

CHAPTER TWO

Service Conceptions in Liberal-Democratic and Western Desert Political Theory

SECTION 2.1

Introduction

This Chapter outlines a number of intriguing parallels between service conceptions in liberal-democratic political theory and Western Desert constructions of authority represented in the literature. Myers' (1986b) discussion and analysis of the Western Desert concept, *kanyininpa* ('holding' or 'looking after'), corresponds closely with a 'service conception of authority' outlined by Joseph Raz in British legal philosophy. Both writers view authority hierarchically, as a status relationship governed by complementary rights and duties - as a 'right to rule' correlated with some form of deference behaviour, duty and moral obligation to 'serve' or 'look after' others. In fact, the homology runs deeper, as the dialectic between autonomy and relatedness in *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* parallels themes of individual freedom (e.g. civil liberties or rights) and social constraint in liberal-democratic philosophy generally. In Myers' ethnography, however, the same dialectic is resolved in forms of nurturance specific to Western Desert culture and religion. Service conceptions in liberal-democratic theory, on the other hand, tend to reflect values and assumptions specific to capitalist market-oriented economies. Despite these important differences, I have found it useful to compare the two models as a way of identifying possible points of articulation between Aboriginal and administrative constructions of service in the ethnography.

To further this aim in Section 2.2, I outline Raz's service conception of authority, likening his view of service relations to a moral contract or bipartisan arrangement between two consenting parties who share the same political culture. Adopting a more critical and relativist approach, Lukes (1987) highlights why Raz's model fails to account for different actor-centred perspectives on authority. For Lukes, value differences are an inescapable part of the way authority is conceived in any political system, for just as people value and interpret things differently, they are equally likely to attribute legitimacy to the actions of authorities in different ways.⁴ I have used Lukes' critical social theory to high-

⁴ Raz seems unperturbed by Lukes' charge that his service conception assumes both an ideal subject position and a common value-orientation on the part of authorities and subjects. These assumptions, however, sit awkwardly with the kind of comparative and relativist approach usually employed by

light different traditions of service in the West, some of which reflect forms of power at odds with the liberal-democratic ideal.⁵

From Lukes' critical and relativist perspective, the assumed congruence of values and interests postulated by Raz assumes an ideal subject position, an 'autonomous rational individual' (1987:72) whose practical judgment is informed by the same cultural logic as his ideally beneficent superiors. However, in comparative studies of the kind undertaken here, where cultural differences constitute an important focus of inquiry, the relativist position seems unassailable: how, for example, can those who claim to work for or represent Aboriginal interests in a service capacity accurately determine those interests if they do not share or understand the same cultural code, worldview or language as their indigenous clients? On this basis alone, it would appear that as soon as we step outside the sociocultural milieu in which Western traditions of service derive meaning, the model outlined by Raz loses explanatory force. In this sense, its utility as a conceptual tool for understanding service relations in remote Aboriginal communities appears seriously limited.

Myers avoids becoming too embroiled in these complex interpretive issues by claiming Aboriginal and European constructions of value and authority are incommensurable, based on fundamentally different cultural (and economic) premises. In defending this claim, he invokes a number of essentialist propositions concerning the nature of (and differences between) Aboriginal and European modalities of exchange. Yet, like numerous other anthropologists who apply transactional models in their ethnography, he notes that White 'bosses' who are generous and show a willingness to 'help' and 'look after' Aboriginal people are 'liked and respected' (1980:319). Here, Myers illustrates an important instrumental (and communicative) function of service modes cross-culturally: the potential for Whites to convert at least some of their occupational (and social) energies into forms of value that Aboriginal people appreciate and understand.

This line of reasoning suggests Western Desert people continue to employ a conception of 'boss-ship' (and authority) in their dealings with Whites that reflects, and in some sense reproduces, certain values, ideals and attitudes current in the Aboriginal domain. It also implies that Aboriginal exchange practices are oriented toward moral sensibilities underlying European traditions of service. It is perhaps worth reiterating here von Sturmer's observation, that the only signifi-

anthropologists studying cross-cultural relations. Equally, so-called 'objectivist' accounts are not confined to studies that purport to work within the boundaries of a particular cultural or political tradition. They also appear in anthropology in the guise of essentialist discourse dedicated to defining Aboriginality, European-ness or some other attribute of a particular racial, social or cultural category (cf. Thiele 1991). These and other related issues are discussed in Chapter Three, where I address the problem of 'shared interests and values' from a cross-cultural transactional perspective.

⁵ It is the redemptive character of the Christian missionary intent on transforming other people's beliefs, values and self-understanding that figures most prominently in Lukes' critique. As Lukes himself notes, the instrumental view of service outlined by Raz diverges markedly from forms of tutelage and paternalism predicated on the transformation of a subject's beliefs, values and interests.

cant point of articulation between Aboriginal and European political cultures seems to conjure up images of personal sponsorship and patronage, obligatory relations that are fundamentally at odds with norms of bureaucratic impersonality in administrative contexts (cited in Rowse 1992:41). Von Sturmer seems to be implying here that relations of personal indebtedness automatically carry over and inform administrative relations in ways that threaten the impartial exercise of authority in the interests of some determinate constituency. However, I argue that service modalities of exchange need not corrupt bureaucratic forms of accountability, for just as welfare-oriented bureaucracies may be sympathetically geared to preserving Aboriginal cultural traditions, administrative brokers (whatever their racial identity) often find novel ways of balancing different orders of social and political obligation in practice. From this standpoint, the central theoretical question becomes: how do those who mediate Aboriginal and administrative domains at a local level, distance themselves from forms of patronage which threaten their perceived impartiality? Such distancing strategies constitute an important facet of a broker's role, although their enactment clearly needs to be handled with great care and sensitivity, lest the delicate balance struck between the client's varied interests is lost altogether.

In concluding the Chapter, I follow Rowse in regarding duality and ambiguity as enduring features of Australian 'welfare colonialism', a term commonly used in the literature to refer to the devolution of administrative authority from state-controlled agencies to Aboriginal organisations. Like Rowse, I extend the metaphor of ambiguity to encompass modes of administrative practice oriented toward different orders of obligation: to government and community. Yet Rowse's summary of the ethnographic literature pays insufficient attention to non-Aboriginal involvement in the Aboriginal domain and forms of exchange which, in transactional terms, preserve intrinsic value differences while maintaining the flow of goods and services that are now essential to Aboriginal lives. In this respect, his review preserves the same sense of irreconcilable difference and value incommensurability evident in Myers' ethnography, emphasising 'profound differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture' (Rowse 1992:58), rather than any sense in which the two political cultures converge in practice. For the purposes of this study, however, I identify exchange processes which, in Bourdieu's (1977:191) terms, 'euphemise' forms of administrative power, in ways that appear generally consistent with Western Desert constructions of authority as 'looking after'. Later, in discussing the implications of this proposition for those working professionally in remote Aboriginal communities, I argue that different constructions of service (and the practices they signify) provide important symbolic capital in the selective and strategic mediation of Aboriginal and administrative domains locally.

PART A

Liberal-Democratic Traditions of Service

SECTION 2.2

Service Conceptions of Authority in Liberal-Democratic Political Theory

In outlining the moral basis of ‘service conceptions of authority’ in the West, Joseph Raz notes, ‘It is common to regard authority over persons as centrally involving a right to rule, where that is understood or correlated with an obligation to obey on the part of those subject to authority’. For Raz, liberal-democratic notions of legitimate government ultimately rest on the moral belief that the ‘role and primary function [of authorities] is to serve the governed’ (1985:21). This conception, he argues, implies a conferred ‘right’ (or ‘authority to act’) and an attendant obligation on the part of those subject to authority to obey authority’s directives where certain criteria of legitimacy and accountability are met.

In defense of this position, Raz maintains that, if authority is to be considered legitimate at all, the actions of people in power should depend upon ‘reasons’ those subject to authority consider relevant and applicable under the circumstances. Service conceptions express the fact that any legitimate authority is limited by the kinds of reasons it may adduce in support of its directives:

Because authorities do not have the right to impose completely independent duties on people, because their directives should reflect dependent reasons which are binding on those people in any case, they should have the right to replace people’s own judgment on the merits of the case. Their directives preempt the force of at least some of the reasons which otherwise should have guided the actions of those people. (1985:24)

Raz ends his discussion with an hypothetical example: a case in which a man considers following the advice of an investment consultant, knowing full well the consultant he has in mind is capable and likely to achieve a good financial outcome on his behalf. In the end, he follows the consultant’s advice because he believes he may learn from the experience and improve his own decision-making in the future. More importantly, he follows the advice because achieving a desirable outcome is more important than asserting his own right to make an independent decision: ‘this surrender of judgment and acceptance of authority, far from being irrational or an abdication of moral responsibility, is in fact the most rational course and the right way to discharge one’s responsibilities’ (1985:29).

For Raz, people everywhere are limited in what they can achieve independently. His example of the financial investor surrendering his judgment illustrates the problem well. On purely rational grounds, accepting the advice of an expert seems justified because, in all probability, the client is less likely to make an informed investment decision if he exercises his own discretion and acts autonomously. Authority, in this sense, is legitimate because it ‘helps’ people circumvent or solve problems they are unable to solve independently. Fundamental to this dependency relation, however, are basic structural inequalities in the authority relation; the basis, in effect, on which authority is constituted in the first place (e.g. inequalities of specialised knowledge, socially recognised status and power).

Beyond such limited contractual arrangements, Raz’s characterisation of authority appears to be founded on the notion that political obligation in a liberal-democratic society is essentially a two-way street: as much a duty of obedience attendant on subjects as a ‘right to rule’ and moral obligation on the part of authorities to serve their interests. Guided by his interest in the philosophy of law, Raz develops a justificatory view of authority that shares much in common with Weber’s concept of ‘legal domination’ (1968:953). Both writers maintain that legal authorities generally seek to justify their directives and back their claims with clear and convincing legal argument. This emphasis on justification as a basic precept of law is perhaps best thought of in relation to judicial procedure; in appellate courts, for example, where defendants argue their case before a judge. This appeals process establishes the sense in which people are treated equally before some predetermined standard guiding the judicial process.

Unlike Raz’s service conception, Weber’s focus on obligation as a fundamental precondition of legitimacy assumes that authorities achieve compliance either coercively (e.g. through legal sanction or threat of force) or voluntarily, through consent.⁶ Raz, however, adopts a more utilitarian and rationalist perspective, arguing that subjects attribute legitimacy to the actions of authorities only where their own interests are being served. To act out of necessity or voluntarily, without due consideration or acceptance of the terms of an arrangement, would not satisfy the contractual arguments on which his service conception rests. With the proviso that subjects belong to a class of rational beings, his service conception inverts the command-obedience relationship by insisting authorities *should* act on the basis of their contractual obligations to others. Consequently,

⁶ See Trigger (1985) for a discussion of Weber’s sociology with respect to Aboriginal Australia. Trigger’s account of colonial power relations at Doomadgee in Queensland challenges the view that attributions of legitimacy from colonial authorities justify their authority from an Aboriginal viewpoint. His objection to Weber’s view of legitimacy amounts to a call for greater ethnographic attention to be paid to forms of accommodation and compliance on the part of Aboriginal people subject to colonial rule. Later, in Chapter Three, I discuss Weber’s critical distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern-bureaucratic’ forms of authority, arguing that the distinction fails to appreciate at the level of practice some of the innovative ways in which service agencies euphemise power relations by making themselves (and their actions) appear subject to the will of others. This perhaps is where Raz and Weber also part company, as Weber is far more concerned with outlining different modes of authority historically (as ideal types) than Raz.

the authority relation (and indeed compliance) is guaranteed on moral, rational and strategic grounds, not through blind custom or some element of coercion or fear. Raz points out that compliance on the basis of hurt feelings or sympathy, for example, is rarely a sound or sufficient reason for accepting the advice of others: ‘...such grounds for recognising the authority of another, even though sometimes good, are always deviant grounds’. On this basis, he defended the principle of ‘sound advice’ by pointing to the ‘spirit in which it is offered’ and its underlying rationale (1985:19).

In developing his argument, Raz acknowledges many of the practical problems that arise in applying service conceptions empirically. Both the task of identifying subjects’ interests and the perennial political question of determining whose interests are ultimately served by the authority relation are given careful consideration. In considering these issues, his justification thesis outlines reasons authorities ought to apply if their decisions and actions are to satisfy his criteria of legitimacy. Foremost among these are ‘reasons’ that authorities and subjects share. These ‘dependent reasons’ are deemed superior to other ‘non-dependent reasons’, the latter typical of cases where authorities exercise considerable discretion and autonomy in day-to-day decision-making. Rather than addressing this important distinction critically, Raz resorts to a rather vague but nevertheless significant reference to the spirit of legal determination and ‘reasons that bind’ parties to a particular arrangement. Consequently, where authorities are required to act in ways that are either not acknowledged or recognised as being in the interests of the governed (as they inevitably are in practice), his justification thesis draws on a willingness on the part of subjects to surrender their own judgment and autonomy.

Evident in this service conception of authority are seventeenth century notions of a social contract between the individual and the state, the sort of argument, for example, that lay behind Locke’s refutation in 1691 of the divine right of monarchs. In his *Two Treatises on Government*, Locke expressed much the same concern as Raz, that any political authority does not have the right (arbitrarily) to impose duties on people (Locke 1989). As a Natural Right, freedom from arbitrary power had to be preserved in any covenant between the State and its citizens, a right justified on the basis that Locke considered Man to be essentially rational and cooperative in a State of Nature. For, according to Locke, an individual may, of his own choosing, divest himself of his Natural Liberty, agreeing in principle with other men to accept the authority of a sovereign power as long as that sovereign can preserve his Natural Rights. The notion of consent in Locke’s political philosophy is critical, emphasising the voluntary nature of the social contract. Where a majority of people feel their rights are not being preserved, they are justified in either withdrawing their consent or insisting the contract be annulled.

To what extent Locke’s ideal citizen in a liberal-democratic State is in a position to withdraw his consent is problematic, as is the more general implication that his political philosophy privileges State rights over the rights of

citizens (is not the relationship a little one-sided?). Concepts of justification in contract theories of this kind should be distinguished from notions of consent generally. As Gaus (1986) notes, justification implies presentation of reasons which those subject to authority feel are adequate or acceptable grounds for submitting to a proposal. Yet this need not entail consent in the sense of voluntary agreement:

It is often remarked that, while contract theories appear to rely on consent, this consent is ultimately bogus; the choice conditions are typically so constructed that everyone must consent to the arrangement, and, consequently, withholding consent is not a real option....The important point is not that all are free to consent or withhold consent, but that everyone is provided with good reasons why he must consent (1986:256-7).

In principle, the stipulation that a ruling body should give a rational and credible account of its directives seems reasonable enough. However, as Raz concedes, authorities normally occupy a privileged position with respect to some ultimate value: one of the reasons why their instrumental role and service are valued in the first place. Under these circumstances, the condition of legitimacy he describes establishes the right to rule as a proxy power, a delegation of authority stemming from the pre-emptive force of a subject’s own right to decide. People, in this sense, ‘surrender their judgment’ because limited dependency and greater certainty with respect to desired outcomes is preferable over and above the right to decide autonomously.

For Raz, this reasoned qualification of autonomy (as a value in itself) lies at the core of liberal-democratic concepts of service. It acknowledges, for example, that desired political and economic outcomes are rarely achieved without some loss of personal freedom on the part of service beneficiaries. Equally, it acknowledges that those who exercise discretionary authority do so on condition that others bow to their better judgment. For Raz, this ‘surrender of judgment’ and personal autonomy may be justified on both rational and moral grounds. Morally, it may be accepted because authorities appear committed in principle to serving the interests of others: this represents the duty or obligation authorities *ought* to have with respect to others. And, rationally, a surrender of judgment and autonomy may be justified because an authority’s knowledge and reasoning on certain issues are inherently superior. On both counts, Raz avoids some of the more complex interpretive issues that arise in theorising service relations governed by different constructions of power, value and authority. Moreover, his ideal authoritative person is, in a common idiom, a guiding light, not someone who extracts a high price for his service.

SECTION 2.3

Lukes and the Problem of Interests: critical perspectives

Unlike Raz, whose service conception fails to account for the diversity of views, interests and perspectives that exist in modern pluralist societies, Lukes (1987:59–75) questions the analytical value of assuming shared norms and moral beliefs as basic preconditions of authority. Moreover, he doubts whether the task of determining people's interests is as easy as Raz's argument tends to suggest. Guided by the suspicion that political authorities will not (or cannot) always have the immediate 'interests' of others in mind, Lukes considers the likely practical difficulties authorities face in meeting Raz's criteria of legitimacy. Lukes suggests Raz's service conception offers a justificatory theory on how a person in authority might legitimate their claim to serve the interests of others; how, in other words, service conceptions of authority draw on some fairly abstract or ideal notions of what a rational and calculating individual might consider in surrendering their judgment and autonomy to others.

From this perspective, subordination and dependency take on specific meaning. According to the service conception outlined, their instrumental value is based on the utilitarian belief that limited dependency in the short term will lead to greater certainty and control over decision-making in the future (cf. John Stuart Mill's notion of enlightened self-interest). Presumably, a principal aim of this process would be to secure greater autonomy for subordinates over time. To suggest otherwise, we would have to acknowledge that service conceptions may be used to justify and entrench power-dependency relations, as when a person forfeits their right to decide because of some permanent disability or limitation in their rational faculties. In these sorts of cases, dependents are often unable to fully consider the merits of decisions that concern their welfare. They are totally vulnerable and open to exploitation.⁷ The problem here lies with basic inequalities in the negotiating position of each party, a situation well expressed in the Roman legal conception *societas leonina* (Simmel 1950:182).⁸ Given such natural inequalities, it seems reasonable to question the nature of safeguards that protect subordinates from becoming members of a permanent under-class dependent on others.

Simmel's sociology sought to go beyond the classical view of exploitation to better understand issues of consent and complicity. His view of power relations, for example, acknowledged that exchange outcomes are never just the result of coercive and limiting practices on the part of people in power. They may also be

7 Chapter Three follows Gouldner in defining 'exploitation' transactionally, as an 'exchange of things of unequal value' (1960:166). This definition makes central the task of defining what is of value to people. It also avoids what Foucault refers to as 'zero-sum' concepts of power, where one person's power comes at the expense of another. In Section 2.4, I consider Lukes' actor-centred view of authority in greater detail, exploring its relevance to the postulate of 'shared values' which, in one form or another, has plagued transactional theory since Barth first wrote *Models of Social Organisation*.

8 In a footnote provided in the English translation, Wolff renders this term as 'Sociation with a lion ... a partnership in which all the advantage is on one side' (Simmel 1950:182).

understood from an interactionist perspective, in terms that convey the extent to which both parties establish and maintain inequalities over time. Hierarchy, in this sense, exists because people everywhere establish the social conditions necessary for its reproduction.⁹ It is the reproduction of hierarchy that concerns Simmel. On service relations, he notes that inequalities operate at different 'levels' of a relationship, implying the situational context of hierarchy is the proper subject of sociological inquiry:

The content and significance of certain personal relations consist in the fact that the exclusive function of one of the two elements is service for the other. But the perfect measure of this devotion of the first element often depends on the condition that the other element surrenders to the first, even though on a different level of the relationship (1950:186).

Simmel's comments here highlight the fact that service relations are never one-sided or restricted to one domain of social interaction. Frequently, they require an 'exchange of influences, which transforms the pure one-sidedness of superordination and subordination into a sociological form' (1950:186). Implicit in this conception is the idea that both parties are subject to constraints, whether they are moral, legal, social or political. Like Weber, Simmel employs the concept of reciprocal obligation in contract theories of law to illustrate the normative basis of compliance. For him, authority implies a relationship governed by shared attributions of value and social worth. As long as people share certain understandings about the purpose or scope of their relationship, and measure success in achieving outcomes in much the same way, authority rests on secure sociological foundations.

What of situations where these conditions are not met? Lukes, for example, commends Raz for developing a theoretical perspective that emphasises the obligation of authorities to 'serve the governed', to 'help them act on reasons which bind them' (1987:68). He doubts, however, whether authorities will always be in a position to know exactly what these 'binding reasons' are; and, assuming they do know, how would they measure 'successful outcomes'? In considering the merits of Raz's argument, Lukes highlights the practical and interpretive problems authorities face in determining the 'interests' of dependent subjects. How, he asks, in all their wisdom and knowledge, are authorities able accurately to determine the reasons, objectives and evaluative criteria that subjects apply in surrendering their judgment? Adopting a more actor-centred perspective, he argues 'social actors rarely interpret the same object or set of circumstances from the same point of view' and that 'every way of identifying authority is relative to

9 By this I mean relations that are socially valued and reinforced in and through everyday interaction. If, for example, a polite formal manner is socially desirable, this trait will most likely be encouraged through some form of mutual reinforcement. Simmel's position on the transactional foundations of hierarchy seems clear when he notes that service relations ultimately depend on reciprocity: 'the reciprocity of service and return service' such that 'all contacts among men rest on the schema of giving and returning the equivalence' (1950:387).

one or more perspectives and is inherently perspectival'. Consequently, 'there is no objective, in the sense of perspective-neutral, way of doing so' (1987:60):

I fail to see how the reasons that apply to authority's subjects, on which authoritative directives should be based, are to be ascertained in a perspective-neutral manner. The objectives an authority is to further are not determinable a priori and are often matters of intense controversy. On the other hand, it is plausible to suggest that, once such objectives are agreed, the question of a given authority's 'reliability' and 'success' (like that of an investment consultant) could be seen as a matter of fact, yet even this is not obvious. What is being judged: the institution or its agents, and over what period of time? (Lukes 1987:70).

Basic to this actor-centred 'relativist' view of authority is the idea that those subject to authority construe legitimacy from their own point of view, one that is conditioned by reasoning that may or may not be shared in the authority relation. Evaluative differences are thus central to Lukes' argument, for just as people value things differently (and have different interests), they may also attribute legitimacy to the actions of authorities in different ways.

In discussing the relationship between power outcomes and interests, Lukes follows Feinberg in defining a person's interests as:

... all those things in which one has a stake, whereas one's interests in the singular, one's personal interest or self-interest, consists in the harmonious advancement of all one's interests in the plural. These interests, or perhaps more accurately, the things these interests are *in*, are distinguishable components of a person's well-being: he flourishes or languishes as they flourish or languish. What promotes them is to his advantage or in his interest; what thwarts them is to his detriment or against his interest (Feinberg cited in Lukes 1986:5).

Lukes (1986:6) argues that a person's interests need not be correlated with his wants, desires or beliefs: 'one can fail to want something that is in one's interests, either because one does not know it is in one's interest(s), or because one does not know it is causally related to one's interest(s), or because one may have other overriding wants, principles or passions'.

Considering the general question of what motivates people in power to pursue certain interests over others, Lukes concedes it is sometimes more productive to examine situations in which power is conditional on serving the interests of others. His critical commentary suggests a sacrificial and instrumental view of power, one that is not always consistent with the idea that authorities exercise power to satisfy their own private political and economic interests:

..the powerful person merely serves the interests of others (either submitting his own interests to those of others or identifying his with theirs, or even with those of 'society' as a whole). Needless to say, this service conception is usually and especially

favoured by the powerful and those employed in defending and promoting their power, though, as Arendt shows, it can also have a radical and critical edge. On the service conception, the interests, and thus by extension the wants and goals, that power outcomes exemplify are adopted and interpreted by the powerful on behalf of those they claim, or are claimed, to serve (Lukes 1986:7).

Having considered the question: 'who can adversely affect the interests of whom?', Lukes identifies three dimensions of power. First, in the one-dimensional view, 'interests are seen as equivalent to revealed preferences - revealed, that is, by political behaviour in decision-making'. Second, in the two-dimensional view of power, in addition to revealing their own preferences, those in power may seek to control political agendas, determining 'which issues come up for decision, and excluding those which threaten [their] interests'. Finally, in the three-dimensional view, Lukes combines the first two dimensions of power and adds the capacity to 'shape and modify desires and beliefs in a manner contrary to people's interests' (1986:9-10).

SECTION 2.4

When service conceptions do not apply: missionaries, tutelage, power relations and the transformation of subjects' interests

It is the third dimension of power mentioned by Lukes that seems most inimical to the service relation described by Raz. Somewhere between revealed preferences, controlling political agendas, and modifying beliefs we have lost sight of the legitimate exercise of power in the interests of dependent subjects. Here, Lukes considers the likelihood that certain types of authority will invariably try to transform the very standards and objectives by which subjects consider a surrender of judgment and autonomy justified:

... what of cases where the relation between authority and reason is intrinsic: where the objectives authority serves are internal to, that is shaped and sustained by, the authority relation itself?...Religious examples demonstrate the intrinsic relation with clarity. Here the 'primary normal function' of authority is not always best described as 'serving the governed' (1987:71).

To illustrate the point, Lukes lists fundamentalist preachers, missionaries, charismatic leaders and psychoanalysts as typical of authorities who dedicate their proselytizing efforts to transforming subjects' beliefs, values and self-understanding.¹⁰ And, while he commends Raz for proposing a supposedly objective

¹⁰ Lukes could well have added any number of role types to this list as the didactic urge is clearly not limited to missionaries, charismatic political leaders and psychoanalysts.

'test' by which governments may be held accountable, he also points out that service conceptions perform important soteriological and ideological functions in liberal-democratic societies, highlighting different 'traditions' of service in the West:

We are offered [by Raz] a test by which claims to authority ... are to be judged genuine or spurious...The very idea of such a test is central to our cultural tradition. Since the Enlightenment, we have believed that some such test should be available, distinguishing 'right' from spurious reasons, autonomy from heteronomy, self- from other-directedness, and providing a bedrock for practical judgment. This strand of our tradition is deeply hostile to priestly power, paternalism, and mystifying ideologies of all kinds. Basic to it is the image of an autonomous rational individual (Lukes 1987:71-2).

The interpretive problems Lukes identifies revolve principally around two axes. Firstly, as a moral obligation and prescriptive norm, service conceptions specify what authorities should or ought to do, not what they actually do in practice. In this sense, the service conception outlined by Raz is a statement of moral principle, and its utility, heuristically, can only be determined by examining the extent to which authorities acknowledge and uphold that principle in practice. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the assumed congruence of values and interests on which his service conception rests, depends on an ideal subject who shares the same basic understanding of 'good reason' as his ideally beneficent superiors. On this score it is likely that, even within the same political culture, social actors will differ as to when, and under what circumstances, they consider a surrender of judgment and autonomy justified.

Raz develops his service conception to defend a particular strand of moral, philosophical and political thought in the West. It is, as Lukes says, a bold attempt at formulating an objective and rational view of authority, borrowing judiciously from case material in the liberal-democratic tradition to support the arguments presented. Yet, Lukes highlights significant problems in Raz's argument, not least of which is the difficulty of accommodating diverse and often contradictory conceptions of service within his theoretical framework. Raz's example of a man weighing the option of following an investment consultant's advice, for instance, assumes that clients understand what a good financial outcome or reputable financial adviser is. Without such basic understanding, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for his ideal subject to make intelligent informed decisions about when and under what circumstances a surrender of judgment is in his own best interests. It is thus essential for Raz's argument that all social actors share certain basic understandings about the social and economic 'system' in which they operate.

Alfred Schutz calls such basic understandings 'common-sense knowledge', the stock of social expectations and typifications that individuals share with others in

a particular sociocultural milieu. Basic to this phenomenological view is the idea that human beings comprehend the world as a 'taken-for-granted reality'; their thoughts and actions, in other words, are conditioned by the knowledge that many things in life, including their relationships with others, are patterned and certain (Berger and Luckmann 1966:27). This taken-for-granted reality, it seems, is epistemologically equivalent to the 'mesh of ideas and beliefs' mentioned by Raz (1985:27). In so far as his service conception represents a culturally specific (i.e. Euro-centric) view of authority, its heuristic value as a conceptual tool for understanding different cultural constructions of authority is clearly limited. As soon as we step outside the milieu in which many of the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions of Western liberalism derive meaning, the model loses explanatory force. Accordingly, any attempt at transposing it cross-culturally without first considering how and why it differs from other cultural formulations would appear confusing and counterproductive.

From Lukes' standpoint, these interpretive problems become even more acute in cross-cultural situations, where communication is often difficult and authorities commonly fail to acknowledge or understand the value-system on which the autonomy of others is based. In such cases, there can be no assumption that behavioural expectations or linguistic codes are shared, at least not in the sense implied above. Similarly, Raz's ideal subject, a rational, self-interested individual willing to surrender his own judgment and autonomy in the hope of furthering his own material interests, may either not exist or be of secondary importance in another sociocultural milieu. This suggests, in turn, that many of the motivational principles and values that underwrite service conceptions in the West (e.g. a utilitarian view of authority or an economically rational predisposition to financial decision-making), while quite likely relevant to an understanding of European modalities of service, may not have the same currency in Aboriginal social contexts. However, the moral belief that political leaders should serve and 'look after' the interests of dependent subjects is clearly not confined to liberal-democratic political theory. It is also, as I demonstrate below, an integral part of Western Desert political thinking, albeit expressed in another idiom and, historically, under different socio-economic circumstances.

PART B

Western Desert Traditions
of Authority

SECTION 2.5

'Looking after' the community:
service conceptions in Western Desert political theory

I raise the classic liberal-democratic view of service, political obligation and authority in this thesis, not just because it belongs to a long lineage of political thought in the West (or because it offers a novel way of thinking about service conceptions in the administration of remote Aboriginal settlements), but because it shares certain basic similarities with a construction of authority considered by Myers as essentially Western Desert in origin. In *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, Myers translates the Pintupi term *kanyininpa* as 'having', 'holding' or 'looking after' (1986b;1982). As a key or dominant symbol in Western Desert society, *kanyininpa* operates at different levels of social organisation, reflecting patterns of nurturance in child care and representing senior men's religious authority as essential to the well being of Pintupi society generally. For the Pintupi, a person may be said to: (1) 'hold' or 'look after' kin, as when a father or mother 'looks after' their child, (2) hold a spear or gun, or (3) 'look after' a community, as when local leaders 'hold' positions of authority and claim to 'look after' community interests. In the administrative domain, the implication is that those who occupy official positions within the community's organisational hierarchy have a responsibility to 'look after' the welfare of others. Similarly, in kinship terms, they may be said to 'look after' the physical or material needs of the community, ensuring a net transfer of value to dependents within the local service economy. Myers explains how this patron-client conception of authority works for the Pintupi:

The Pintupi concept of hierarchy and authority recognises a status relationship in which the superordinate's obligation is to 'look after' (*kanyininpa*) the subordinate, in return for which the subordinate owes his 'boss' deference, respect, and a degree of obedience to his wishes. It is felt that he can tell one what to do, although we shall see how problematic this becomes in regard to the range of his authority (1982:98).

Myers' interpretive approach to Pintupi cultural politics aims to reconcile gerontocratic authority (the power of older men and women over the young) with the cultural basis of nurturance and hierarchy in the religious life. Older Pintupi say their primary responsibility is to 'look after' the spiritual heritage laid down in

the *tjukurrpa* (the Dreaming) for everyone. This claim, Myers argues, is not just ideological dogma contrived by senior men in their quest for power over women and the young. The power of *kanyininpa* as a symbolic construct and ideological form derives from its ability to articulate different realms of social action into a convincing 'moral order':

The power that males exercise through their control of the Dreaming is of two sorts. One kind of power, direct and dramatic, is the power exercised by senior males over novices in periods of seclusion and the power exercised by males over the uninitiated during ritual: shouted commands, belligerency accompanied by threat of violence if disobeyed. Not all authority relations involve giving commands in this fashion. Often public goals are set or power exercised through limiting participation in decision-making, limiting the opportunities of speaking publicly (Bloch 1975). Such is the case with much of Pintupi gerontocracy, wherein 'authority' is simply the right to speak. The moral basis for both kinds of 'power' in the Pintupi case is the same, the survival and security of the subordinates. Elders conform to this criterion by the representation of gerontocracy as 'looking after' or nurturance (1982:90-1).

As Myers notes, the viability of 'looking after' as a meaningful ideology ultimately depends on certain shared understandings about the purpose and scope of religious authority. In ritual contexts, for example, the durability of the ideology depends on rights of succession and the continual transformation of a subordinate's status over time. By obtaining access to esoteric and restricted spiritual knowledge from *tjilpi tjurta* [lit. many old people or a council of elders], younger Pintupi gain valuable status and resources (material and non-material). Service modalities in this system are essentially hierarchical and asymmetrical, in that certain ritual and material transactions between individuals signify hierarchy and subordination across different domains of social action (e.g. pain/ritual knowledge; food/claim to women). Exchange processes, in this system, are essentially 'transformative', in that certain transactions mark reciprocal 'obligation[s] that can never be [fully] repaid.' (Myers 1986b:173-4). Examples include sons-in-law working for fathers-in-law, where the recipient of a spouse enters into a service relation with his senior partner. For initiates, one's 'father-in-law' [real or classificatory] is a preferred circumcisor, a practice that reinforces the value of service modalities in other contexts (e.g. in the gifting of meat or carrying out certain ritual duties upon the death of their children).

Among Western Desert communities today, the term *kanyininpa* operates grammatically as a verb (i.e. 'look after' or 'hold'), but may be transformed in speech through suffixing. The suffix *pai*, for instance, has the effect of transforming the transitive verb-stem *kanyil-* into a noun form, as with the term *kanyilpai* [free translation 'one who habitually looks after or holds something'] (Eckert 1988:229-31). In the contemporary settlement context, this latter form is often used in conjunction with English words to denote official responsibilities

(e.g. money *kanyilpai* [to describe the activities of a bookkeeper or accountant]. By attaching English nouns to traditional verb forms in this way, Western Desert speakers are able to describe official work roles and responsibilities in ways that reproduce themes of nurturance, care and protection in interpersonal relations. The same construction of nurturance and authority may be applied to White 'bosses' and collectively-owned property, conveying the idea that people in authority are expected to 'hold' and 'look after' people (and things) in the course of their working lives. In all these cases, traditional Western Desert grammar and syntax are preserved, but new terms are added enabling the construction of syncretic speech forms. The conjunction of standard English terms used to designate occupational roles and *kanyilpai* thus carries the core meaning of authority conveyed in conventional symbolic form into a new sphere of social and administrative action.¹¹

From a comparative perspective, the most intriguing aspect of Myers' analysis of 'looking after' centres on his discussion of cross-cultural relations in the settlement context. His description of the way Western Desert people extend their kin-based 'patron-client' conception of authority to non-Aboriginal staff, for example, highlights profound cultural differences, conflict and dissonance, rather than any sense in which the two parties employed service modalities or helping practices to overcome their differences:

The Pintupi conception of a reciprocal relationship did not match the European economically-founded notion of bosses and workers, especially in regard to the boss's obligation to look after the people. That *they did not share the same code for interpreting and evaluating the behaviour and intentions of the opposite party caused dissonance, mutual resentment, frustration, and disillusion on both sides* [my emphasis]. Because the ideology was inadequate to provide an acceptable accommodation to the situation, the Pintupi found it difficult to act purposefully...The 'shared understandings' which Weber thought were necessary for social relations were lacking in both the basis and nature of authority and the co-ordinate concepts of value ... A major problem in the articulation of black-white relations was the coordination of value. In transactions where the expectation of 'help' is justified by previous work each side must evaluate its own reciprocal obligations. However, a 'measuring', if it is to satisfy both parties, requires a shared concept of value and equivalence. (Myers 1980:317-9).

In many ways, this analytical focus on cultural misunderstanding, incommensurable values and 'a lack of fairness and equivalence' in exchange is curious.

11 I say 'core' because, like all modes of symbolic action, the reproduction and resilience of *kanyinipa* as a symbolic form depends on its capacity to assimilate new experiences and referents. In Chapter Three, I follow Sahlins in arguing that this process of assimilation and cultural reproduction also entails some form of 'practical revaluation' of the form's meaning and significance over time. 'The transformation of a culture', as Sahlins says, 'is also a mode of its [cultural] reproduction' (1985:138).

Myers cites ample evidence of occasions when some form of parity and equality was achieved between the Pintupi and White 'bosses' (1986b:31-39;1980:320). Moreover, the ethnographic literature is replete with references to cooperative social relations between early settlers, pastoralists and the like elsewhere in remote Aboriginal Australia. Trigger (1992), for example, notes that cooperative relations between Aboriginal station workers and White pastoralists in the Queensland cattle industry were common (see also Rowse 1988). Similarly, Anderson's (1983) account of Aboriginal relations with Whites in the southeast Cape York Peninsula suggests local landholders forged relations with Whites on the basis of their view of what 'proper' and balanced exchange partnerships entailed.

These and other ethnographic accounts demonstrate the historical conditions within which an important aspect of colonial relations developed: the establishment of co-operative social relations coinciding with some attempt on the part of Aborigines and frontier Whites to achieve mutually beneficial exchange partnerships. For Rowse, the import of Aboriginal testimony lies in its implicit denial of an anti-colonial discourse within Australian Aboriginal Studies. In short, it is all too easy to direct one's attention polemically to the shame and abhorrence of colonial exploitation, far more difficult to explain cooperative relations subjectively from the perspective of colonial subjects.¹²

Based on fieldwork in the Western Desert in the 1960s, Hamilton offered the following observations on early Aboriginal-European contacts:

When the Aboriginal people moved into areas of white settlement it was with the intention of utilising a new and abundant source of food, no more no less. However, *in order to make claims on the whites they attempted to incorporate them into their own social system, a fact of which the whites were generally ignorant...* [my emphasis]. The fact that they use the English word 'boss' for the leader of their ritual line, and that ritual leaders are expected to 'care for' their ritual subordinates, suggests that this may be the approach they took in comprehending the white/Aboriginal relationship. That is, they accepted the same status of subordination to and dependency on the white man as they expected to show towards the significant ritual leaders in their own culture (Hamilton 1972:42-3).

12 Based on the testimony of Aboriginal stockmen in the Northern Territory and his reading of McGrath's historiography, *Born in the Cattle*, Rowse argues it is 'no longer sufficient [or accurate] to say non-Aborigines ruthlessly exploited Aboriginal labour and land' (1988:57). Rowse's paper, titled 'Paternalism's Changing Reputation', makes the point that those employed in the pastoral industry were 'not simply concerned for money but for a shared understanding of the relationship in which money is to be exchanged for labour' (1988:62). Rowse is cautious about playing into the hands of non-Aboriginal pastoralists, many of whom claimed to have 'an 'understanding' with Aborigines that went beyond monetary considerations - a convenient ruse, he argued, for the maintenance of low-wage conditions. In the next Chapter, I argue that Gouldner's concept of exploitation (ie. 'the exchange of unequal things') offers a useful way of interpreting exchange relations where, ostensibly, each party gets something different out of a transaction. This leaves plenty of scope for notions of parity even where the goods and services transacted are valued differently by each party.

Here, Hamilton describes a phenomenon that is still significant in relations between Whites and Western Desert people living in remote settlements today: namely, attempts to include Whites within a structured field of reciprocal obligation consistent with Aboriginal understandings of nurturance, hierarchy and boss-ship (cf. Myers 1986b). However, reading Hamilton's comments, we could easily be forgiven for thinking this incorporative strategy was essentially utilitarian, motivated more by economic concerns than a desire to establish 'good' workable relations or to incorporate Whites within 'their own social system' (cf. Rowse 1988:44). In any event, the homology or correspondence between the motivational scheme Hamilton describes and the utilitarian view of service outlined earlier should now be clear. For Western Desert people to get what they wanted (e.g. European foods), they had to accept some kind of 'subordination and dependency on the white man'. In return for this deference and respect, they expected their White 'boss' to 'look after' them. This appears to be similar to the utilitarian view of service outlined by Raz, except that in this instance, it is subordination and dependency in return for food (or other desired goods) and the authority figures are White and largely 'ignorant' of the nature of their reciprocal obligations.

It is perhaps reasonable in light of Hamilton's testimony to ask whether the conditions Raz deemed necessary for legitimate service relations were ever met on the colonial frontier. Did, for example, Aboriginal people and Whites develop exchange partnerships that, from the point of view of either party, satisfied their own understanding of what constitutes 'good' and 'proper' exchange? Were Raz's criteria for a rational calculation of self-interest ever satisfied, or were these relations governed by other considerations? A large amount of historical and ethnographic evidence, including accounts given by Myers, suggests that early exchange relations were marked by *largesse* on both sides. Food and rights of access to water, labour, women and precious artifacts were given by Aboriginal people in the hope of securing mutually beneficial trade partnerships (cf. Myers' account of Western Desert people's emphasis on reciprocity and balance in exchange; see also Rowse 1988). Likewise, from accounts given by early explorers, settlers and missionaries, there was often an element of what Andrew Lang called 'the ferocity and almost equally fatal goodwill' of Europeans (Stanner 1979:47). This situation of exaggerated generosity, presumably aimed at enhancing opportunities for on-going trade, needs further assessment in light of the seemingly disparate conceptions of 'value' and authority pointed to by Myers. It suggests, among other things, that gift-giving and personalised acts of service performed important instrumental functions in establishing and maintaining co-operative race-relations, a proposition that has clear implications for administrative practice in remote Aboriginal settlements today.¹³

13 In Chapter Three, I develop a discussion based on Wallace's (1964) concept of 'complexly-linked equivalence structures', where certain instrumental acts call forth consummatory behaviour on the part of others. Wallace's theory provides a useful way of understanding certain material transactions

I cited Myers' comparative observations at length because they relate directly to the arguments outlined in the Introduction concerning conjunctive power relations. His focus on incompatible cultural forms appears to be founded on a number of humanist assumptions regarding the significance of 'shared understandings' for the establishment and maintenance of co-operative exchange relations. In *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, dissonance and resentment are viewed as products of cultural misunderstanding, underscoring the tragedy of an assumed naivete on the part of colonised subjects. However, naivete is a two-edged sword: that a person is naive may imply that he is either unaware or ignorant of something, in the sense of not knowing, or, alternatively, it may mean that he does not have the kind of facility in language or knowledge normally identified with sophistication. In the former sense, a presumption of innocence may carry the added moral implication of faultlessness, a status normally reserved for those absolved from guilt.¹⁴

At the very least, Myers' analytical focus on an absence of shared values and cultural misunderstanding ignores how certain practices and value-systems are maintained cross-culturally. For Myers, what is not shared in Aboriginal-European interaction is a common conception of market value and political authority. The Pintupi do not know how much is enough in monetary terms and phrase their requests in a way that takes for granted a White boss's obligation to help. However, this assumption was unwarranted from the perspective of Whites, who took 'a very different view of the same social relations' (1980:319).

Behind these comments lies a perspective on what is essentially different about Aboriginal and European modes of exchange. Two opposed systems are postulated, one operating on 'market' principles and a 'European economically founded notion of bosses and workers', the other based on nurturance and reciprocity among kin. Myers' use of the term 'economic' in reference to Whites becomes clearer when he distinguishes 'status' from 'contract-based relationships'; the former is more time-extensive, constituted as 'an on-going series of obligations extending beyond the "work" domain' (1980:319), while the latter

as instrumental in an economy of service exchange. For Wallace, consummation implies some form of recognition on the part of beneficiaries, although this need not imply shared understanding of either the motives, values or significance either party imputes to instrumental acts. All that is required is recognition of 'the behavioural cues and codes' that register acknowledgment and make on going exchange possible (cf. Paine 1974; Wallace 1964). This is a far cry from 'shared understanding' in the sense implied by Myers (1980:318).

14 A presumption of innocence may also aid the cause of anthropologists who, in presenting their ethnographic accounts of postcolonial race relations, wish to avoid many of the interpretive difficulties and ethical dilemmas associated with ascribing 'value' cross-culturally. Perhaps this is why Myers states that the Pintupi are culturally ill equipped to act purposefully in the contemporary situation *vis-a-vis* the wider society (see above). He does not, I assume, mean that the Pintupi find it impossible to act purposefully in all their encounters with Europeans. A far more plausible (and perhaps honest) reading of his comparative remarks might stress the fact that he follows Weber's interpretive methodology (*verstehen*) in postulating 'shared understanding' and 'coordinate concepts of value' as necessary for cooperative social relations and exchange equivalence (Myers 1980:318).

is restricted both in time and scope by the logic of contract and commodity exchange (i.e. the purchase of labour time at an agreed rate and under specific conditions; cf. Gregory 1982). Needless to say, it was Whites working for the community (not the Pintupi) who generally applied this purchase mentality in exchange, although Myers noted there were some Whites who, because they were generous and satisfied the people's expectations of how a good 'boss' should behave, were 'liked and respected'.

It seems, from the foregoing, that while the Pintupi were dependent upon the skills and knowledge Whites had with respect to the wider economy, they continued to employ exchange strategies that reminded their 'bosses' of their obligation to 'help' and 'look after' them. On the surface at least, this strategic emphasis on helping and looking after people appears consistent with the service conception outlined earlier, although how and why such claims were either ignored or misunderstood by Whites (under what circumstances?) needs addressing ethnographically.¹⁵

On the face of Myers' ethnography, it would seem premature to discount the possibility that at least some Whites employed by Aboriginal communities today share, or at least understand, the rudiments of a service economy based on themes of nurturance and generosity. Later, in Chapter Six and Seven, I argue that Western Desert people continue to apply concepts of authority and social worth that serve a dual social function: first, attributions of social worth reflect values, attitudes and expectations operating in the Aboriginal domain, reproducing much the same exchange ethos described by Myers (e.g. elements of compassion, nurturance, reciprocity, etc.); second, from the perspective of long-term staff, attributions of authority (and some of the more positive affirmations of good character extended in the course of daily interaction) appear to engage moral sensibilities that are deeply embedded in liberal-democratic traditions of service.¹⁶

To make sense of these propositions ethnographically, there needs to be some indication of how Aboriginal people and Whites working locally level claims and establish grounds of appeal in their dealings with one another, how they invoke shared sentiments and recognise the cues and codes that make social interaction and exchange possible. If, as Myers asserts, the Pintupi concept of authority does not match 'the European economically founded notion of bosses and workers, especially in regard to the boss's obligation to look after the people', then we could expect some indication of what an 'economic' predisposition entails in practice.

15 By strategic I mean to suggest that Western Desert people often make claims on Whites based on the belief, mistaken or otherwise, that they recognise the nature of their reciprocal obligations. Claims are strategic in the sense that they take for granted certain moral assumptions about how people should behave. At the very least, the categorical identification of Whites with contract and commodity-based exchange leaves questions unanswered concerning the basis of conjunctive power relations.

16 It may be, as Gouldner argued in clarifying the concept of reciprocity in functionalist theory, that a 'generalised moral norm of reciprocity ... is one of the universal "principal components" of [all] moral codes' (1960:161).

Armed with a clear idea of how both parties apply their different conceptions of value and authority in exchange, we would then be in a better position to assess some of the cultural differences posited by Myers as the cause of mutual dissonance, resentment and frustration.

Most of the transactional examples in *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* concern Aboriginal requests for help from Whites. Myers' analysis of Aboriginal-European interaction is thus limited by a critical focus on cultural misunderstanding and the Pintupi's dissatisfaction with Whites, a limitation which may have been avoided by further consideration of the claims both parties employ in exchange. Do, for example, as Hamilton's comments appear to indicate, Western Desert people still seek to incorporate certain Whites within 'their' social system? And, if so, what are the responses of employees who, as one anthropologist recently remarked, differ markedly both in their structural relationship to Aboriginal people and the extent to which they are involved in an economy of service exchange?¹⁷

Reading Myers' ethnography, I am left wondering whether much of the dissonance, frustration and resentment of which he speaks could be explained in other terms, as a reflection of opposed political and economic interests, for example, rather than being a result of cultural misunderstanding or miscommunication. As manifestations of what Keesing (1990:17-8) referred to as incipient tensions and 'cleavages' in societies subject to colonial rule, for instance, the sort

17 Chapter Three outlines this service economy in detail, noting how Gerrard and several other anthropologists minimise the social significance of 'long-term reciprocity' and personalised forms of exchange for intercultural relations (Gerrard 1989:108; Martin 1995). Martin, for example, claims that no 'personalised reciprocity or social relationships of any depth' exist between Aboriginal people and Whites in the contemporary townships in which he did his fieldwork in Northern Australia during the 1980s (1995:13-14). This is not the case in my own fieldwork area, and from accounts given by other anthropologists and work colleagues who have worked in remote North Australian settlements, I doubt whether it will suffice for Arnhem Land settlements either. There are, however, significant issues of social scale and social separation specific to certain large Aboriginal housing settlements (eg. Arakun, Oenpelli and Maningrida) that would seem to explain Gerrard and Martin's perspective. In any event, non-Aboriginal transience, as Gerrard calls it, is certainly not universal and I have found it useful in this study to focus on service modalities of exchange as key elements in the role repertoire of both short and long-term staff. One virtue of this approach is that it helps us better understand 'the invisible hierarchies of social acceptance' (Brody 1975:76) that organise staff according to the nature and extent of their involvement with Aboriginal people. In some remote Western Desert settlements, long-serving staff occupy a privileged position in this organisational hierarchy because their vocational commitment is self-evident and manifest in their extensive knowledge of Aboriginal culture and social practice. If, as I argue later in the thesis, this moral hierarchy also implies a form of 'community' service that must not only be validated materially through competent and effective use of administrative office in the 'interests' of the community as a whole, but also demonstrated personally through affirmation of 'relatedness' with Aboriginal others, then it would seem prudent to consider how Whites situate themselves within this moral hierarchy by extending their involvement beyond the narrow confines of their occupational role (cf. Gerrard's (1989:108) comments about Aboriginal people orienting themselves to European occupational roles, rather than Europeans vesting those roles with multiple significations by extending their involvement with Aboriginal people to include relationships and activities that powerfully and symbolically express their personal identification with the needs and 'interests' of Aboriginal people in different contexts).

of dissonance, conflict and resentment Myers alludes to may reflect dissatisfaction with the apparent indifference shown by Whites to Aboriginal claims of need. In any event, the significant characteristics of conflict from a sociological perspective concern the difficulties people encounter in realising their personal wants, goals and interests, difficulties that may be identified with both the actions of others and the structures of power they inhabit.

From such a critical sociological perspective, the classic formulation of service outlined earlier in this Chapter does not fare well. It would seem from the foregoing discussion that service conceptions ultimately hinge on an assumption regarding the intentions of people in power: that their primary responsibility is to serve others faithfully; that their interests are in some way congruent with the interests of the governed. Where this convergence of subject's interests and authoritative conduct can be demonstrated ethnographically, we are given important clues as to the binding force of administrative arrangements predicated on serving Aboriginal interests. As political constructs, service conceptions are not just normative or moral prescriptions specifying how authorities ought to behave. They may also take-for-granted and reflect certain social givens: how particular individuals and authority figures do (or appear to) behave at times. This, as I understand it, is what Myers had in mind when he spoke of *kanyininpa* as a legitimating ideology in Pintupi society. Like *kanyininpa*, service conceptions both reflect and veil key aspects of social reality, a feature of all legitimating ideologies. In the following section, I discuss some of the more persistent dilemmas of accountability evident in remote community administration, linking many of the practical difficulties and organisational dilemmas experienced by local staff to broader structures of political and economic power.

SECTION 2.6

Problems of accountability, ambiguity and representation in the administration of remote Aboriginal settlements

From an organisational perspective, dilemmas of accountability are commonplace in the administration of Aboriginal affairs. Rowse, for example, speaks of ambiguity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and other key government agencies, claiming those responsible for monitoring community funding are engaged in:

... two rather different tasks of legitimation: on the one hand, both are formal instruments of non-Aboriginal government, administering 'taxpayer's money'; on the other, each has had the mission of serving Aboriginal interests, of advocating Aboriginal interests in an often hostile bureaucratic and political climate (1992:5).

By examining some of the more persistent dilemmas of accountability experienced within this service-oriented administration, Rowse highlights the predicaments of those caught in the middle of seemingly opposed social and political interests. At a local level, Aboriginal councillors experience similar problems in representing 'community' interests to government agencies.¹⁸ Confusion over accountability issues presents problems for settlement staff as well. They also attempt to balance the demands of public accountability and community representation, often questioning the relevance of bureaucratic guidelines or the extent to which they should accommodate community concerns in their official capacity.

In such cases, where lines of political obligation and accountability are not clearly drawn, it seems more than likely that community councillors and settlement staff will take a pragmatic line, hoping to avoid any confrontation that might threaten their position locally. Being aware of a possible conflict of interests, for example, they may choose a course of action that involves the least risk possible, doing whatever seems expedient under the circumstances. Alternatively, they may be moved more by sentiment than expedience and assert their own autonomy over and above loyalty or responsibility to any particular person or body. In examining these issues ethnographically, it is important to consider the social context in which exchange occurs: the fact that each person orients his or her behaviour with respect to known others. Political expedience, like the value Pintupi accord personal autonomy (Myers 1986b), comes at a certain social cost, typically where expectations of support are disregarded or devalued in the process.

The implications of this kind of social accounting become apparent when we consider the strategies employed by staff and councillors in shoring up their support locally. Myers, for example, argued that a White 'boss-outsider' offered a convenient scapegoat for Pintupi councillors when council decisions become unpopular in the wider community (1986b:265-85). By appealing to the paternalistic sentiments of settlement staff (their presumed desire to take initiative in implementing Council resolutions), Pintupi councillors avoided at least some of

18 In some ways, the term 'community interests' (as opposed to government or non-Aboriginal interests) gives a false and misleading impression of ethnic and corporate solidarity, suggesting a greater degree of consensus and solidarity among local actors than actually exists. Yet the term 'community' has become so much a part of administrative (and Aboriginal) discourse that its use here seems justified. Recent attempts by anthropologists to de-construct the concept, however, have shed light on its utility for service-oriented bureaucratic agencies. Smith (1989:19), for example, feels the term serves the policy needs of state-sponsored development agencies, whose role in monitoring Aboriginal communities as 'self-governing social units' (i.e. supposedly representative of an undifferentiated Aboriginal constituency) requires continual legitimation; see also Rowse 1992). The term 'community' has thus become indispensable to bureaucratic decision-making and the legitimating apparatus of government. However, one further point needs bearing in mind. In the Western Desert at least, there is a 'tradition' of consensus-based decision-making founded on temporary aggregations. Consequently, if as Smith argues, the term community conjures up images of social cohesion, consensus and cooperative endeavour in the minds of both government and indigenous service agencies, then it would seem reasonable to argue that the sense of community (or *gemeinschaft* in Tonnies' terms) implied in contemporary usage derives at least some of its cultural significance from customary forms of social organisation.

the flak associated with unpopular Council decisions. For Myers, the advantage of having such a 'boss' was obvious: by projecting authority outside the group (on to Whites or the government or some other external locus of power) the Pintupi sustained a degree of unity among themselves.

Tonkinson also found settlement staff at Jigalong functioned politically as outsiders, largely beyond the social constraints and pressures of accountability to which Mardu were subject. In 1978, he went as far as to say 'Whites have no active place in their internal affairs and remain for the most part blurred images beyond the periphery of the all-important Law' (1978:93). Ten years on, the situation at Jigalong remained fairly much the same. After nearly a decade of self-management policy, Tonkinson found the *Mardu* continued to conceptualise 'whitefella' and 'blackfella business' as two distinct realms of social concern, power and authority:

In my view, the fundamental problem lies in Aboriginal conceptualisations of two distinct realms of power and authority: their own, deriving from the Dreaming, and that of whites, deriving from some other source. Governed by this dichotomy, the Aborigines refused to see any parallels or convergence between their Dreaming-originated culture and the wholly alien culture of the whites. They made a spatial division between the *maya* 'house' (or settlement area, in the case of the mission) and the *ngurra* 'camp'. Each domain had its own loci of authority and within it that authority was paramount.

The first threat to this separation was the insistence by government policy that Aborigines assume responsibility for what had formerly been part of the *maya* [mission] domain, that of 'whitefella business'. The strategy adopted by the Jigalong people to maintain the dichotomy aimed to insulate the increasingly penetrative bureaucratic machinery of the outside world from the camp, and the means they used was to require the council to mediate between themselves and the wider society. ... This insulation strategy has been increasingly undermined as more and more of what once was 'whitefella business' becomes 'Aboriginal business' and thus invades the domain of the camp. It is no longer possible to maintain the clear dichotomy, since the pace of change is necessitating some degree of fusion between the two realms of power and authority (1988a:407-8).

From an official government viewpoint, non-Aboriginal employees working for Aboriginal organisations are employed to facilitate community development aspirations: to help free Aboriginal people from dependence on government funding and control. Tonkinson, however, notes that in remote Aboriginal settlements like Jigalong, White staff still exercise considerable *de facto* authority, a predictable result of their role in delivering government services. This also seems to be the practical logic that sustains Aboriginal conceptions of non-Aboriginal administrative support. Tonkinson's arguments, however, suggest that Western Desert people continue to see strategic benefit in giving Whites a larger degree of

administrative latitude than many government agencies would prefer. At Jigalong, the Mardu use non-Aboriginal administrative support strategically: to strike a balance between the need for competent management of their organisation's financial affairs and often difficult mediation of interests generated internally within the Aboriginal domain.¹⁹

The question of how and why the 'whitefella/blackfella business' distinction originated is central to my discussion of staff-community relations at Coonana and Tjuntjuntjara today. The distinction also influences much of the debate concerning 'domains' and social closure in the ethnographic literature (see, for example, Trigger 1986; Rowse 1992), concepts that seek to clarify the extent to which Aboriginal people resist incorporation within structures of administrative power. It is worth recalling here the colonial circumstances that gave rise to the distinction in the mission era at Jigalong – the mutual antipathy and distrust Tonkinson describes between 'Aborigines, intent on retaining their Law, and the missionaries, intent on destroying it' (1988b:64). At the same time, the Jigalong mob maintained a further distinction between 'whitefellas' and 'Christians'; the latter category identified negatively with the Apostolic missionaries' desire to change Aboriginal lifestyles and cultural practices. In his later work, Tonkinson argues that fundamental changes in power relations, government policy and the employment of a new category of Whites more sympathetic to Aboriginal cultural practices has all but made the 'whitefella/blackfella business' distinction redundant. As he puts it, 'much of what had been 'whitefella business' is now, in an era of Aboriginal self-management, essentially Aboriginal business, and major social problems demand new solutions which must come from both domains to be successful' (1988b:71).

As Tonkinson's analysis suggests, for many Aboriginal councillors and employees living in remote Aboriginal settlements, responsibilities in community management, administration and Council decision-making compete with kinship and ritual obligations, none of which are easily forsaken. Likewise, a desire to be free of administrative concerns and participate more fully in the religious life appears to conflict with policy expectations that Aboriginal people assume administrative responsibilities as a condition of their cultural and political autonomy in the wider economy. Dilemmas of accountability and responsibility are thus integral to the politics of community representation, a feature of local-level politics that Rowse (1992) described in examining the structural parameters of self-determination policy in remote Aboriginal settlements.

19 The structural contradiction underlying these organisational dilemmas should now be clear: while the dictates of current policy define Aboriginal self-management as the right of Aboriginal people to take charge of their own affairs and '... make the kinds of decisions about their future as other Australians make and to accept responsibility for the results' (cited in Tonkinson and Howard 1990:67), the discrepancy between administrative means and developmental ends – the fact that remote Western Desert communities like Coonana and Tjuntjuntjara do not have the administrative competencies necessary to achieve desired development outcomes without non-Aboriginal support provides service agencies with a powerful and practical rationale for working in remote communities.

SECTION 2.7

Conclusion

While it is too early at this stage to sketch a model of administrative practice that does justice to the theory of conjunctive power relations outlined in Chapter One, the discussion presented in this Chapter indicates service conceptions, helping practices and some rather diffuse, culturally non-specific notions of 'looking after' constitute important points of articulation between Aboriginal and administrative domains at a local level. This proposition raises the likelihood that the often tense and complex mediation of Aboriginal and administrative domains suggested by Rowse (1992:100) implies a dedicatory form of 'community service', one 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 Aboriginal others (i.e. through highly personalised modes of service exchange). At the very least, it would seem worthwhile examining how and why staff situate themselves within this dual economy by extending their involvement with Aboriginal people to include relationships and activities that powerfully and symbolically express their identification with Aboriginal 'interests' in different contexts.

In the following Chapter, I consider some of the more complex interpretive and methodological issues involved in theorising service relations cross-culturally, accepting, at the same time, Merlan's call for the development of a 'service framework for understanding value... in Aboriginal social contexts' (1991:259). Merlan does not extend her analysis to include the participation of Whites in Aboriginal service economies, the effect of which is to reinforce the perception that there are no significant points of articulation between Aboriginal and administrative domains locally. Yet there are good reasons to believe, as indicated empirically in this study and elsewhere in the anthropological literature, that significant points of articulation or convergence do exist, one of the reasons perhaps why a practice-oriented approach to the study of power relations seems to bear fruit. In this thesis, I have found it useful to identify exchange practices and modalities of service that, in Bourdieu's (1977:191) terms, 'euphemise' administrative forms of power in ways that are generally consistent with Western Desert conceptions of authority as 'looking after'.

Bourdieu's notion of euphemised power recalls another distinction common in economic anthropology: between the 'good faith' (1977:186) economy of trust, good-will and gift exchange conducted between kin in traditional societies and the somewhat more indifferent and calculating disposition of individual transactors in cash-based market economies. This comparative view of exchange implies a moral obligation attendant on people operating in small-scale societies: namely, that those who participate in gift exchange do so on condition that they translate (or convert) purely economic forms of domination or power into locally recognised forms of symbolic and social capital. This process of conversion and translation appears to be less an option than a condi-

tion of legitimacy in systems of exchange that resist domination by outside interests (1977:192).

In Chapter Six and Seven I describe some of the more subtle ways in which administrative brokers *qua* cultural intermediaries (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) adapt to local conditions and organise themselves according to both the nature and extent of their involvement with Aboriginal people (and their vocational commitment generally). Commenting on Whites working in Canadian East Arctic Inuit settlements, for example, Brody (1975:73) noted the 'invisible [moral] hierarchies' of social acceptance that arranged Whites according to whether they were liked by the community and their knowledge of (and identification with) Inuit culture. This orientation presumed that Whites were concerned with gaining acceptance, both from their work colleagues and Inuit clients. While this condition need not always hold in remote Aboriginal settlements like Coonana and Tjuntjuntjara (particularly among itinerant employees who often see no practical need for acceptance) it would still seem to constitute an important motivational principle in the practice of long-serving staff (missionaries included), one of the reasons, perhaps, why some of the more respected and influential staff members remain in the community for so long.