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Cycles of Integration and Fragmentation: Changing Yolngu–Balanda Sentiments of the ‘Good Life’ in Northern Australia

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Introduction

Almost 20 years ago, on 24 June 1998, the first woman elected to the Northern Territory parliament, Senator Trish Crossan,¹ began her opening speech by defining the ‘good life’ as living on Yolngu country, learning cultural ways and upholding and acknowledging the rights of the Indigenous citizens of her constituency. In political discourse around Indigenous issues, such ‘good’ intentions can counter the ‘authoritarian moralism’ that informs Australian neoliberal ideology, as Wacquant (as cited in Altman, 2010, p. 266) has argued, but they

1 Crossan taught at Yirrkala in the 1980s and is Chair of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee. She made an apology to the Stolen Generations in this speech. She is also a speaker of Yolngu matha (language) and addressed members as follows: *Nhamirr bukma? Manyak walnga nganapurr nhinan ngarra ga gurritumirr ngarrak, ngunhal Yirrkala wangangur. Yolngu walal ngarrak djaka, ga gurritu gathar ngarrak ga marnngikungal ngarran Yolngu Romgu. Buku—wekan mhuma, wanga—watangun Yolngun, nbe ngarrak, djaka.* ‘Those words translated mean thank you for welcoming my family and I, for allowing us to live on your land and for the opportunity to understand your culture. I give a public undertaking to work hard to represent them and to continue to respect and acknowledge their rights’ (Lawrence, 2013).

may also unconsciously mute competing perspectives by highlighting sameness over *différance* (Derrida, 1968).² Therefore, the intersubjective complexities and politically motivated agendas surrounding terms like the 'good life' in cross-cultural settings require close attention to how *différance* is 'announced' or 'recalled' through language, in turn inviting new forms of temporality, 'play' and the emergence of 'a middle voice' (Derrida, 1968, pp. 261, 284).³ Forty years after Derrida coined the term *différance*, Hart's (2013, 2015) theory of the 'human economy' placed the plurality of human perspectives at the core of achieving 'economic democracy' working from the grassroots to the global. He argued that 'the human economy was everywhere, including in the cracks of modern societies. This goes with treating markets and money in a variety of forms as human universals' (Hart, 2013, p. 18). Hart (2015, p. 6) specifically argued for an approach that views the global as an extension and outworking of local values and practices. Thus, the imagined futures that local people aspire to should be recognised and encouraged by the larger economic system and those in power (Hart, 2013, p. 18). Since the terms of recognition require agreement, it is in this nexus that Hart (2013) perceived 'the scope for revolution' (p. 22) and the recombination of different kinds of economic institutions and frameworks. By giving credence to the 'body of customs, laws and history' that have been concealed or indeed 'repressed' by dominant forces, he argued that their value was potentially to 'humanize' economic processes (pp. 24–25).

In this chapter, I suggest that the tools needed to engage effectively with economic struggles in Aboriginal contexts are those of language and culture. By bringing out how linguistically mediated practices shape socioeconomic change, some scholars have shown how the language of relationships may be used to manage intercultural ventures and handle

2 Derrida's (1968) term '*différance*' combines Freud's definition of 'differing' as 'discernibility, distinction, deviation' with 'deferring' as 'detour, delay, relay, reserve' (pp. 292–93). In a complex treatise on *différance*, Derrida, following Bataille, argued for 'the economic character of difference' and its delayed effects or 'trace' that 'dislocates, displaces and refers beyond itself' (pp. 294, 297). The application of *différance* in this chapter is intended to draw the reader's attention to a play of positions, concepts and linguistic disruptions that shape crisis, precarity and hope in aspirations for and imagination of the 'good life'.

3 Some aspects of this essay were first presented at the final Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Domestic Moral Economy conference, 'The Quest for the Good Life in Precarious Times: Grassroots Perspectives on the Value Question in the 21st Century', 24–26 March 2015, University of Manchester. I am most grateful to Jon Altman for insights and discussions on these issues, and to Chris Gregory and Karen Sykes for broader perspectives on the domestic moral economy in the Asia-Pacific. The project was supported by the ESRC (2011–15).

conflicts (Adler & Elmhurst, 2008).⁴ Yet, while some reviews of Australian employment statistics claim that the situation is improving in certain areas (e.g. around Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous employment), the language of what constitutes advantage and disadvantage continues to be variously misunderstood cross culturally.⁵ This situation presents challenges for achieving a sense of parity between Yolngu and Balanda (non-Aboriginal people of European descent). It manifests where Balanda governments use the language of ‘target setting’, a notion that is typically at odds with Yolngu ways of asserting their ‘self-perception of presence’ (Derrida, 1968, p. 291) in a range of economic contexts.

The spaces in which the presencing of a ‘middle voice’ occurs receive less attention than policies that propound economic gain and productivity, resulting in play becoming enfolded in, and constrained by, competing political positions. As Altman (2009) noted, the self-regulation required for neoliberal productivity can entangle citizens in complex relations with the state, in which it ‘at once acknowledges difference while simultaneously disciplining, constraining and regulating otherness’ (p. 10). Moreover, as Peterson (2005) observed, ‘there is always the threat of politicization of inequality by any one of a number of external interests’ (p. 13). While recognising such constraints, I follow Hart’s (2013) approach to human economy, which is:

Informed by an economic vision capable of bridging the gap between everyday life (what people know) and humanity’s common predicament, which is inevitably impersonal and lies beyond the actor’s point of view (what they don’t know). (p. 3)

In the Australian context, Altman (2010) outlined how this tension is embedded across four key tropes influencing culture and policy discourses around the ‘crisis of [Aboriginal] culture’ (pp. 266–270). First, the crisis

4 Adler and Elmhurst (2008) have shown that misunderstandings do not only arise from material demands or their lack, but from the kinds of conflict-management styles and concepts that workers experience as either confrontational or non-confrontational. S.-Y. Kim, J. Kim and Lim (2013, p. 58) also discussed how Westerners engage with confrontation, which involves competition and collaboration, while Easterners adopt non-confrontational practices of avoidance and compromise (Morris et al., 1998; Tang & Kirkbride, 1986; Ting-Toomey, 1988).

5 The Prime Minister’s *Closing the Gap* report (Australian Government, 2015, p. 5) asserted that decreasing gap targets in areas of mortality rates for children under five, and Year 12 attainment rates, are both on track. Meanwhile, the language of the good life in the new Forrest review (Altman, 2014) has been criticised for failing ‘to demonstrate an appreciation of the significance of local cultural and social realities in shaping the existing forms of economic activity in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people already engage’ (Lahn, 2014, p. 2).

is represented in a tension between economic impoverishment and rates of violence in the media; second, scholars and politicians (e.g. Noel Pearson, Peter Sutton and others) highlight negative influences in particular regions where they consider cultural practices to have contributed to 'passive welfare'; third, the idea of a crisis is promoted by 'neoconservative thinkers' who champion entrepreneurial independence for Aboriginal people; and, fourth, the goal of such independence is evidenced in an overemphasis on education as a panacea for welfare ills, regardless of lived differences (Altman, 2010, p. 267). In this framework, the reason why 'closing the gap' has been difficult to advance is because issues are 'intergenerational', changing trends are hard to estimate and disadvantages need to be considered in terms of 'reducing disparities' (Altman, Biddle & Hunter, 2008, pp. 17–18). By comparing competing interpretations of crisis, we can see how the incommensurable aspects of intercultural *différance* are evoked in the spaces in between, although they often are too diffuse or difficult to account for or to enter political agendas. For example, the 2008 Closing the Gap reforms⁶ unproblematically assumed a shared language related to proposed outcomes across Yolngu and non-Yolngu domains, which ultimately rendered differences in Yolngu culture, language and life, as well as *différance*, invisible.

Some anthropologists have shown how commodification has created new kinds of conflict. In Central Australia, Austin-Broos (2003, as cited in Peterson, 2005) has demonstrated how relations around commodities compete with relationships that are long established through connections to place, land and religious law, and which once provided the basis of economic engagement. Peterson (2005) asserted that understanding the interpersonal dynamics of cultural issues is critical to achieving successful development processes for Indigenous livelihood, but that it has been extremely difficult to bring these cultural issues to the fore in development projects because the premises they raise present a complexity not readily able to be taken into account. However, as we shall see from the cases presented below, optimal modes of engagement take seriously the implications of *différance*, since achieving goals and targets involves 'allocative power', which MacDonald (2000, pp. 96–99) defined as the 'relative ability to respond to demands'. Allocative power entails

6 The Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, delivered the 2008 annual lecture commemorating the Mabo judgment on native title and questioned the poverty experienced by many Aboriginal Australians living on great wealth in terms of land ownership, a paradox a former federal minister, Amanda Vanstone, had identified (Altman, 2009, p. 1).

understanding how Yolngu wellbeing is dependent, in part, on the extent to which Yolngu linguistic and cultural interpretations of the good life diverge from neoliberal agendas, and how their effects create imbalance.

For Yolngu, the good life is more accurately translated as the ‘right path’, the ‘right way’ or as ‘having power’. Understanding the good life for Yolngu entails recognising the emotional, practical and cultural dimensions of ‘aspiration and agency’ and implementing ‘structural opportunities’ that lead to ‘dignity and fairness’, as well as ‘commitments to meaningful (moral) projects’ (Fischer, 2014, pp. 207–12).

This chapter examines how Yolngu concepts of the good life work through cycles of integration that stem from periods when a broader sense of ‘allocative power’ is admitted in relation to all aspects of livelihood. It considers how these perspectives alternate with experiences of alienation or competition, which can lead to unhealthy individualism and fragmentation, dispersing energies in conflict negotiation rather than allowing them to be managed effectively or capitalising on them for other kinds of outcomes. As we shall see, some Balanda recognise the paradoxes (and presencing) of *différance* that new targets for employment or development create, and have devised means of exploring such issues with Yolngu themselves, rather than simply aiming to introduce change to achieve targets. However, understanding a ‘middle voice’ of shared practice requires movements and mediations from both providers and workers to enable healthy interdependence and to develop immunity from policy that detracts from wellbeing.

The Good Life on Galiwin’ku

The town of Galiwin’ku is 550 kilometres north-east of Darwin, located in the southern corner of Elcho Island in north-east Arnhem Land.⁷ The island is 55 kilometres long and 6 kilometres wide at its broadest point. In the 2011 census, 1,890 Aboriginal and Torres Strait residents were accounted for in a total population of 2,124. Established in 1942 by the Methodist Overseas Mission and run by the mission superintendent, Reverend Harold Shepherdson, Yolngu were benevolently disciplined

7 Galiwin’ku is the name of the town on the island and also of the island itself. In English it is known as Elcho Island. The regional population of north-east Arnhem Land is 9,098, of which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 91.2 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011).

into a Protestant work ethic. The mission sought to provide a Christian education as well as to skill the population for work. Men were trained in carpentry and agriculture and women in domestic-related tasks. Following the Whitlam Government's introduction of self-determination policies in 1972, the mission administration was handed over to Galiwin'ku Community Incorporated to empower local decision-making. The Galiwin'ku Community Council, comprising 12 clan elders, was created under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (see also Schwarz, 2006, p. 74). In 2008, the East Arnhem Regional Council was established under the *Local Government Act (NT)* to provide services to nine remote communities, including Galiwin'ku, which belongs to one of six wards, the Gumurr Marthakal Ward. In 2014, nine local authorities replaced the former community advisory boards of the remote communities. Elected representatives from the regional council meet with representatives from the Galiwin'ku local authority to agree on the administration of services on the island. Residents in town also have access to 29 homelands across the region, whose infrastructure is delivered by the Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre.⁸

Visions of the good life often refer to the early mission periods when there were key individuals to whom one related. Today, the good life is consistently referred to by Yolngu men and women aged 30 and above as living on their homelands with the potential to hunt, gather, spend time in the bush looking for yams, collect shellfish and being on country, whether simply being there, or painting, or organising or participating in ritual activities. Homelands offer year-round access to a wide range of bush foods, marine life, shellfish and mammals, which supplement a Western-based town diet.⁹ These activities bring a sense of dignity, interconnectedness and relationship with land and family, shared toil, commensality, generosity and camaraderie. The reasons why the emotional and dietary benefits of homeland life are felt to outweigh the practical challenges of living away from town for this age group is not just because they provide a release from the pressures of semi-urban living, and a change from Western food—the latter most commonly comprising meat, some vegetables, bread, rice, damper, syrup, biscuits and tea, alongside popular

8 The 2011 ABS census notes that there were 184 private dwellings occupied across these homelands and 264 homes occupied in Galiwin'ku town. In total, in 2011, there were 393 families in the town and 2,124 residents (ABS, 2011).

9 Homelands in the Northern Territory will continue to receive basic levels of funding until 2022 as part of the Stronger Futures policies. (Altman, 2015).

daily use of three takeaways in the town—but because homeland living fosters empowerment and affinity with the right paths (*dhukarr*) of moral and physical sustenance for a healthy lifestyle. In addition, there are also serious jural reasons for living on homelands or outstations—to ensure the proper maintenance of the country both ritually and environmentally and to tend graves and transmit the crucial knowledge of law and order that persists within environmental relations.

The positive effects of living on homelands include distance from problems in towns, opportunities to enhance culture and language for the next generation, inspiration for art and ritual, having a sense of being at home with the authority and power to decide for oneself and the time and space to teach the stories that hold the power of the Law. Yingiya Guyula (as cited in Christie, 2010) spoke about how his ancestors:

Told stories through looking at the first thunderstorm of the year, standing tall and straight when it calls out, and I feel strong, stand up strong and the tears run out from my eyes remembering the land, where I am, and it gives me a new knowledge. (p. 72)

Support for homeland living is provided by chartered flights, visits from health professionals, access to solar power and care for the environment in ranger activities and government bushfire management programs.¹⁰

The Language of ‘Allocative Power’ in the Good Life

In an effort ‘to engage more concretely with the world that lies beyond the familiar institutions immediately securing people’s rights and interest’ (Hart, 2013, p. 6) and to generate dialogue around how the good life is constituted from different perspectives, a small group of Balanda service providers and Yolngu were invited to share their aspirations for, and experiences of, the good life during a half-day focus group in Darwin in 2015. The event brought together seven stakeholders (two Yolngu and five Balanda)¹¹ from financial services, the Anglican and Uniting churches, linguistic services and community development to consider the language

10 Further information is available at apo.org.au/system/files/14480/apo-nid14480-35086.pdf

11 The Balanda comprised three women and two men; one Yolngu man and one Yolngu woman also attended.

of the good life and intercultural difference. These participants emphasised that the good life was underpinned by wants and needs (*djäl*), noting that the Yolngu term goes beyond self-centred or selfish expressions to mandated desires relating to Yolngu law that should be complied with, alongside transcendent desires such as serving God and making a positive contribution to society.

However, given the competing referents of *djäl*, one Balanda participant noted that ‘you don’t really know what the good life is until it is tested’. In response, a Yolngu contributor explained what the good life meant to him: ‘Everything would be good within the family and between families as well. Our homeland too ... *mägaya wänga* (a peaceful place)’. He went on to consider how, when the balance between clans, land and law is disturbed—perhaps when some people win greater access to resources than others—it can affect the emotional energy or power of those involved in decision-making, leaving them feeling disempowered (*märrmiriw*). This sense of societal imbalance generates a state without peace (*mägayamirriw*) that can only be rectified by a return to right relations through customary law (*rom*). He emphasised the moral process involved in understanding the right way of taking responsibility for managing and distributing resources by kin rather than having or acquiring products or material items as status symbols of the good life.

One participant noted how different expectations around practices of measuring can emerge between the two-value systems due to the different emphases given to qualitative and quantitative mechanisms of apportioning and distribution. A community development worker put it this way:

When you’re into distributions you look around and you give and make some sort of assessment, some sort of calculation how it will work: that looks about right, enough, yes, that’s the right amount (*gana, yo, dhunupa*). But when you apportion, then there is this cutting and dividing (*mittmitthun ga djalthan-ngupan*): all measured, all calculated, all estimated. But no-one is doing that. People are allocating not apportioning.

Among Yolngu, there is trust among their own leaders and those with authority that they will make the right allocations and distributions, aligned with the relative power that they have to make those decisions. Yet, in contrast, the Balanda banking system requires that trust is also placed in those who have knowledge of national and international strategic investments and income-management processes that rely upon techniques

of apportioning. These distinct processes can, at times, lead to misconstrual by some Balanda who deal with Yolngu finance as mismanaging monetary affairs instead of recognising that they are prioritising culturally distinct modes of 'allocative power' through their knowledge of monetary and relational practice. Such differing values, and the embodied practices they infer, are further underlined by the ways in which banks have generated 'borrowed' terms to explain their services. For example, to translate the concept of a bank, it was noted in this focus group that the equivalent would be a 'money house' (*rrupiyang dhu wänga*), but more often people would talk of going to the 'TCU' (Traditional Credit Union), a term that they say is taken for granted and, as such, does not necessarily facilitate a full understanding of the banking processes involved.

In exploring this issue, Balanda and Yolngu participants discussed how they might educate Yolngu families about bank loans. In the Yolngu context, it was explained that a bank loan is like a *garul*, a place where you can collect and eat yams. The concept of the loan was aligned with asking someone from another clan whether they could take their *garul*, which would otherwise be forbidden. Just as the bank decides whether to approve a loan, so, in the Yolngu context, it was explained how a traditional owner might debate whether to allow the *garul* to be harvested. Such translations of economic practice can offer conceptual and linguistic conduits for the negotiation of values to assist in realising intercultural business models.

In situ service providers have, for some time, identified the need for an 'economic literacy program' in Yolngu language to convey contemporary economic terms (Trudgen, 2014, p. 35). Much careful, detailed work on the cross-cultural competencies needed to facilitate enterprise development, as well as culturally nuanced analyses of human resource management, has been undertaken by the Arnhem Human Enterprise Development Project (AHED) since 2012. This project runs in conjunction with the Why Warriors organisation, established on Galiwin'ku in 2001 by Richard and Tim Trudgen. It is recognised that one of the key elements in facilitating sustainable development projects is the need to educate families about business requirements. To this end, a series of programs on Yolngu economy have been broadcast on Yolngu Radio, and an e-learning program has been established for facility in Yolngu matha (language). Working with 15 leaders on Galiwin'ku, the AHED project has identified more than 40 possible industries and potentially hundreds of businesses that could be established if full support were available (Trudgen, 2014, p. 2).

These Yolngu aspirations are not new. Over 30 years ago, Yolngu visions of business development were evident in their decisions about how they should run their affairs on homelands. In 1987, there was one Balanda builder on Galiwin'ku working for the outstations along with a Yolngu (Watt, 1988). At this time, there was recognition by those on the Resource Centre committee that clans ought to have more say from the start in the development of their homeland priorities. The following year, at Yirrkala, the Laynhapuy Homelands Association outlined their goals as needing 'to determine [our] own future; to manage our own affairs; and to develop towards gaining self-sufficiency' (Watt, 1988, p. 26).¹² Yet, as Hart (2013) explained, 'the real task is to work out how states, cities, big money and the rest might be selectively combined with citizens' initiatives to promote a more democratic world society' (p. 4). Thus, when considering the mechanisms needed to effect culturally appropriate business development, it is important to know both what constitutes the good life—the 'right way' (*dhunupa dhukarr*) to 'empowerment' (*märrmirr*)¹³—and, also, how hardship or disempowerment is conceived and from whose perspective. By privileging a self-sustaining economy *and* the infrastructure costs needed to deliver it, the concerns of the financial system often override cultural and relational dynamics. A senior Yolngu woman explained to me how she viewed the ongoing effects of neoliberal government agendas¹⁴ that have tried to reshape Yolngu society, and which have affected the 'right blood' and feeling of respect that people have for their culture and their law:

12 High on the list of priorities at that time were housing developments that would include baths, laundries, toilets and kitchens at Baniyala. Work was required on a windmill, water supply and solar pump at Yangunbi. Yolngu envisaged home management education around cooking, sewing, keeping clean yards, tropical gardens and healthy communities that would flourish with arts and crafts activities (Watt, 1988). These goals covered 11 homeland centres ruled by the Laynhapuy Executive and Homeland Council. Rather than comprising separate units of development, the committee included representatives from Yirrkala, the Fijian resource centre, coordinator, also resident at Yirrkala, a Dhalwangu outstation pastor and the vice-chairperson of the Laynhapuy Homeland Resource Centre.

13 Trudgen (2014) has noted that '*märr* is like a spiritual energy force that all humans have and when a person works at something, that force or spiritual power is transmitted to the article produced or the service provided. The more effort used to produce the product or the service the more *märr* the article or the service contains. This happens whenever food is produced and harvested, things are made from raw products, or when an article is obtained and then value is added to it, or whenever a service is carried out. Whoever then receives that product or service also receives the person's *märr* or spiritual power, which builds up in them. As the spiritual power builds up in the receiving person their own *märr* or spiritual power is decreased. They become *märr-miriw*—without spiritual power ... As other people's *märr* builds up in you, your *märr* is depressed and a person can feel sick and even die' (p. 62).

14 The Northern Territory Emergency Response, known as the 'Intervention', was announced on 21 June 2007 and introduced a raft of draconian measures to discipline and monitor Aboriginal communities.

Like, some know, some don't know what Intervention does to our body and to our system, our blood. It's a foreign system that's going into Yolngu's blood. For example, if I have a wrong blood line going into my blood, it makes me sick, see, and that's a new law, government law whatever the policy is. That's a new law, it's like that. I think they [government] should have made it differently, firstly telling that story around the camp, what is going to be happening, but it just came like water, coming rushing and just going in to all our laws and all our culture and everything there. Why are they ruining that? Within our body system—inside, in our blood—where the culture [is], [it] helps to communicate life, helps the environment, work together, good leadership, everything. But, if you try to put your power and your system into ours, it's hard. We wouldn't go to you and force you to do that, you wouldn't like it.

Her critique shows how Yolngu are deeply affected by the places where they feel at home, and how changing policies and practices not only take away control, but also affect people's trust in working through negotiated settlements. The 'foreign system' that is referred to is not confined to the Northern Territory Emergency Response, known as the 'Intervention', but is indicative of other kinds of cultural shifts as well. Indeed, as the many excellent and carefully detailed Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) reports on homelands, housing, welfare, basic cards, employment and income-support mechanisms show (e.g. Bray et al., 2012; Hunter, 2014; Yap & Biddle, 2012), there can be no single approach to addressing the economic demands of what are essentially very different modes of living opportunities and lifestyles. Instead, each context requires careful support to affect a conjoined system of 'moral optimism' (Trouillot, 2003) as people move between locales and the different economies of wellbeing that they afford.

'Moral Optimism' in Yolngu Enterprise

In the next half of this chapter, I draw upon Muehlebach's (2013, p. 298) analysis of Trouillot's (2003) concept of 'moral optimism' to consider how Yolngu have always used 'self-guiding principles' as a means of extending generosity to others while remaining resilient against systems that may misconstrue or misunderstand the relational and customary norms of the economy. 'Moral optimism' relates not simply to improved conditions of materiality through capital works or better infrastructure but, more fully, to the changing emotional, cultural and spiritual dynamics of human relationship. In two examples, I show how moral optimism was promoted

on Galiwin'ku by the entangled nature of work, mutual appreciation, reciprocity and finance in the development of an agricultural work scheme devised during mission times from the perspective of the missionary who ran it. I then compare the relational aspects of this productive mission-run enterprise with housing and infrastructure projects in the town to consider how they operate on principles of “waiting, following and carrying”, all notions inherently expressing the task for relation’ (Thiele, 2008, p. 26).

Growing Generosity in Relationships

By examining successful work relations in the past, we can understand how Yolngu view culturally appropriate development in the present. One example of how historical labour relations have informed the present is the way in which homelands have long offered opportunities for gardening, which was encouraged by missionaries and supported by government. As Myers and Peterson (2016) noted, ‘the emphasis on “gardens” can be understood as a comprehensible mediation between Indigenous aspirations for autonomy and governmental/mission concerns for learning to labour as a basis for “self-sufficiency”’ (p. 5). During the 1970s, a large area of market garden flourished on Galiwin'ku. It was established over many years with the tireless efforts of various mission staff, including the Reverend Wendell Flentje, who worked on Galiwin'ku from 1973–81. Wendell, who had trained in Victoria as an agriculturalist, left the island to study for the Uniting Church ministry. He returned to the Northern Territory Synod as the minister of Casuarina Uniting Church in Darwin in 2004. He was Moderator of the Northern Synod from 2007–10. His time on Galiwin'ku overlapped with Reverend Harold Shepherdson. ‘Sheppy’, as he was known, had a family background in farming and sawmilling, and was a pilot. Flentje (personal communication) recalled:

All the Balanda were church staff employed by the mission. There were no government employees. There were about 100 Balanda, not all of them being Christian. The vast majority were Christian and came from all over Australia and from many different backgrounds. Teachers, nurses, tradespeople, [a] mechanic, plumber, electrician, agriculturalist, powerhouse worker, fisherman—all these were mission staff. Some of the houses were pretty old, but the government had supplied some housing for teaching staff and they were those houses down from where the store is now.

Flentje worked half-time in the school at post-primary level and half-time in the garden for two years, until he decided he needed to be full-time in the garden, due to its demands. The produce was prolific—more than the store could manage—so it was sold from the back of a truck driving through the town; the remainder was sent by plane to community stores in other mission communities with the assistance of Missionary Aviation Fellowship, which had been established in 1974. Flentje was successful in negotiating sales of bananas at Katherine and then Milingimbi and Gapuwiyak. The garden was, as he put it:

Quite an enterprise—bananas and sweet potatoes—up to 1 tonne of bananas a week, watermelons in dry season, pawpaw, limes, sugarcane for sugarcane drinks. With the bananas and sweet potatoes and fish [they had the] basis of a really good diet and they always ate a lot of fish.

These ventures were successful because the emphasis was on the interpersonal, moral and cultural advantage in the interstices of relational engagement rather than market outcomes and financial sustainability or development of the market venture.

Flentje's aim was to provide food for the community, promote relationships, support needs and enhance lives while, at the same time, offering meaningful employment and training to workers. There was also a desire on the part of some garden workers to learn more about the techniques of gardening via the Resource Centre. One garden worker told Flentje how he wanted to pass on his knowledge of gardening, which he had learned over the previous year, to others in homelands right around the islands, and on the mainland, teaching them how to cut the grass, seed and plant, and water and grow banana suckers and other roots. The relational process of 'waiting, following and carrying' was evident in on-the-job training based on a system of kin reciprocity among the workers. Eight Yolngu men were key in the process over the years: a Wangurri man, a son of Battangga, who had worked with Shepherdson; a *Datıwuy* man and his son; a group of four brothers from Golumarri homeland on the island; and a young Djambarrpuynu man who had been involved in the school garden project in 1973 and 1974. A number of women also worked in the garden. The realisation that this was a 'long-term business'—not something that was done overnight—was one of the changes in attitude that took place in the process of educating people through on-the-job training. It was critical to the success of these ventures that the workplace took on its own family dynamic, since the processes needed to complete

the ordering of materials, such as fertilisers, irrigation parts and so forth, required investment from everyone working together, waiting on one another and following through with their various roles.

Trudgen (2000, pp. 48–49) has discussed the decline of the garden after this period, arguing that the enterprise was seen as mission owned—as Yolngu working for missionaries in return for pay. With increased welfare being paid to individuals by government, he believed that Yolngu no longer considered it necessary to work for pay in the garden. However, Flentje (personal communication) told me that, from his perspective, it was the holistic system that had been put in place based on relationships and learning through concepts of the land that had determined its success, at least in part, rather than it operating around financial benefit. He highlighted how moral generosity in working for others' wellbeing was key to the success of mission endeavours on Galiwin'ku. Despite this generosity, the difficulties of sustaining a communal enterprise rather than a family run system—in which responsibilities and obligations are clearly defined—was also viewed as the reason for its demise.

Moral generosity is a cultural principle that runs through all Yolngu relationships with Balanda. An early missionary-art curator and, later, anthropologist working on Galiwin'ku, John Rudder (personal communication), put it very clearly when he explained to me that:

When I started taking in paintings and paying them [Yolngu] for the paintings on the spot, they were doing it for me and were doing it for the mission. They weren't doing it to make money. They were doing it to support the mission. That was a reciprocal relationship thing. It was almost all on relationship and was nothing to do with economics. These [Balanda] craft workers who go out and work to build an industry, the minute they leave, that's the end of the relationship and the person who comes in has to start all over again.

With the departure of former mission staff, employment systems were handed over to the Galiwin'ku council and its workers, but gardening as a community enterprise gradually ceased. Thus, while good intercultural relations are critical to effective enterprise, as some argue, monetary return may play a role in ensuring the flow of productivity. Nevertheless, the same faithful Yolngu worker who started with Wendell and the other mission staff is tending his own garden today, this time with the assistance of AHED and a Balanda community development worker. This garden, located slightly further away from the residential area, is flourishing. Although operating on a smaller scale than the earlier garden, it provides

fruit and vegetables for family and extended kin. This engagement not only illustrates the loyalty shown to a missionary who passed on his gardening skills 40 years ago, it also demonstrates a yearning for the past that had ‘a stable horizon of expectation’ and which had to confront the many dilemmas of precarity over time (Muehlebach, 2013, p. 297). In sum, these examples demonstrate the importance of culture in shaping job choices, which have been recognised in planning processes since 2014 as integral to supporting and informing employee choices around cultural values in the workplace.

From Jobs to Homes: Affordability and Sustainability

By extending intercultural relations in the area of work and gardening to housing issues, we can see how Yolngu on Galiwin’ku also understand their land and homes as sites of relational and ritual practice that face challenges from wider processes of capital-infrastructure planning and development. Housing is not only a concern for Balanda in the quest for the good life, it also constitutes a key focus of Yolngu aspiration. Yolngu have long become accustomed to the fortnightly rents that, even 30 years ago, were recycled back into the maintenance of housing ‘to fix any broken pipes, windows, doors, lights etc.’ (National Aborigines Week, 1985).¹⁵ Thirty years ago, the majority of communication around the town and to homelands was limited to satellite radio receivers; only 10 telephone lines were available, connected via an antenna located behind the council offices. More than 30 years on, mobile technologies are expertly used by Yolngu and rent not only applies to Yolngu housing but also to housing for Balanda and migrant workers of other ethnicities who come as health workers, teachers and construction workers. Visitors pay a higher fee for short stays at the local ‘Galiwin’ku Hilton’—the Visitor Accommodation.¹⁶ Even though 92.9 per cent of housing is rented on the island (ABS, 2011),¹⁷ rent equates in some people’s thinking to ownership, due, in part, to longstanding

15 Rent for housing was introduced in 1985 on Galiwin’ku; it was to be paid at the council office at the rate of AUD10 for pensioners, AUD15 for unemployed people and AUD34 for those in work.

16 The construction cost of a duplex was in the region of AUD407,000 in 2004. See www.cordellconnect.com.au/public/project/ProjectDetails.aspx?uid=238887

17 According to ABS 2011 census data, 2.5 per cent of homes are fully owned, but none are currently under mortgage. See galiwinku.localstats.com.au/demographics/nt/northern-territory/darwin/galiwinku

agreements about who has rights over particular houses. A policy of rental needs drives housing requirements and there is no guarantee that Balanda who have lived in a house for many years, developed its gardens and invested in its infrastructure will return to the same house if they go on leave. One Balanda who left for six months was upset when she came home to find that her years of gardening, plant cultivation and care of mature banana plants had been unattended by short-term residents.

Relational and capital investments continue to be worked out as housing developments expand in towns, encouraging people to stay in a single place rather than being dispersed around homelands. For Yolngu, this presents the added dilemma of how to manage the upkeep on housing in homelands when they are absent for part of the year. Mobility costs involved in caring for country, and less individual disposable income due to the system of demand sharing, variously translate into financial burdens in trying to meet the needs of families living between homelands and the town; financial burdens are also incurred where homeland living presents challenges to employers' Community Development Programme ('work for the dole') and Newstart benefit requirements. The fact that homelands are expensive to maintain and that the delivery of remote education and 'monitoring' of homelands is difficult led, in 2008, to government recommending their closure if they were not 'viable': 'only those passing a viability test should get access to services such as schools and health clinics' (Murdoch, 2008).

While Marthakal homelands are regularly occupied, Galiwin'ku felt the effects of two cyclones in 2015, at the same time as a new subdivision was being completed. The development had been built in return for a mandatory 40-year lease to the government over the town without the payment of rents.¹⁸ However, some Yolngu expressed their concern at the length of time the project took, as well as problems of access to the area. One Balanda resident pointed out how the building construction was at odds with similar construction work being carried out in Palmerston, Darwin. By February 2011, it had become clear that planning for Galiwin'ku housing had been done in reverse compared to that for the new subdivision on the mainland, creating significant issues for prospective

18 Four housing precinct leases have been confirmed in Maningrida, Gunbalanya, Galiwin'ku and Wadeye, a whole of township lease in Nguiu for 99 years, and for 80 years in three Groote Eylandt communities.

residents.¹⁹ While around 20 dwellings had been completed in the Galiwin'ku suburb, there was no access to sewerage, water, lighting and roads. In contrast, the new subdivision at Palmerston²⁰ had demarcated sites with road access, lighting, waterworks, nature strips and bus stops before house building began. The new housing on Galiwin'ku was initially referred to as Palmerston, but its name was changed to Humpty Doo, in part because of the lack of bus access. Given that families were split between Galiwin'ku and the new subdivision, bus access between them became a key issue to ensure that Yolngu could look after growing families and the elderly.

All housing on Galiwin'ku was surveyed and divided according to 'new builds' and existing housing scheduled for repair. Families who were to receive new houses (decided by the Local Housing Reference Group) had to agree which members would be entitled to them, in turn altering the dynamics of kinship and residency patterns.²¹ In the past, repairs to houses depended on which departments owned them (e.g. the education department or the council). With financial backing from the state through the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program and the National Action Plan, new houses built in the mid-2000s comprised single-storey dwellings, as well as some duplexes of four units made of steel frames, with steel cladding, steel roofs and timber floors. Each unit's floor area was 200 square feet (18.5 square metres) and each one had a carport.²² Yet, on an island where the wet season lasts only a few months, and the number of cars owned is fewer than one per dwelling, carports have tended to be used for sitting in the shade.

For Yolngu, the financial and material aspects of housing are not their primary concern. Rather, it is the need to ensure continuities of care and provision for their relatives. As one Christian widow noted, 'the house of love' takes many forms. Yet, a commitment to provide for all the family can also be a source of frustration. This widow was proud of her double house (comprising four rooms on one side and four on the other), having worked hard over many years to maintain one-half of it for herself, her daughter and her grandchildren. Yet, she was also frustrated that she could not persuade her relatives' children living in the other half of the

19 I am grateful to Kaye Thurlow for her analysis of these systems.

20 Palmerston is a satellite city of Darwin created for its commuters and comprises 18 suburbs.

21 Tenancy agreements are made with Territory Housing and administered by the shire.

22 For a detailed analysis of modes of provision in urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait social housing elsewhere, see Milligan, Phillips, Easthope, Liu and Memmott (2011).

long house to do the same.²³ The house was large, but the sloping ground in front meant that it was difficult to grow plants, which she enjoyed. A Balanda friend had bought seeds from Darwin to try to improve the grass around it, but the poor soil meant that roots were weak and the rains washed away the grass seed. An extensive, unfenced sandy area at the back of her house provided a short cut for walkers travelling between the main road and the street behind the house. While all new housing designs are fenced off, in part to demarcate the house boundary and keep dogs in and cattle out, this woman's older, mission-built house provided no such privacy.

The option of moving to a new home would seem attractive; however, the choice of who should leave their existing home for the new area presented emotional, spiritual and practical challenges, prompting this woman and other families to think seriously about a range of relational issues and obligations, including those of looking after the deceased. I asked this widow if she would like to move to the new residential area. She replied that even if she had the option to leave, she would have to stay where she was; she wanted the shire to build her a new house on the other side of her husband's grave that was prominently marked by ritual flags in the sandy area some metres behind the house. She said she could not leave the home as she had to look after his grave, even though it was not her choice that he had been buried there.

Neoliberalism, Moral Generosity and Intercultural Relations

Neoliberalism expects those in its sights to rise to the challenges that the system sets, yet it does so without reference to culture or to an end point of its own target setting. In a neoliberal framework, homes are moveable, like targets; job expectations and figures change; and percentages are indicators, not absolutes. Thus, it is not surprising that the sentiment of resilience becomes just as, if not more, important than accomplishment. In the Yolngu case described above, to ignore the spiritual dimensions of power and powerlessness (*märr* and *märrmiriw*), as well as the

23 Reference to the 'house of love' is part of a Christian discourse circulating on Galiwin'ku. This Christian woman explained how money also divides 'the house of love'; at one time, the cost of getting a new Basics Card was the equivalent of half of their pay going on a flight/taxi fare to get to the bank.

sentiments of love, moral duty and care that they engender, would be to impoverish an understanding of the 'good life'. These sentiments and obligations are embodied through the protection of family members who look after their deceased loved ones by singing, dancing and tending for the grave.

Despite neoliberal rhetorics of advancement, I have tried to illustrate how difference generated by neoliberalism contains within its own ideology a process of symbolic violence (see Bourdieu, 1984). As well as presenting intercultural challenges to understanding, cultural intermediaries have provided a conduit through well-established relationships in various roles as missionaries, politicians or non-government organisations, either alongside or together with government aspirations for mobilising local productivity. Nevertheless, they have played a key part in translating the conditions of precarity, as well as filtering national global challenges around economic sustainability into locally meaningful conditions of production. A concern for intermediaries in the past has been the ability to address tensions effectively, and in ongoing dialogue, when they are produced by the very complexities of a value system and its concepts that do not align neatly with Eurocentric aspirations to wealth, power, productivity and notions of individualism. The effect is to create uncertain futures. Precarity, though, is not only the condition of working within neoliberal parameters, it is also the effect of capital and its emergences through the experiences of being human. As I have argued, for Yolngu, targets are not their main priority; rather, care in relationships exemplifies how 'giving-on-and-with' (Glissant, 1997, p. 192) others enfolds Yolngu into the set of obligations of return. It is clear from the examples presented here that the 'good life' needs to be considered a dialectical relation between intercultural and customary facets that influence macro-economic demands, as well as the micro-pressures of family, ritual and inter-clan relations. Kinship and cultural specificities influence what interdependency means with one another as well as with outsiders. Whatever economic systems are employed, there are differing degrees of humanising and dehumanising processes, some an effect of those systems and others that generate recognition of the difficulties in trying to effect and maintain stable regional (and global) economies (see Muehlebach, 2013, p. 298; Roy, 2012). I have tried to illustrate how the Yolngu moral economy operates from linguistically and culturally appropriate strategies to address the good life. Service providers are daily confronted with intercultural dilemmas relating to cultural difference, which Yolngu

must also deal with in terms of changing policies and practices. Therefore, it is imperative that the appropriate translation of concepts, values and employment outcomes are implemented to generate the maximum potential for 'allocative power' to effect positive cycles of integration between Balanda and Yolngu in all spheres of interaction, not just in jobs or housing. As I have argued, these practices of moral generosity, relative power dynamics, educational literacy and culturally appropriate ways of working build 'up a reservoir of knowledge and aspiration that, given appropriate direction, could lead us to a better economy' (Hart, 2013, p. 21). Yet, care is also needed to ensure that cultural blindness, relational insensitivity, linguistic indifference and neoliberal agendas do not mute the relation–identity principle (cf. Deutsch, 1998) and lead to further fragmentation of senses of self and empowerment.

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