

## Chapter Title: Economic hybridity in remote indigenous Australia as development alterity

### Abstract

While hegemonic development discourse continues to privilege industrial capitalism, Jon Altman has called for an open exploration of creative alternatives that better suit the values and aspirations of 'kin-based societies'. Building on empirical evidence from decades of research with Indigenous peoples in northern Australia, he has proposed an innovative way to conceptualise regional economies that seeks to re-establish the potential importance to livelihoods of customary production. The actually existing hybrid economies of northern Australia, which draw on Indigenous strengths, are a palpable demonstration that there is an alternative to the ecologically unsustainable status quo. The hybrid economy approach to development does not envisage the sudden elimination of either the market or the state, but rather makes space for other governing logics, thereby enabling Indigenous people to fashion livelihoods that enable them to live on or close to their ancestral lands. Economic hybridity is viewed as here to stay, rather than a transitory arrangement on the road to industrial capitalism.

While numerous geographic, demographic and cultural features make remote Indigenous Australia highly distinctive, there are many lessons that might be drawn from the Australian experience in thinking about postdevelopment possibilities elsewhere.

### Key words

hybrid economy, postdevelopment, customary production, Aboriginal Australia, livelihoods

### Introduction

This chapter considers the potential contribution of economic hybridity to postdevelopment in practice. It does this by focusing on Jon Altman's application of a hybrid economy lens to the search for alternatives to development in Australia. Many regions in the centre and north of the Australian continent are distant from labour markets, centres of economic and political power, and the lived experience of the non-Indigenous people who govern them from afar. Just over 70,000 Indigenous people – roughly 10% of the Indigenous population of Australia – live on land held under exclusive Indigenous title in these 'remote' regions (Altman and Markham, 2015: 135). Unlike the individualistic culture brought to Australia by colonisers from Britain, Indigenous cultures emphasise "a set of relationships that bind particular persons inter-generationally to specific places via carefully delineated bodies of cosmological knowledge" (Altman and Hinkson, 2010: 189). Today Indigenous people inhabit intercultural social worlds formed from "a mix of customary and western (global) social norms and values" (Altman, 2009a: 7).

Through regular fieldwork over almost four decades, Altman has documented the resilience and adaptability of the Kuninjku people's customary economic practices on their ancestral land. He has highlighted their agency in pursuing a valued lifeway shaped by ongoing commitments to kin, country and ceremony. His work seeks to

make visible and to legitimate what orthodox development discredits and ignores. Underpinning his work is a rejection of the central tenets of the hegemonic development paradigm: that humanity progresses down a single path; that the West provides a model other parts of the world should emulate; that noncapitalist economic relations are backward; and that local knowledges and practices are inferior (Santos 2004; Sachs 2017). He contests the hegemonic assumption that “the future for Indigenous Australians lies in modernity, urbanization, a full embrace of the market and ultimately, assimilation” (Altman, 2001: 9-10). Altman criticises the settler state’s development agenda for Indigenous Australians for its hubris, inequity, ecological unsustainability and failure to appreciate difference. His work can be read as a celebration of a form of postdevelopment pursued in remote regions of Australia since the 1970s.

The concept of economic hybridity has been key to the way Altman understands existing institutions and envisions alternatives to the dominant development paradigm. Altman’s central contribution to development debates has been “expanding and diversifying what counts as economic activity in remote Australia” (Muecke and Dibley, 2016: 149). If we understand economic activity as “laboring activity to provide goods and services to satisfy human needs” (Wright, 2010: 36), we realise the conventional exclusion of nonmonetised activity is arbitrary and distorting. In 2001 Altman proposed a provocative “conceptual framework for understanding the nature of the economy” in remote regions of Australia (Altman, 2001: 10). He made the case that actually existing regional economies are comprised of market, state and customary sectors (Altman 2001). Non-monetised customary production should not be understood as merely cultural, but as making an important contribution to people’s livelihoods, he argued. Conventional economics, blinkered by its preoccupation with the market and state, fails to see the customary economic production of remote regions. Viewing regional economies through the three-sector lens, rather than a conventional two-sector lens, has important implications for evaluating policy options (Altman 2001). In particular, the ways that the different sectors articulate are important for thinking about alternative, ecologically sustainable futures. Economic hybridity offers a vantage point from which to critique both the hegemonic discourse of capitalist expansion and the punitive behavioural policy seeking to shift Indigenous norms. Policy proposals that appear common sense from a neoliberal vantage point are reframed as unproductive, costly and risky.

This chapter describes how economic hybridity figures in Altman’s work and explains how it connects with his empirical research as an economic anthropologist. I then examine a range of critiques of the hybrid economy framework from empirical and ideological perspectives. Finally, I draw tentative lessons from the Australian experience that may be relevant to postdevelopment thinkers in other parts of the globe.

### [Economic hybridity in Indigenous Australia](#)

Altman’s theorising of alternatives to orthodox development can be traced back to the ethnographic fieldwork he – a Balanda (non-Indigenous) man, initially trained in economics – conducted among the Kuninjku in Central Arnhem Land in Australia’s Northern Territory in 1979-1980. There he documented the marked revival of the Indigenous subsistence economy as the Kuninjku chose to move from the township of

Maningrida to tiny satellite communities (outstations) on their clan lands (Altman, 1987). His study of economic life on the outstation at Mumeka left him convinced that the demise of the Indigenous customary economy was not inevitable.

The reoccupation by the Kuninjku of their ancestral lands was part of a larger “rural exodus” (Altman, 1987: xiii) in the 1970s and 1980s initiated by Aboriginal groups and facilitated by the government policy that it termed 'self-determination'. The voluntary revival of the customary economy after years, often decades, of dependence on the colonisers contradicted powerful assumptions about the flimsiness of non-capitalist economic formations once in contact with capitalism. In 1979 the people of Mumeka were not living a pre-contact existence, but they were resisting the adoption of western economic rationality. They furthered their own purposes (which were shaped by a kin-based worldview) by engaging with the market when it suited them, for example, using cash from sales of artefacts to buy weapons for hunting, and then distributing the kill according to customary obligations. Outstation residents' production of artefacts for sale and engagement in subsistence hunting and gathering resulted in a higher standard of living for them than those who remained in the town (Altman, 1987: 11). Here were Aboriginal people, in the late 1970s, creating, in the cracks of capitalism, flexible economic arrangements: this was postdevelopment in practice. Living beyond the institution of waged labour, the Kuninjku cobbled together their livelihoods from various available sources, none of which would be sufficient on their own. Rather than hapless victims of modernity, Altman interpreted them as “exploiters of the capitalist system” (Altman, 1987: 9). So much for universal capitalist domination.

In his doctoral work at Mumeka, Altman was concerned to highlight Indigenous agency in maintaining and creatively adapting economic institutions. The concern with the capacity of Indigenous people to control “the intensity of their interaction with the wider Australian economy” has been an enduring theme in his work (Curchin 2015: 417). Adopting the language of economic hybridity has helped Altman think more systematically about the kind of economic institutions the Kuninjku and other Aboriginal groups in similar circumstances had created. This has entailed paying attention to the way the present-day customary sector *articulates* with the state and market sectors. Importantly, the task has not been to categorise economic activities or products – sorting them into boxes marked customary, state or market – or to measure the relative size of each, so much as to make visible the interdependencies between the customary, state and market.

In the articulation of customary, market and state sectors Indigenous peoples have discovered sources of income compatible with continuing “distinctively Indigenous forms of personhood and sociality” (Curchin 2016: 69). The hybrid economies of northern Australia nurture a series of niche industries that draw on distinctive Aboriginal advantages. These include art, craft and artefact production for international markets, cultural tourism, wild harvesting of bushfoods, and environmental management services informed by traditional ecological knowledge. Such industries “enable people to reside on or close to their ancestral land and to maintain a valued connection with a sentient landscape” while using local resources in sustainable ways (Curchin, 2016: 69). Drawing on cultural inheritance to produce goods for export beyond the region comes with the threat of repressive demands for

authenticity (Wolfe, 1999; Altman and Fogarty, 2010). However, experience has shown that savvy Indigenous art centres can mitigate this problem by educating the tastes of art buyers, thereby enabling artists the freedom to paint how and what they wish.

These intercultural industries – which are often not commercially viable without state subsidisation due to their distance from markets or small scale – may better suit the values and aspirations of (some) local people than the economic opportunities presented by, for example, capital intensive extractive industries (Curchin, 2016: 70). The livelihood solutions they offer are likely to fly under the radar of conventional development thinking, which prioritises commercial profitability over social or ecological sustainability.

Altman has emphasised the importance of not just thinking creatively about potential income sources, but in carefully evaluating livelihood options according to local aspirations (Curchin 2013: 23). Conventional employment opportunities in capital intensive industries, such as mining, should not be rejected out of hand but considered in relation to valued livelihoods. For example, through a stint in mining a person may save enough money to buy a boat enabling them to earn a living fishing (Altman 2009b). The hybrid economy paradigm does not seek to arbitrarily foreclose such opportunities.

I have argued that the concept of ‘partial commodification’ is key to understanding how hybrid economies function (Curchin, 2016). Appreciating the appeal of partial commodification means acknowledging that exchanging goods for money does not necessarily turn them into “mere commodities, mere instruments of profit and use” (Curchin, 2016: 71). According to the liberal political philosopher Elizabeth Anderson “what confers commodity status on a good is not that people pay for it, but that exclusively market norms govern its production, exchange and enjoyment” (Anderson, 1993: 156). By insisting on the right to retain their own non-market norms, Aboriginal Australians have engaged with markets “while resisting the full commoditisation of their labour, their cultural inheritance or the local environment” (Curchin, 2016: 70).

Engagement with the market does not always mean total submission to the logic of capitalism. Many Indigenous art centres choose to balance business imperatives with social and cultural purposes such as maximising participation, making them less commercially profitable (and more reliant on government funding) than they might otherwise be (Curchin, 2015: 422). An analogous phenomenon can be seen in the fishing industry in the Torres Strait (off the northern tip of Queensland). Annick Thomassin (2016) observes that the livelihoods of Masig fishers involve an “interplay between ... commercial and customary fisheries” (Thomassin, 2016: 101). Though Masig fishers catch seafood for the market, they decline to organise their labour for optimal commercial profit. Instead, their preferred fishing arrangements reflect the continuing importance of the “customary marine tenure regime” and the cultural imperative to “take only what you need” (Thomassin, 2016: 103). By refusing to internalise the ethos of the market they place less stress on the marine resources they depend on. Rather than viewing customary production as a remnant of the past, which will inevitably give way to the superior technology of modernity, Altman views it as an enduring component of alternative livelihoods. Economic hybridity is here to stay, rather than a transitory arrangement on the road to industrial capitalism (Curchin, 2015: 421).

An important strategy for resisting the pressure towards full commoditisation is state subsidisation. It is clear that an innovative government program called the Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP) was practically important in growing hybrid regional economies. CDEP, which operated from 1977, provided funds for small-scale Aboriginal-controlled organisations to employ Aboriginal workers – the majority of whom would otherwise have been unemployed – on local projects decided upon by local people. Organisations received ongoing government funding rather than one off grants. The form of employment made possible by CDEP was compatible with the maintenance of ceremony and customary production because of its flexibility. Work shaped by rhythms of the land and the sea doesn't fit well with rigid 9 to 5 employment. CDEP attended the birth of various niche industries and thereby expanded Indigenous livelihood options. Altman describes the scheme as “replete with postcolonial possibility” (Altman, in review: 17). After the official retreat from self-determination as government policy, CDEP fell out of favour. It came to be viewed as an obstacle to the full assimilation of Aboriginal people into the norms of a modern labour market (Altman and Hinkson, 2010) and was replaced by active labour market programs aimed at transitioning Aboriginal people to the mainstream workforce. Its opponents were correct, I believe, in their view that CDEP was insulating Aboriginal participants to some extent from the norms of the capitalist economy.

The state has played an important role in facilitating the development of community-based rangers as a livelihood option. Initially part of a grassroots movement driven by the Indigenous belief that “the land needs its people” (Altman 2010: 261), Indigenous ranger groups have become formalised as the state came to recognise the positive externalities of Indigenous customary production. They now receive government support to undertake important environmental management work, such as bushfire management and invasive species control, on the vast Indigenous estate. Preventing massive late dry season bushfires by adapting customary burning practices has become a scientifically verified form of carbon abatement that provides a highly significant, sustainable income stream from private companies for Indigenous ranger groups in Arnhem Land (Cooke, 2012). Just as the intersection of market and customary sector has its tensions, the interface of the state and customary sectors can be fraught. There is contestation over which norms – customary or state – will prevail in determining objectives, priorities and work practices (Kerins, 2012; Fache, 2017). Ranger groups are subject to bureaucratic forms of accountability and their funding is vulnerable to changes in government budgetary priorities. The interaction of the customary with the state in Indigenous rangers programs also poses the threat of essentialism, potentially constraining Aboriginal peoples’ space to interpret their own identities (de Rijke, Martin and Trigger, 2016: 50).

Whereas in other tri-sector conceptualisations of economy, the non-market, non-state component is labelled civil society (see Wright, 2010), the notion of civil society rarely features in Altman's work. The reason for this is likely to be that the Western concept of civil society is a poor fit for Indigenous relational ontologies. Civil society is a sector comprised of associations voluntarily entered into by adult citizens. In a kin-oriented society the most politically significant relationships are those one is born into, rather than those freely chosen in adulthood.

Hybrid economies are dynamic, living economies. Altman insists that fluidity is ever present. Peck observes that the livelihood strategies afforded by the hybrid economy of the Pilbara region are “precarious” – they have enabled Aboriginal communities to “survive, although hardly thrive” (Peck, 2013, 256). Different sectors within regional economies grow and contract over the years in accordance with changes to the external environment. Though place-based, they are globally connected. For example, as the financial crisis of 2007-2008 depressed art sales prices internationally, the revenue of Aboriginal art centres fell substantially. Regulatory decisions of the state also impact the viability of livelihood options. For example, tighter gun regulations can make it harder to access the particular types of firearm needed to hunt certain species (Altman, 2009c). Ecosystem health also has an impact on available livelihoods.

Pursuing diverse sources of income (both monetised and non-monetised), and willingness to shift between occupations can be interpreted as a sensible way of managing risk (Altman, 2005; Altman and Hinkson, 2010). Altman and Hinkson (2010) highlight the irony that the neoliberal state perceives Aboriginal alterity as a source of risk which must be managed or even eradicated. By contrast the risks of advanced capitalism are often underplayed: industrial capitalism concentrates wealth and power in ways that are socially unsustainable while depleting non-renewable resources, decreasing biodiversity and putting the climate at risk.

The hybrid economy framework foregrounds Aboriginal strengths of skill, knowledge, responsibility, identity, land ownership and kinship. This contrasts with the dominant discourse of deficit suffusing Indigenous policy in Australia – deficits of income, employment, literacy, education. Government policy fixates on the 'gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous socio-economic indicators such as income and educational attainment. Altman questions whether closing the 'gap' is the most appropriate objective, suggesting that it imposes Western priorities on people with a different worldview (Altman, 2010: 262).

### Critiques

Some scholars have criticised as over-optimistic the idea that economic hybridity offers Indigenous Australians an alternative development pathway. For example, there is scepticism about the extent to which subsistence hunting and gathering contributes to Indigenous diets in the twenty-first century. Some anthropologists have suggested hunting and gathering is significant in specific tropical regions where game is more plentiful, but far less important in more arid areas (de Rijke, Martin and Trigger, 2016), but this is contested by studies of Martu hunters in the Western Desert (Scelza, Bird and Bliege Bird, 2014). Nicolas Peterson has called the hybrid economy approach a 'Rolls-Royce' solution to surplus labour – an economic option available only to a small proportion of remote-living Aboriginal people, which inevitably leaves intact the larger surplus labour problem in remote Australia (2016: 61). The Kuninjku are lucky not to be separated from the means of subsistence, but not all Indigenous groups have the option of self-provisioning on their own land. Peterson also queries whether the growing demand from Aboriginal people in remote communities for expensive consumer goods, such as smart phones, is undermining the sustainability of a low cash lifestyle (Peterson, 2016: 60). Others have emphasised the contemporary challenges to maintenance and inter-generation transmission of customary knowledge and practice, including “material and cultural attractions of the wider Australian society as well as

the realities of socioeconomic inequality, structural discrimination, interpersonal violence, and related social crises" (de Rijke, Martin and Trigger, 2016: 45). John, an older Kuninju man said "If you stay here in Maningrida you don't learn anything about your country and how to gather food from it. You only think about chicken and Balanda food" (in Altman, forthcoming, p187). Similarly his contemporary Samuel observed, "We are the last generation to eat bush tucker but the children today are not used to eating bush food" (in Altman, forthcoming, p186).

Alternatives to development involving subsistence hunting are controversial in a policy era where the received wisdom is that the only solutions to the problem of Indigenous surplus labour are industrialisation of Australia's tropical north and Indigenous migration to urban centres. From a conventional economic framework, the decision by Aboriginal people to remain living on their ancestral land in places with no functioning labour market is seen as irrational. Programs that support the aspiration to live on ancestral lands garner hostility from opponents who perceive them as consigning Aboriginal communities to be living 'museums'. This 'museum' critique misses the mark because it conveys the idea that outstation residents are shaping themselves to the colonisers' nostalgic desire for unchanging tradition, while the picture Altman paints is of dynamic peoples exploiting new economic opportunities. He recognises the interculturality of the contemporary Kuninju economy. The model is not anti-technology, rather state of the art technology is incorporated when it serves a valued purpose. For example, Indigenous rangers use equipment such as helicopters and incendiaries for fire management and sophisticated remote sensing and digital technology for recording and monitoring carbon emission offsets and biodiversity benefits of environmental work (Altman, 2012: 16).

The modest livelihoods offered by hybrid economies contrast with an aspirational discourse of 'prosperity' championed by some Indigenous thought-leaders (Curchin, 2015; Empowered Communities Alliance 2015). These influential policy entrepreneurs are convinced that the only viable solution for Indigenous poverty is for Indigenous people to accommodate themselves to the imperatives of capitalism. For example, Richard Ah Mat argues that he and his fellow Indigenous leaders in Cape York in Queensland need to make wealth accumulation "respectable amongst our people" (Ah Mat, 2003, p10). Greater autonomy and greater dignity require, in their view, Indigenous economic independence from the state, which in turn entails full integration of Indigenous peoples into the capitalist economy. Key steps towards this goal include integration of Aboriginal people into the mining workforce of remote regions, support for the development of Indigenous-owned business enterprises, and greater relocation from homelands to urban centres for education and employment. Inculcation of the practice of household saving rather than distributing income among kin are part of this project. The objective of reducing Indigenous dependence on the state has government backing. In support of greater private sector employment, social policy has sought "to reshape those Aboriginal values, beliefs, social relations and practices that remain distinct from mainstream norms" by, for example, making government income support contingent on certain behaviours (Altman 2010: 277).

It seems the question of how much pressure should be placed on Indigenous peoples to assimilate to the individualistic norms of settler Australians is a central point of contention (Curchin 2013). Noel Pearson, a nationally prominent Aboriginal leader and

social reformer, sees value in the continuation of hunting and gathering, yet opposes Altman's larger philosophy on development (Curchin 2015: 420). "You cannot live a traditional lifestyle underwritten by passive welfare" he claims, because "in the long run passive welfare is socially and culturally corrosive" (Pearson 2005). In his view, any strategy predicated on alternatives to waged employment – or in his terminology, "real jobs" – amounts to a plan for "passive welfare dependency" (Pearson, 2000: 13). Though the hybrid economy model promises meaningful activity rather than idleness, for Pearson at least this is not enough to overcome the deep stigma of income support.

Altman has explicitly sought to propose alternatives to development which are 'realistic'. More utopian thinkers might criticise the hybrid economy approach for a lack of ambition. The economic form exemplified by the Kuninjku economy poses no real challenge to capitalism as a system. It does not promise genuine postcolonial justice, but merely the possibility of survival as a society organised around kinship and reciprocity in the crevices of the liberal capitalist state. Indigenous people remain encapsulated by the more powerful settler society and vulnerable to domination (Altman, 2012: 18). Yet in the current political climate, defending the right of Indigenous peoples to remain on their lands and continue their customary economic activities is radical: "The existence and resilience of a customary sector is anathema to dominant neoliberal ways of thinking and the goal to bring all human action within the realm of the market" (Altman 2010: 272).

### Economic hybridity elsewhere

Altman's argument is not that Aboriginal economies are uniquely hybrid. Rather his project has been to document the particular shape economic hybridity takes in a particular part of Australia. While numerous geographic, demographic and cultural features make remote Indigenous Australia highly distinctive – the rich biodiversity and very low population density, as well as Aboriginal peoples' relational ontology and deep spiritual attachment to land and sea – there is much here that could be learnt from.

The notion of economic hybridity is an important intervention into the discursive contestation over the legitimacy of non-market economic forms. It has obvious relevance to people in other countries struggling to preserve local norms and values rather than succumb to the homogenising impact of hegemonic development. Economic hybridity reclaims the concept of 'productivity' from neoliberalism, interpreting productivity as not about profitability, but about meaningful activity to provision a society.

Economic hybridity holds particular promise for those thinking about the problem of surplus labour. Increasing automation is predicted to render the labour of huge numbers of skilled workers surplus to capitalist economies, creating development problems within affluent nations (Frey and Osborne, 2017). The hybrid economies of northern Australia demonstrate that people can create livelihoods beyond the institution of waged labour that fit their priorities, especially if they creatively bundle complementary productive activities. The concept of economic hybridity might help people resist paternalistic policy aimed at disciplining people to accept a lifestyle based



upon waged employment alone. It insists on the diversity of motivations for productive labour beyond cash remuneration.

By un hiding the actually existing hybrid economies of remote Australia, Altman rebuts the message that there is no alternative to capitalist development (see also Gibson-Graham 2005). As Altman, through his long relationship with Kuninjku has documented, postdevelopment is not a recent phenomenon. This points to the possibility of excavating histories of postdevelopment from other places.

Economic hybridity helpfully clarifies that it is market fundamentalism rather than markets per se which pose such a threat to diversity. Partial commodification is a generative concept, often enabling people to find valued livelihoods without forfeiting their autonomy to an unacceptable extent. I would urge more attention to the nature of the interaction between market and non-market sectors of local economies: the compromises and trade-offs which are made, as well as the synergies which are possible, as the relative sway of different sectors changes over time (Curchin, 2016). This is very similar to Wright's project of studying the way actually existing economies are comprised of varying degrees of capitalism, statism and socialism (Wright, 2010).

The intersection of market and non-market spheres create potential for conflict, necessitating assessments of instances of partial commodification to determine whether market norms are crowding out non-market norms in undesirable ways (Curchin, 2016). State funding (for example of Indigenous art centres, so that they are only partially reliant on art sales to cover operating costs) can be a useful way of buffering producers from market forces, thereby enabling them to resist full commodification of their knowledge and talents. Livelihood options are broadened enormously when governments are willing to underwrite community-controlled organisations which coordinate productive activity in pursuit of local goals. But this depends upon the capacity of the state to see and to value difference. The coercive state can also aid neoliberalism's creative destruction of customary practice and Indigenous identity (Altman and Hinkson, 2010).

The ups and downs of actually existing hybrid economies may have something to teach us about the potential challenges and vulnerabilities of postdevelopment, too. It is worth reflecting on the political opposition Indigenous attempts to remain beyond the confines of waged labour have inspired. In the Australian context, influential commentators continue to view government-subsidised employment and non-monetised forms of productive activity as inherently less dignified and less psychologically fulfilling than waged employment, even in regions where there is no demand for labour (Pearson 2000; Pearson 2001). This contrasts with Kuninjku assessments of the relevance of conventional employment to their lives. In Joshua Jununwangga's words, 'I am far too busy for a full-time Balanada job' (cited in Altman, in review).

Strong norms of sharing among kin and tolerance for a lower material living standard than the Australian norm have enabled Indigenous peoples to survive in the interstices of capitalism. According to John (quoted above):

Being able to get to your country and being able to live here [the township of Maningrida] too, that's the good life. Sometimes going bush, sometimes living here;

the main thing is to have enough food. When you have enough food to eat, that's good, (cited in Altman, forthcoming, p163).

It remains to be seen whether the younger generations' dreams of prosperity, fuelled by international mass media and entertainment, will undermine their resistance to displacement from their land. Consumerism is a powerful ally to capitalist expansion. The growing dependency among Indigenous people on consumer goods, especially expensive digital communications technology, is threatening the viability of economic institutions that generate only modest incomes. This strikes me as the Achilles' heel of attempts to live beyond neoliberalism.

## Conclusion

Altman has sought to stretch the discipline of economics: to make visible economic plurality, and thereby do justice to Aboriginal productivity obscured by more conventional approaches to economics. A "will to improve" (Li, 2007) ultimately underpins this project: not the desire to reshape the subjectivity of Aboriginal people, but the desire to improve the government policies that thwart or support Aboriginal peoples' capacity to pursue their chosen life projects.

Altman has at times despaired at the inability or unwillingness of governments to respond to social scientific evidence and is alive to the danger of governments and public commentators misusing anthropological concepts (Altman, 2010). Yet his research and writing on alternatives to development has been predicated on the conviction that deliberate choices made by the state can hinder or facilitate Aboriginal groups in pursuing their aspirations, and that well-founded social scientific expertise can support these deliberate choices. Indeed, why else despair when governments make decisions flagrantly counter to the weight of evidence on what will promote social and ecological sustainability? This faith, albeit fragile, in the possibility of improving policy through better evidence seems to me worth preserving.

Despite Altman's commitment to postdevelopment, he does not denounce the term 'development'. Instead he employs it strategically, framing policy options that facilitate the revival of subsistence hunting as 'development alternatives' (Altman, 2001).

Altman makes this choice as an activist-scholar intent on influencing government policy (Altman, 2009c). Much of Altman's output has been written with a policy audience, rather than an academic audience, in mind. The positive valence that 'development' has for his audience of policymakers helps legitimate a radical idea: the use of state resources to enable Kuninjku to make a living on country. Altman's reason for writing in terms of 'development alternatives' is not to reform and rehabilitate 'development' in response to postdevelopment critique. It is clear that Altman's commitment is not to 'development', but the Kuninjku struggle to choose lifeways they value.

The hybrid economy framework speaks to many of the concerns animating postdevelopment theory. If postdevelopment is taken to include the struggle to fashion diverse lifeways based on relational ontology rather than exploitation of the earth (Demaria and Kothari, 2017), it might be argued that in the remote regions of Australia a form of postdevelopment is already underway. Altman's anthropological commitment to grounded research brings into focus the agency of Indigenous people adapting and co-opting the possibilities available to them regardless of official attempts to control their lives or theorists' attempts to foretell their economic

destinies. This general spirit of inquiry, and the concept of economic hybridity might be creatively appropriated by people in other settings envisioning economic futures. The Indigenous Australian experience may offer some inspiration for other people who wish to benefit from some market engagement without being confined within capitalism.

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