seems appropriate therefore in light of this historical shift to consider Paine's model of brokerage in greater detail.

SECTION 3.4

Barth, brokerage and the problem of cultural integration

In reviewing Barth's (1966) *Models of Social Organisation*, Paine affirmed Barth's view of a broker as someone who performs important bridging functions across wide boundaries of cultural difference (1974:24). His main aim in reviewing *Models*, however, was to highlight a number of critical assumptions and inconsistencies in Barth's theory of brokerage and its significance for cultural integration. He took exception, for example, to Barth's claim that: 'transaction [and hence brokerage] generates trends towards integration and institutionalisation', such that 'where persons of different cultures interact, one would expect differences [between them] to be reduced, since interaction both requires and generates a congruence of codes and value' (Barth 1966:14,16). Not content to leave this critical assumption unanswered, Paine maintained that 'a broker is [often] interested in sustaining a level of *value differences* between his clients, not in eliminating them'.

The problem, as Paine saw it, was that Barth accepted the view that brokers facilitate a 'congruence of codes and values', without first considering how and why the elimination of value differences runs contrary to a broker's long-term interests and survival. While he conceded that, for reasons of self-preservation, brokers almost always have an interest in 'preventing ... breakdowns in the system', he failed to see how their role in resolving conflicts or mediating differences generates the sort of cultural integration implied in Barth's *Models*.²⁹ The reason, it seems, is that Barth's theory is predicated on a 'melting-pot' or assimilationist model of integration:

Here [in the melting-pot model], differences between sections of the population are 'melted down' in order to achieve the commensurability, determinacy, and consistency that, for Barth, signal integration. The process is frequently recognisable as one of assimilation of the weaker party, probably with the assistance of coercive measures. Middlemen are not strictly necessary for its attainment and, furthermore, are likely to be rendered redundant ... whenever such integration should be completed. However, it is unlikely that such a process of 'integration' is ever completed, even if government should make determined efforts to that end (Paine 1974:25-6).

For Paine, 'melting pot' theories tend to assume that, without some form of determinacy and consistency in the way individuals think and behave, social relations degenerate rapidly into conflict and misunderstanding, as if value differences are fundamentally opposed to cooperative relations and coordinated social behaviour. In this and other respects, he felt there was a significant homology between Barth's transactionalism and Grand Theory, most notably in the sociology of Durkheim, Weber and Parsons. Weber, for example, seems to have tied the problem of integration to the existence of shared understandings in developing his *verstehen* or interpretive methodology, although his view of what 'understanding' is or can be seems to be far more complex than Myers' application of the approach suggests.

For Paine, the homology or correspondence between Barth's *Models* and Grand Theory derives from the fact that, in both cases, value-differences seem to be equated with conflict and an absence of social order, as if cultural systems, and by extension, society itself, would degenerate into chaos and conflict were it not for some overarching 'value' or 'principle' that makes coordinated social behaviour possible (cf. Aberle 1950). From this standpoint, an absence of behavioural consistency or, in Myers' terms, 'co-ordinate concepts of value and

²⁹ This assumes brokers are interested in preserving the institutional arrangements that give them authority in the first place. While in some respects this assumption may seem unwarranted, it does convey the idea that all brokers work within given institutional constraints. For Paine, such constraints are enabling conditions, as his 'successful' broker values arrangements that make possible 'transactions across wide boundaries of difference' (1974:24).

authority', translates quite readily into social conflict, dissonance and misunderstanding. It is perhaps also understandable why, in light of this assumption, Barth saw transaction and exchange as the most likely source of social integration. He seems, in other words, to have assumed from the outset that, where no meaningful interaction or exchange occurs, relations between different cultural groups degenerate into conflict, a process Bateson (1972) referred to as 'schismogenesis'.³⁰

What then, Paine asks, of the familiar distinction made in exchange theory between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' values, and what are its implications for a model of brokerage that seeks to accommodate the diversity of values, motivations and (presumably) interests that exist within any given social system? (cf. Blau 1964). Here, Paine argues that a broker facilitates the exchange of 'extrinsic' values (i.e. values that are commonly understood and readily transactable) while trying not to offend the 'intrinsic' value-differences that exist between clients. In other words, certain types of 'commodity' exchange serve useful instrumental functions, satisfying material needs and sustaining amicable relations while each party establishes boundaries and learns what the other holds dear. For Paine, intrinsic evaluative differences may be sustained, 'despite traffic of persons, sanctions, and even ideas across ethnic boundaries' (1974:23). In this scheme, the measure of a broker's success is not the elimination of value differences or cultural assimilation (cf. Barth's view of transaction as an 'incorporative process'; Paine 1974), but the capacity or potential to exploit significant points of articulation between different 'spheres' of value, ideally without offending the intrinsic values that, in Blau's (1964) terms, define a person's cultural and social identity most conclusively. In this sense, the outcome of brokerage is a happy conjunction of interests, albeit interests conceived from different subjective and/or cultural viewpoints (i.e. people may hold different views of the significance of a transaction) and, perhaps more importantly, in terms of the different roles or types of situated activity in which brokers participate.

Considering Barth's *Models* to have inadequacies 'too serious' to be profitably applied cross-culturally, Paine suggests that anthropology may be better served by Wallace's view of culture as 'characterised internally not by uniformity, but by diversity of both individuals and groups (1964:28). Unlike Barth, Wallace

30 As Wallace (1964) observed, from a political standpoint, the consensual or uniformitarian view of cultural integration has been particularly congenial for conservative social commentators who, under the guise of a well-intentioned desire to locate and define the 'cause' of social problems, invoke 'the threat of social disintegration and individual degeneration to justify measures for the standardisation of sentiments' (eg. the 'pathogenic' model evident in some of the more psychologically-oriented studies of deviance in the United States in the post-War years seems relevant, as does Mead's foray into psychoanalysis). The so-called 'culture of poverty' theorists appear to express much the same theoretical tendency, although the same criticism has been levelled at just about every sociological theory that seems to justify or explain rule-breaking behaviour as a symptom of cognitive disjunction or moral collapse (Wallace 1964:29-30; see also Becker 1973).

makes no claim that coordinated social interaction depends on a congruence of cultural codes and values. On the contrary, he argues persuasively that shared values and cognitive uniformity are not 'functional prerequisites' of coordinated social behaviour:

It is impossible to demonstrate empirically that any social system is operated by individuals all driven by the same motives; indeed, the data of personality-and-culture studies...show conclusively that a sharing of motives is not necessary to a sharing of institutions (1964:30)

For Wallace, human beings have an inherent capacity to interpret and understand overt behaviour without necessarily understanding or comprehending each other's motives or value-orientation. Summarising the argument, Paine notes:

Such limited mutuality does not imply that one understands the values themselves that are held by others, but simply, the behavioural cues and codes whereby the values are expressed...What *is* maintained between them, however, are 'complexly linked equivalence structures which make behaviour mutually predictable even when it is not fully understood' (1974:6).

Such 'equivalence structures' need not rely on 'exchange of equivalent values' as a precondition of exchange, only adequate description of the way individuals negotiate their way in life by seeking some form of acceptable 'correspondence' between their own and other's behaviour. In these terms, 'culture may be conceived as an invention which makes possible the maximal organisation of motivational diversity' (Wallace 1964:41).

At their most fundamental level, Wallace's 'equivalence structures' are grounded in 'instrumental' and 'consummatory' acts of exchange, repetitive sequences of behaviour played out between two or more individuals over time. Instrumental acts - 'whenever A does a1, then (sooner or later) B does b1; and whenever B does b1, then (sooner or later) A does a1' - call forth or release 'consummatory' acts (a2 and b2). Consummation, in turn, increases the likelihood of the original transaction being repeated at some future point in time (1964:32). Nowhere does Wallace assume that repetitive sequences of behaviour depend on shared motives or understandings. On the contrary, what appears to be instrumental from one person's viewpoint may seem consummatory from another's (and vice-versa).³¹

31 Wallace's model is far more involved than I can do justice to here. Suffice to say that he demonstrates a number of different cognitive pathways by which transacting parties can achieve equivalence and consummate their relationships with others.

SECTION 3.5

**Gouldner: a generalised moral norm of reciprocity,
instrumental acts and compensatory mechanisms
in service exchange**

Wallace's concept of the way 'instrumental acts' elicit or release 'consummatory acts' appears similar to Gouldner's model of the way reciprocity norms function as 'starting mechanisms' in exchange, particularly in situations where 'there are no clearly differentiated and customary set of status duties' (1960:175). Indeed, Gouldner seems to be on much the same theoretical track as Wallace when he asserts:

Certain kinds of mechanisms, conducive to the crystallisation of social systems out of ephemeral contacts, will in some measure be institutionalised or ... patterned in any society ... The norm of reciprocity may serve as a starting mechanism in such circumstances ... When internalised in both parties, the norm *obliges* the one who has first received a benefit to repay it at some time (1960:177).

For Gouldner, a generalised, non-specific, norm of reciprocity 'is one of the universal "principal components" of [all] moral codes' (1960:161). Although he concedes 'the norm functions differently...in different cultures', he contends that all human societies subscribe, in one form or another, to the general principle that 'people should help those that have helped them' (1960:170). This moral imperative, however, says little about notions of equivalence, equity or value in exchange. Gouldner's norm of reciprocity is non-specific, not just in the sense that it functions differently in different cultures, but also because the 'value' of a gift or service is contingent on its imputed significance or worth, not on some universal standard or measure (cf. Sansom's paper 'A Grammar of Exchange' where 'debts are reckoned according to the quality and urgency of a recipient's need').

Like Wallace, Gouldner's regard for diversity leads him to consider the difficulties people face in establishing and maintaining relations where there are no clearly 'differentiated and customary set of status duties' (1960:176). Here, he distinguishes complementarity (the sort of rights and obligations that attach to formally designated status positions, which require 'almost unconditional compliance, in the sense that they are incumbent on all those in a given status by virtue of the socially standardised roles they play') from reciprocity ('mutually contingent' forms of exchange) (1960:168-70). The distinction here is critical, as complementarity suggests A and B are operating within a social system that vests certain 'rights' and 'obligations' with taken-for-granted legitimacy and authority (cf. Raz's definition of authority as 'a right to rule and a duty to obey'), whereas a generalised moral norm of reciprocity need only assume that A and B acknowledge relations of personal obligation and indebtedness based on past comportment. In

a passage strikingly reminiscent of Sansom's description of performative orders of service operating in the Darwin fringe-camps, Gouldner writes:

... there are certain duties that people owe one another, not as human beings, or as fellow members of a group, or even as occupants of social statuses within the group, but, rather, because of their prior actions. We owe others certain things because of what they have previously done for us, because of previous interaction we have had with them (1960:170).

Having regard for the diversity of interests and intentions that exist in any social system, Gouldner follows Wallace in claiming a person need not fully understand or comprehend the subjective reasons that motivate others to initiate interaction or reciprocate a gift of service. Nor need there be any shared understanding of the purpose, scope or significance of their engagement with respect to broader power structures.³² As a critical social theorist, Gouldner felt that Parsonian functionalism placed too much emphasis on 'shared values as a source of stability in social systems', rather than examining the role reciprocity norms play in 'inhibiting the emergence of exploitative relations which would undermine ... the very power arrangements which [make] exploitation possible' (1960:174).³³

For Gouldner, reciprocity norms play a vital role in establishing and maintaining power relations where exchange is conditioned by different formulations of value. He argues that very 'rough' notions of equivalence and feelings of obligation (presumably created through 'instrumental' acts of service and generosity on the part of others) are often sufficient to sustain social relations, despite existing inequalities in bargaining position and power differences. For Gouldner, there need be no ethical or benevolent intent involved either, as 'egoism' or 'a concern with the satisfaction of one's own needs' may be sufficient, in many cases, to vest reciprocity norms with intrinsic appeal.

What then, Gouldner (1960:164) asks, of cases where reciprocity breaks down altogether, where relations are sufficiently one-sided to generate mutual suspicion and distrust? Here, he reminds us that, in nearly all forms of exchange, 'one party gives something more or less than that received'. In such cases, 'there may

32 Later, in Chapter Eight, I discuss this issue further in light of Cowlshaw's (1990) commentary on 'helping ideologies' within professional anthropology and the public service. Cowlshaw's argument, 'that the ideological baggage that surrounds notions of helping mystifies rather than clarifies its nature as political practice within specific structures of power which are outside the control of these workers' could just as well be applied to all helping professionals (1990:4). The thrust of Gouldner's argument, however, is that reciprocity norms inhibit the emergence of power differences at a more primary level. This says little about the way 'helping ideologies' mask exploitative power relations generally.

33 Gouldner defined 'exploitation' as 'reciprocity imbalance ... an exchange of things of unequal value' (1960:166-7). This definition offers a useful explanation for the way in which postcolonial power relations are sustained by modalities of service oriented toward satisfying the diverse needs, wants and values of indigenous communities. Gouldner's contribution here seems to lie in his insistence that notions of 'value' and 'equivalence' should be defined situationally, in terms of the different evaluative criteria applied by actors in different exchange contexts.

be special mechanisms which compensate for or control the tensions that arise in the event of a breakdown in reciprocity':

Among such compensatory mechanisms there may be culturally shared prescriptions of one-sided or unconditional generosity, such as the Christian notion of 'turning the other cheek' or 'walking the second mile', the feudal notion of *'noblesse oblige'*, or the Roman notion of 'clemency'. The major point here is that if empirical analysis fails to detect the existence of functional reciprocity, or finds that it has been disrupted, it becomes necessary to search out and analyse the compensatory mechanisms that may provide means of controlling the resultant tensions, thereby enabling the problematic pattern to remain stable (1960:164).

Gouldner may well have added service conceptions to his list of compensatory mechanisms, at least in the sense discussed earlier in Chapter Two. Recall, for example, Lukes' definition of 'service conceptions of power', whereby the powerful submit and identify their own personal and political interests with the needs, wants and interests of others. Service, in this sense, reflects dedicatory forms of power predicated on a transfer of 'value' to subordinates within a given hierarchy of value (cf. Dumont 1982). It also suggests a rather heroic, romantic and sacrificial ethic of service, the same ethic alluded to by Sansom when he contrasts Aboriginal modalities of service with Mauss's theory of value in *The Gift*:

In Mauss's analysis, the gift enwraps the sacrificial volition of a self which could have put time or substance to alternative use. In our analysis we share emphasis on volition with Mauss. He was concerned with the reduction of its potential for expression [*its negation through obligation?*]. In Aboriginal Australia it is otherwise. The gift's significance is not the extent of a donor's sacrifice. It is measured against the degree or nature of a receiver's want... Mauss's view is Gallic and romantic. Aboriginal ethnography, however, points the other way. Practice in Aboriginal Australia is more in line with the hard-nosed, Anglo-Saxon logic of Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan* Hobbes wrote: 'The Value or WORTH of a man, is as of all other things, his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgement of another ... For let a man (as most men do) rate themselves at the highest Value they can; yet their true Value is no more than is esteemed by others.' (cited from Sansom and Baines 1982:59)

It may now be possible, in light of Sansom's comparative remarks and Gouldner's theory, to say something useful about the role service conceptions play in sustaining power relations in postcolonial contexts, where the interests of service providers are nominally (and often sympathetically) aligned with the wants, needs and interests of indigenous people. The notion I have in mind here is conveyed by Rowse (1988) in his paper 'Paternalism's Changing Reputation', where he invokes Foucault's critique of 'zero-sum' concepts of power in order to better

understand the operation of colonial pastoral regimes in the Northern Territory. To go beyond zero-sum concepts (the idea that one person has power to the exclusion of others), Rowse argues that it is necessary to abandon the idea that a particular ethnic group or racial category has power over others. For Rowse, what makes the study of colonialism interesting is the way power functions as an enabling device: not just through the formal delegation of authority, but through 'power's de-facto dispersal in chains and networks of (often unconsciously) assumed obligations and expectations' (1988:66).

This, perhaps, is close to (but not the same as) the view of service outlined in Chapter Two, where authority functioned as a proxy power, sympathetically aligned with the interests of others. For Rowse, the social, economic and moral cement that held colonial pastoral regimes together had more to do with 'assumed obligations and expectations' generated between European station-owners and Aboriginal stockmen (i.e. relations of obligation and indebtedness created through patronage and a paternalistic concern for the welfare of native charges) than a delegated 'right' to exercise authority over others. Here, there is a sense in which European pastoralists used service exchange and calculated generosity to resolve incipient tensions in their dealings with Aboriginal stockmen, maintaining an underpaid (and exploited) indigenous workforce by accommodating Aboriginal interests in the process.

SECTION 3.6

Service modes in transition: outline of a theory of symbolic action and cultural change

In the rough-and-tumble of social interaction, groups are known to exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, to impart new evaluations or valences to them, to borrow forms more expressive of their interests, or to create wholly new forms to answer to changed circumstances (Wolf 1982:387).

The transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction
(Sahlins 1985:138).

Having read Paine's summary of *Culture and Personality*, readers less familiar with Wallace's work may be forgiven for thinking he has solved the 'conundrum of integration' (Paine's words) while leaving unanswered the question of how generative cultural change occurs in practice. However, this is not the case, as in his closing chapter Wallace deals specifically with the issue of how cultural order and diversity reveal an underlying cultural (and psychological) dynamic:

... [the] quasi-independence of perception from the 'objective' reality of nature makes possible two mental phenomena: first, the ability of the perceiver to say

that two sensibly different experiences involve the 'same thing'; second, the possibility of two perceivers, or of the same observer at different times, perceiving the 'same' object differently, depending on differences in their own perceptual equipment and experience. The former ability makes possible learning and cultural continuity; but the latter makes possible culture change (1964:122).

From this standpoint, innovative culture change occurs because individuals experience and perceive things differently and are likely, for purely pragmatic reasons, to seek some form of realignment of their own perceptual models with those of others. For Wallace, this cognitive process requires both the recognition of likeness (an associative capacity) and an ability to differentiate, suggesting that generative culture change is none other than 'the [novel] recombination of previously existing configurations' (1964:124).

Like Wallace, Sahlins argues that culture change occurs dialectically, as a 'dialogue between the received categories [of culture] and the perceived contexts' in which symbolic forms operate. In this sense, symbolic transformations occur when actors apply conventional concepts and categories in situations that fail to respond in expected ways. To support this proposition, Sahlins describes the dramatic arrival of Captain Cook in Hawaii in 1778 as 'a condensed paradigm of the subsequent course of Hawaiian history' (1985:144). In *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, for example, he argued that 'the complex of exchanges that developed between Hawaiians and Europeans' generated circumstances that brought the Hawaiians and their culture 'into uncharacteristic conditions of internal conflict and contradiction' (1981:156). For Sahlins, it was not some supposed uniformity or consistency in the way Hawaiians behaved *vis-a-vis* Europeans that imbued Hawaiian history with 'novel empirical content'. Rather, Sahlins saw the diversity of interests and intentions of the Hawaiians themselves as a significant factor generating change:

... their [i.e. the Hawaiians] differential connections with Europeans thereby endowed their relationships to each other with novel functional content. This is structural transformation. The values acquired in practice return to structure as new relationships between its categories (1981:50)

Later, in *Islands of History*, Sahlins develops a somewhat more elaborate theory of symbolic action and cultural transformation, applying a cognitive and semiotic approach to his analysis of Hawaiian history:

Human social experience is the appropriation of specific percepts by general concepts: an ordering of men and the objects of their existence according to a scheme of cultural categories which is never the only one possible, but in that sense is arbitrary and historical. The second proposition is that the use of conventional concepts in empirical contexts subjects the cultural meanings to practical revaluations. Brought to bear on a world that has its own reasons, a world in-itself

and potentially refractory, the traditional categories are transformed. For even as the world can easily escape the interpretive schemes of some given group of mankind, nothing guarantees either that intelligent and intentional subjects, with their several social interests and biographies, will use the existing categories in prescribed ways. I call this double contingency the risk of the categories in action (1985:145).

For Sahlins, the usual distinction made in anthropology between cultural continuity and historical change reveals a more fundamental feature of Western thought: the tendency to confuse history with change itself, as if history were the very antithesis or negation of continuity and all discontinuities were essentially historical. This distinction, he contends, presupposes a whole set of other oppositions in the West, all of which tend to conceal or deny the fact that 'history is throughout grounded in structure' (1985:144).³⁴ Hence his now famous proposition that: 'the transformation of a culture is a mode of its reproduction' (1985:138).

Sahlins' view of the way symbolic transformations occur in and through human *praxis* bears striking resemblance to Wallace's view of the way differences in human perception generate novel and innovative recombinations of existing cultural forms. Both writers settle on the 'quasi-independence' of 'objects' of reference (whether they be physical, symbolic or metaphysical) from the perceptual or interpretive schemes actors apply in making sense of the world. In Sahlins' model, this autonomy of perception gives rise to a kind of semantic slippage as the conventional meaning(s) attached to symbolic forms undergo some kind of 'practical revaluation' over time. The end result, however, is the same in both models: the continual readjustment and realignment of conventional symbolic forms with 'things' as they are or, in a more philosophical sense, appear to be.

From this 'semiotic' perspective, the distinction made in traditional semantics between 'signs', as conceptual points of reference, and that which is 'signified', the concrete phenomena to which signs refer, seems apposite, as do related concepts of polyvocality and valorisation commonly employed in poststructural theory (cf. Lyons 1977:403). In Sahlins' model, it is the metaphoric and polysemic quality of symbolic forms that increases the likelihood (he calls it 'risk') that some form of redefinition, misconception, or transformation of meaning will occur in practice. Yet there is more than a theory of semantic slippage in

34 As samplers, he offers the following categorical distinctions as indicative: stability vs change, condition vs process, static vs dynamic, diachronic vs synchronic and last but not least, noun and verb. To this list I would add Giddens' use (and synthesis) of the distinction between structure and agency. It could be argued here that Ortner's (1984) interpretation of practice-oriented approaches in the discipline is caught in the same oppositional logic, although I tend to think her choice of Bourdieu, Sahlins and Giddens as noteworthy reflects her positive assessment of anthropology's 'rapprochement with history' over the last ten or so years has gone some way toward dislodging the political economist's view of history, which, to borrow her colonial metaphor, seems to 'arrive like a ship' on indigenous shores (Ortner 1984:143).

Sahlins' scheme. His discussion of the 'risk of categories in action' posits an intersubjective world in which individuals, with their various competing and, in some sense, antagonistic interests, deploy symbolic forms differently. Take, for example, his discussion of how the Polynesian concept of *tabu* has changed and taken on different meanings since the arrival of Europeans in Hawaii in 1778: what was once a powerful sign of ritual prohibition veiling chiefly authority with the threat of divine sanction became an expression of the 'material and proprietary rights' of a new commercial class of Hawaiian entrepreneurs. The end result of this transformation was the effective de-sacralisation of *tabu* as a symbolic form, evidenced today 'in the numerous signs that read KAPU and mean 'no trespassing' (1985:142).

Like Sahlins, I want to understand how so-called 'traditional' practices acquire new values and meanings in historically unique circumstances, how time-honoured Aboriginal and European conceptions of service are selected as functionally relevant (or irrelevant) in the settlement context. In Chapter Seven, I follow Myers (1986b) in discussing some of the reasons why customary Aboriginal understandings of nurturance, boss-ship and authority (e.g. the construction of nurturant authority Myers describes as 'looking after') fail to account satisfactorily for the type of behaviour Whites (and, increasingly it seems, Aboriginal Councillors) exhibit in administrative roles, where corporate notions of 'community' responsibility and accountability are predicated on 'being hard' and denying Aboriginal claims of need 'for the common good'. Yet, consistent with the arguments presented earlier, I also argue that 'being hard' is not a fixed or immutable disposition attributable to Whites, Aboriginal brokers or some other ethnic category. If anything, the findings of this study suggest a more subtle interpretive approach is necessary, one that satisfactorily accounts for the way service conceptions and Western Desert concepts of 'looking after' are variously reproduced and transformed in and through administrative practice.

I have included Sahlins' theory of symbolic action in this study because I believe it presents a novel way of interpreting cultural transformations that occurred after the Spinifex people were displaced from their traditional homelands in the Great Victoria Desert during the 1950s and 1960s. This colonial history, rudely punctuated by the British and Australian governments' attempts at clearing large areas of the desert for atomic tests, was in many ways no less dramatic than the events surrounding Cook's first encounter with the Hawaiians in 1778. I do not propose, however, to offer (nor could I deliver, given the ethnographic nature of the study) a detailed account of early contact history. Rather, my principal aim is to apply Sahlins' theory of symbolic action to the thesis problem outlined in Chapter One, examining some of the ways in which different cultural constructions of service, value and authority are reproduced and transformed in practice.

SECTION 3.7

Conclusions

In this Chapter, I hope to have demonstrated the relevance of Wallace's theory for the thesis: that 'shared understandings' or 'common value-orientations' are not functionally necessary for co-ordinating exchange behaviour cross-culturally. In examining the implications of this proposition, I stressed the utility of a practice-oriented approach to the study of service relations, one ideally appreciative of the way value-differences are managed and accommodated transactionally. Wallace's concept of culture (as 'an invention that makes possible the maximal organisation of motivational diversity') seemed particularly useful, as it allowed for the establishment of 'complexly linked equivalence structures' across wide boundaries of difference (i.e. structures, norms and principles that facilitate mutually predictable behaviour, rather than shared understandings or values in the classic sociological sense).

Section 3.2 examined constructions of non-Aboriginal agency in the ethnographic literature, comparing two very different accounts of organisational politics, both of which employed concepts of patronage first formulated in transactionalism. Notably, neither Myers nor Sackett characterised Whites as brokers operating across different domains of social value. Nor did they examine the competitive hierarchies of social acceptance mentioned by Brody, where Whites working in remote Inuit settlements organised themselves according to the nature and extent of their relationships with the community or knowledge of indigenous culture. Consequently, rather than view the roles of patron, broker and client situationally, Sackett and Myers employed theories of patronage and non-Aboriginal agency consistent with their view of power relations historically.

In making sense of the different ways in which Myers and Sackett characterised local-level politics, I considered Rowse's claim, that two rather romantic views of Aboriginal politics surfaced within Australian Aboriginal Studies over the last two decades (i.e. since the introduction of self-management policies in the 1970s). Consistent with the first of these views, Sackett's discussion of welfare colonialism at Wiluna focused critically on 'the colonial state's ways of "dealing with" indigenous interests'. The second mode of enquiry, less concerned with external interventions, seemed generally consistent with Myers' ethnography, 'functioning as a kind of authentic critical reference point from which state-centred accounts can be examined'. More importantly, from a transactional viewpoint, Sackett's analysis contained an implicit theory of value, founded on the notion that Aboriginal clients and White patrons shared a common overriding interest in the fruits of economic development. Myers, on the other hand, took a very different view of Aboriginal-European interaction, claiming the Pintupi's patron-client conception of authority 'did not match the European economically-founded notion of bosses and workers'.

One could argue as I have done earlier that these differences in perspective reflect substantive differences in each writer's assessment of the conditions

necessary for Western Desert people to achieve self-determination and autonomy in the settlement context. Myers' description of the way the Pintupi preserved autonomy in dealing with White 'bosses', for example, appears to have been based on certain assumptions about the role Whites play in sustaining relatedness as a value-system within the Aboriginal domain. However, it is notable that, rather than pursue the implications of this insight sociologically, he justified his somewhat romantic view of 'a community without government supervision' (1986b:67) by defining non-Aboriginal Advisers categorically as 'outsiders', a significant move since it obviated the need to explore how (if at all) White 'bosses' accommodated Pintupi conceptions of 'looking after' as a condition of their administrative authority locally.

Fortunately, considerations of 'value', and their interrelation with issues of power and authority have been well theorised in anthropology, particularly in Canadian sub-arctic studies, where anthropologists have generally followed Paine in recognising 'role selectivity' as an important element of Fourth World organisational politics. Brody's analysis, for example, reminds us that there need be no categorical alignment of value and ethnicity, as social actors, whatever their ascribed cultural or ethnic identity from an etic perspective, may embrace the roles of patron-broker-client situationally, being, for example, administrative patrons in one context and clients dependent on indigenous favour (patronage?) in another. In this regard, Brody focussed on an important aspect of postcolonial power relations (what Paine referred to as 'non-demonstrative colonialism'): the need for social acceptance, not just for Whites, whom invariably apply their own performative criteria of service to work colleagues, but also from the perspective of indigenous clients, many of who are well aware of the value of cultural knowledge and transact with Whites accordingly. In all these areas, what makes the study of service relations in Fourth World contexts interesting are the subtle ways in which feelings of obligation generated in one context interrelate or affect social relations in another. Once again, this suggests a methodological issue of direct relevance to this thesis: that, in developing a service framework along comparative lines, different cultural constructions of service need to be understood situationally, ideally by examining the connections established (in Wallace's terms, 'equivalence structures') between different performative orders of service in practice.

Perhaps the single biggest impediment to understanding how service conceptions and *kanyininpa* function ideologically has been the stereotypical alignment of Whites (and Aborigines) with an equally stereotypical view of their agency: in Sansom's terms, the historical subjects of anti-colonial discourse often seem like 'reified agents' or 'class actors ... assimilated to scene' (1988b:148), bound to behave (and transact) in culturally predetermined ways. In some ethnographic accounts, this alignment correlates with a further analytical assumption: that Whites (*qua* patrons and cultural 'outsiders') rarely, if ever, engage in exchange modalities that are compatible with indigenous traditions. The result, in such cases, has not only been systematic denial of the import of helping practices for the preservation of

core elements of indigenous culture (e.g. how *kanyininpa* as political ideology is reproduced through interaction with Whites), but also studied indifference to the dilemmas of accountability that arise when Whites (*qua* administrative brokers) modify their own practice to accommodate indigenous exchange practices and cultural sensibilities. Whether we call this academic malaise essentialism or some other pejorative label, Thiele (1991) reminds us that it has serious shortcomings from a sociological perspective, particularly for comparative studies that seek to make sense of the different ways in which social identities are culturally constructed.

A key theme throughout this Chapter has been that, if there are any significant points of articulation between Aboriginal and administrative domains locally, they are more than likely to be manifest in service modalities of exchange: in the contingent and eminently visible forms of 'help' and 'helping' found locally. Myers' description of the strained and often difficult relations between the Pintupi and Whites in the settlement context offered a useful starting point, although as indicated earlier, I have a number of reservations about his comparative approach. In Chapter Two, I drew attention to the fact that his focus on conflict and cultural misunderstanding placed too much emphasis on Difference and a lack of any 'shared concepts of value and equivalence' in exchange (rather than examining how cooperative exchange relations persist despite value-differences). And, like Sackett's account, his discussion of Aboriginal politics located Whites outside the Aboriginal domain, rather than considering how and why boundaries shift or dissolve according to the situational involvements of Whites locally. However, in light of the apparent correspondence between his theory of Western Desert politics and the service conception outlined earlier in Chapter Two, I suggested a need for closer examination of non-Aboriginal administrative practice and its bearing on *kanyininpa* as political ideology. The issue of whether Aboriginal and administrative constructions of service, value and authority converge, I argued, could not be resolved by focussing on Aboriginal politics or agency. It also requires consideration of the strategies Whites employ in shoring up their administrative authority locally.

Gouldner's paper, in particular, appeared well-suited to the idea that service modalities of exchange are ultimately founded on feelings of indebtedness associated with gift-giving and helping practices. The analytical distinction between complementarity and reciprocity mentioned in Section 3.5 was critical as, for Gouldner, complementary forms of exchange assume A and B vest certain rights and obligations with taken-for-granted legitimacy, whereas reciprocity norms only require that A and B acknowledge relations of indebtedness based on past comportment. I cited Sansom's account of performative orders of service because his ethnography illustrates, better than most, the generative and constructed nature of status hierarchies in the Aboriginal domain. However, his ethnography, like that of Myers, preserved an image of that domain as 'a conceptual isolate' (Rowse 1992:24), obviating the need to assess the role Whites play in sustaining service relations cross-culturally.

Had Sansom felt less inclined to define what is essentially different about Aboriginal practice from a Western viewpoint, he may well have pursued the implications of his analysis for conjunctive power relations. The idea, for example, that a voluntaristic philosophy of social action underlies liberal-democratic constructions of service reminds us that the sort of utilitarian thinking attributed to the 'hard-nosed Anglo-Saxon' philosophy of Hobbes may also be integral to Aboriginal exchange modalities. My point is this: structural oppositions are, in an ethnographic sense, culturally specific and the task of comparative sociology is not just to describe human variability, but to discover universal elements of exchange by relating specific cultural forms to more general questions concerning the nature of human social behaviour (cf. Levis Strauss's theory of the way specific cultural forms and structures manifest more fundamental binary oppositions in human cognition).

Consistent with the aims outlined in Chapter One, it may now be possible to say something useful about the way helping practices afford service agencies opportunities for converting officially-sanctioned authority into locally recognised forms of 'symbolic capital'. Fundamental to this conversion process, it seems, is the requirement that service agencies defer in some way to locally recognised status hierarchies, whether those hierarchies are of a ceremonial nature, manifest in cultural competencies (e.g. language) or, as one might expect, in the competent management of collectively-owned resources. Deference is no cheap coin here either, as the accumulation of symbolic capital in Bourdieu's terms involves investments which amount to a substantial restriction on those who would naively assert their right to exercise authority without vesting considerable time and energy in the service of others. Consistent with the arguments outlined in the last Chapter, I would argue (*contra* Martin and Gerrard) that this form of investment entails, at the very least, a dedicatory mode of service, a mode that must not only be validated materially, through competent use of administrative office in the interests of the community as a whole, but also socially, in the demonstration of relatedness with others over time (i.e. by engaging in helping practices and participating in one form or another in the Aboriginal domain).

Later, in Chapters Six and Seven, I discuss how Aboriginal attributions of boss-ship and social worth function as compensatory mechanisms in exchange, rewarding service providers by providing ego-rewards and status recognition in power-dependency relations. Understandably, this says little about the 'real' intentions or motivations Whites have for helping people or working in Aboriginal communities. It does, however, suggest that, in order to develop a grounded appreciation of how service conceptions and *kanyininpa* function ideologically, we need to adequately account for the way exchange modalities are oriented (in Weber's sense) toward moral sensibilities underlying both liberal-democratic and Western Desert constructions of value.

Gouldner's main contention is that, where empirical analysis fails to detect functional reciprocity (i.e. where no clearly differentiated and demarcated status duties exist to exact compliance), it becomes necessary to locate 'compensa-

tory mechanisms' that stabilise power-dependency relations. In Section 3.5, I suggested that service conceptions perform similar compensatory functions for non-Aboriginal staff working in remote Aboriginal settlements today. Similarly, Goulder's example of the Christian ethic of 'turning the other cheek' or 'walking the second mile' suggests a vocational ethic of fundamental significance to liberal-democratic and humanitarian constructions of service. Helping ideologies, for example, serve similar functions for non-Aboriginal staff in the administrative domain, particularly where those working for or on behalf of Aboriginal communities subscribe to principles of social justice and justify their help in humanitarian terms. Service in this sense reflects dedicatory modes of power predicated on serving the collective needs of Aboriginal communities. For examples of this mode, one need only look to principles of compassion firmly entrenched in the rhetoric of helping professionals, many of whom have a keen sense of social justice and feel genuinely sorry for the circumstances in which Aboriginal people live.

As one might expect, similar moral sentiments complement reciprocity norms in the Aboriginal domain, compensating in effect when expectations of help fail to materialise. The Western Desert concept *ngaltutjarra* [lit. to feel compassion or sorry for someone in need], for example, conveys an empathic regard for the welfare of others, although Myers' analysis of its affective dimensions illustrates how such feelings and emotions are variably constructed. The same concept informs Western Desert concepts of authority and 'relatedness', such that when a person demonstrates compassion for others they implicitly acknowledge a claim of need and an obligation to help and 'look after' others. In Gouldner's terms, *ngaltutjarra* 'provides a second-order defense ... to mobilise auxiliary motivations for conformity with existing status demands' (1960:177).

Section 3.4 implied an administrative broker's success ultimately rests on his capacity to exploit significant points of articulation between different domains of social value, ideally without offending the intrinsic values which clients hold dear. Gouldner's distinction between reciprocity and complementarity also needs bearing in mind here, if only because forms of indebtedness generated in one context need not always carry over or legitimate power relations in others. As Gouldner explains, 'the concept of complementarity takes mutually compatible expectations as given; it does not and cannot explain how they are maintained once established' (1960:173). It is perhaps worth mentioning Gouldner's contention that very 'rough' notions of equivalence are often sufficient to comply with generalised norms of reciprocity; such norms, he argues, 'tolerates a range of variability', because 'the demand for *exact* equality would place an impossible burden on actors' (1960:172). And where actors do differ in their evaluations, 'compensatory mechanisms' come into play, cultural norms, principles or beliefs that resolve tensions in the event of a perceived breakdown in reciprocity.

Interestingly, the missionary mode of service seems at times to function in this way, compensating for a perceived breakdown in reciprocity by valorising self-sacrifice and Christian charity as signs of vocational commitment and personal