The Craft Industry and Women in Ernabella

By
Keiko Tamura

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Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated
this thesis is my own work.

Keiko Tamura
December 1985
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I would like to show my appreciation to the many people who have helped me in completing this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

One of the most important social and political issues in Australia is the present and future position of Aborigines in the wider Australian community. Although since the 1967 referendum, Aborigines have achieved equality with other Australians in the eyes of the law in all states but Queensland, in practice, they have not achieved equal status. This is despite the current tolerance of cultural diversity, which is greater than at any time in the past. A central problem in the relationship between Aborigines and other Australians is that of economic self-sufficiency: Aborigines are seen to be largely dependent on the public purse. In the context of the present Aboriginal self-determination policy, the most important problem is how Aborigines can attain a standard of living at the same level as other Australians, without losing their cultural identity.

Studies of Aboriginal communities show that craft products are one of very few commodities produced for economic exchange with the Australian economy and that the craft industry presents an interface between the two economies and cultures at a practical level, since the products are marketed throughout Australia as works reflecting Aboriginal culture. The development of the Aboriginal craft industry illustrates in microcosm the problems of establishing a new Aboriginal economy in remote Australia. Consequently, a study of the craft industry provides significant insights into the problem of achieving economic development whilst maintaining cultural identity.

This thesis addresses the above problem through a case study of economic change in Ernabella, a remote Aboriginal community in Central Australia. My analysis will focus on the development and current status of the craft industry, which has an important role in economic change in this community, and still does. The study highlights a number of issues relevant to the problem of Aboriginal economic development.
Ernabella is situated in the North-West of South Australia in the heart of the Pitjantjatjara lands, about 430km south-west of Alice Springs. The settlement was established in 1937 as a Presbyterian mission and continued its operation till 1973. In 1974, the community became self-governing. At present, the community is administered by the Aboriginal community council and with the assistance of several European advisers. The population in June, 1983 consisted of about 370 Aborigines and 64 Europeans.

The craft industry was started in 1949 by the mission, and its origin is closely related to the mission’s plans for socio-economic development. From the beginning, the missionaries foresaw that change would be inevitable for the Aboriginal culture. They planned to find a way for Aboriginal survival, firstly through maintaining the traditional economy and by establishing a new economic base for Aborigines to support themselves. At the outset, the mission’s policy was to protect the Aborigines from outside influence. It tried to maintain the Aboriginal nomadic way of life so that they would remain economically independent. With the advent of the government’s assimilation policy, the mission changed its policy and tried to train the people to acquire European values through a settled life and employment. The craft industry was introduced to the mission as one of the means to achieve the goal of assimilation and to eventually create economic self-sufficiency. In the last decade, as a self-governing community, self-determination and self-management have been stressed. The government’s goal is that the Aborigines will eventually decide and manage their own affairs. For this purpose, financial and practical assistance has been provided to help development. The craft industry currently receives substantial amounts of money from the government to maintain its operation.

Close examination of the history of the Ernabella development programmes is important because the programmes have never achieved the original and on-going aim of establishing a self-supporting economy. On the contrary, the Aboriginal population have gradually lost their subsistence economy, and with it their independence. At the same time, they have failed to acquire new economic means of supporting themselves. Consequently, at present, they are highly dependent on government subsidies. Thus, there exists a clear contradiction between the aim of the programmes and their outcome. An examination of Ernabella’s history, focussing on the development of the craft industry, will clarify the problems and obstacles that Aborigines and Europeans have had in developing a self-supporting Aboriginal community that is not destructive of Aboriginal cultural identity.
Currently, there are two types of craft activities in Ernabella: production of batik fabric and of carved wooden artefacts. Batik production has developed from the mission organized craft industry. The batiks are well known as a new Aboriginal art form and have been exhibited in various cities in Australia and Japan. On the other hand, artefact production has never been included in official economic development programmes in the community. The publicity received by artefact production is much less than that of batik. The contrast between these two economic activities highlights the economic and cultural impact of development problems at Ernabella.

Because the Ernabella craft industry has always been almost exclusively the domain of women, the discussion will specifically deal with women. Despite the recent interest in Aboriginal women and their position and role in Aboriginal society, the focus has mainly been on the pre-colonial situation with some exceptions (see Bell & Ditton, 1980; Bell, 1983; Meehan, 1982). In particular, Aboriginal women's involvement in wage employment in remote Aboriginal communities has not been studied. As the general policy objective of increasing employment opportunities is clear at both the community and government levels, it is useful to examine the Ernabella case and study how the women have been incorporated into the workforce over the last forty years. This examination will show how women have maintained their importance in the Aboriginal economy despite having to adapt to a radically different situation.

The thesis follows a general progression from examining the historical background of the craft industry in Ernabella to its present situation. In Chapter 2, the history of Ernabella and the development of the craft industry will be discussed. One emphasis of my discussion will be on the differences between the directions of social change the early missionaries contemplated, and the results of the various projects they implemented. In the latter half of the chapter, I will examine how the aim of the craft industry fitted into the mission's ideas on transformation of Aboriginal society and discuss the problem the industry had during its development.

The current batik production will be discussed in Chapter 3 and artefact production in Chapter 4. The aim of these two chapters is to clarify and analyze the present production and marketing system of the craft industry in Ernabella.

In Chapter 5, I will place the craft industry in the context of the contemporary
Ernabella economy. Firstly, the present situation of the community economy will be analysed from various aspects, such as funding sources, employment, level of social welfare payment and individual income. I will then discuss how the craft industry functions in the community economy after forty years of development. Thus, the role of the industry as a source of employment, as a source of income and as a source social recognition will be also examined in this chapter.

In the conclusion, I discuss the implications of the economic changes for the people in Ernabella. How do they perceive their work and their employment after more than forty years of European contact? I will then consider how they try to combine the traditional aspects of their life with the essential cash earning activities today. I will demonstrate how this case study is relevant to understanding the Aboriginal economy in other areas and conclude by speculating on the future prospects of the craft industry.
CHAPTER 2
History of Ernabella and Development of the Craft Industry

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the history of Ernabella mission (1937-1973) and the development of the craft industry. From the outset, Ernabella mission adopted progressive policies and sought to operate in harmony with the Aboriginal culture. Even now, the image of a "model mission" is often associated with Ernabella. In the early period, the missionaries wanted to keep the Aborigines half-nomadic and half-sedentary in order to protect them from detribalization. Thus, the mission's main aim was to act as a buffer between the Europeans and the Aborigines.

However, the existence of the mission itself affected the Aborigines in unforeseen ways, forcing the missionaries to change their policy and recognise the Aboriginal people's desire for European goods. For example, although they retained their initial motto, "No Work, No Food," the mission decided to generate employment for all the adult Aboriginal population. Through the employment, the Aborigines were expected to learn the work ethic and to assimilate into Australian society. The craft industry was started in this context in order to provide jobs for women.

2.2 Background to founding the mission

The founding of Ernabella Mission in 1937 owed a great deal to Charles Duguid, an Adelaide surgeon and member of the Presbyterian Church. It will become clear that the progressive policy of Ernabella mission originated from Duguid's liberal and pragmatic views. In 1935, he was elected as the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in South Australia, and as such was the first lay Moderator in Australia. His visits to Central Australia in 1934 and 1935, in order to inspect the social and medical situation of the Aborigines, initiated his life time commitment to Aboriginal welfare. He was depressed by the destructive situation the Aborigines were in, and was disturbed to learn of the ill treatment they received from the white settlers in the area. Aboriginal men were economically exploited on the cattle stations whilst the
women were sexually exploited. The resultant growth in the number of children of mixed descent, with an uncertain future, made him determined to do something about the situation. During his second trip to the Centre, he met some Pitjantjatjara living a traditional life in the Musgrave Ranges. Their contact with Europeans was still minimal, but change seemed to be inevitable because dingo scalp bounty hunters were pushing into their territory. He believed that there was still some hope left for the Pitjantjatjara to survive as a "pure race" if uncontrolled contact was prevented. He decided that the establishment of a mission in the area was the way to prevent social disintegration and detribalisation among the people.

Although in this period it was widely believed that tribal Aborigines were dying out, there were two opposing arguments about the future of the Aborigines in the North-West Reserve. One side was represented by Sir John Cleland, Chairman of the Advisory Council for Aborigines in South Australia. He argued that the Musgrave Ranges were much better left to the 150 to 200 Aborigines with their subsistence economy, rather than being opened up for cattle stations. He couched his argument in economic terms: few Europeans would be able to live on any stations established in this area, and those that were there would eventually be forced to give up their properties when the first drought rendered them useless. On the other hand, the Aborigines could survive in the harshest conditions without government assistance (Cleland, 1937). The opposing argument, presented by people like Duguid, insisted that such views ignored the general hardship Aboriginal people had to endure. Duguid believed that Aborigines too needed emergency aid during droughts and in illness, and that social changes would inevitably reach even the most remote Aborigines. Thus, he argued, an institution which was capable of controlling European contact should be established next to the Reserve. Otherwise, the Aborigines in the Ranges would be detribalized and dispossessed as had occurred in most parts of Australia.

After Duguid came back from his second trip to the Centre, he was asked to submit a report to Herbert Hudd, the Minister then responsible for Aborigines in South Australia. In this report, Duguid clarified his idea about a mission in the Musgrave Ranges, to be established as a buffer between tribal Aborigines and white civilization (Duguid, 1936). As a Christian mission, it would give a "spiritual prop" to fill the gap between the traditional Aboriginal belief system and the new situation. Secondly, the mission would give training and education to the Aborigines so that they would not be so easily exploited. Lastly, medical attention was to be provided.
He also stressed that in order to operate the mission effectively and to understand the culture better, missionaries should learn the local Aboriginal language and acquire fluency in it. Eventually, the government agreed to establish a mission based on these principles if Duguid could arrange a responsible church to run it. Further, the government agreed to provide 1000 pounds if Duguid could collect the same sum. Duguid’s efforts were then directed to persuading the Presbyterian Church to take on this responsibility through lobbying and a public lecture programme. Early in 1936, Duguid made his third trip to the Centre with David Munro, who had succeeded Duguid as Moderator in South Australia, to convince him of the need for the mission. Before Duguid could attain his vision of establishing a mission in the Musgrave Ranges, he had to face many problems. His appeal to the church was distorted and sensationalistically reported in a newspaper (Duguid, 1972:105-106). Opponents also existed within the church because his idea was considered to be too radical and the originator of the Flying Doctor service, John Flynn, was one of them. Nevertheless, in mid-1936, a decision was made by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church to take on the responsibility of establishing and running of a mission in the Ranges, and during the next year, the mission operation was started in Ernabella.

As a buffer between the Aborigines and the whites, the location of the mission was carefully chosen. The mission land was close to the eastern border of the North-West Reserve. In 1939, the leases held on land adjoining the eastern boundary of the reserve were cancelled thus the mission location was then actually next to the reserve. Consequently, the Aborigines did not have to trespass on private property in order to reach the mission for medical treatment or dingo scalp trading. Furthermore, once the people arrived at the mission, they were encouraged to stay for a while and then go back to the reserve rather than go east to the railway line.

2.3 Mission policy in the founding period: Duguid and Love

Ernabella Mission was officially started in 1937 with the Reverend Taylor as superintendent. During the early period of the mission, the most important people determining its establishment and development were Charles Duguid and the Rev.R.R.B. Love. Although he never worked in the mission as a missionary, Duguid’s ideas provided the basic principles for the mission policy as discussed above. He has maintained his commitment and support for the mission throughout its history. Also as chairman of the Aboriginal Advancement League of South Australia from 1951 till
1961, he had considerable influence outside the Presbyterian church. Love worked as superintendent after the Rev. Taylor, from 1941 to 1945 during the initial establishment phase. With his previous rich experiences of working among the Aborigines in the Kimberleys, Love contributed greatly in managing the mission as a buffer station for Pitjantjatjara people.

Both Duguid and Love were aiming at the same goal, i.e., to save the Aborigines from detribalization and social destruction. They had very similar ideas on the function of the mission and its contribution. The role of the mission was seen as a buffer which would control the contact between the Aborigines and white people and, therefore, the existence of the mission should soften the clash of the two groups. Around that period, the increasing number of children of mixed descent and their treatment were a big concern in various parts of Australia. Duguid claimed that the existence of the mission would prevent this problem before it became significant in the reserve, since the doggers would leave the area when the missionaries arrived, and the exploitation of black women would stop. He emphasized that the Aboriginal people could contribute to Australian economy by killing dingoes, thereby controlling the numbers and reducing cattle losses in other areas. With a similar idea in their minds, Duguid and Love tried to achieve an ideal mission for the Aborigines. However, their ideas of how to realise their goals were not the same; the difference came from their evaluation of Aboriginal culture and their views on the prospects for economic development of the mission.

When Ernabella Mission started, the Aboriginal economy was almost completely separate from the Australian economy, except for the bartering of dingo scalps for European food with doggers in the area. With the start of the mission, economic changes were inevitably accelerated, because the existence of the mission led to the greatly increased availability of European goods for the Aborigines. At the start of the mission, Duguid expected, rather optimistically, that the Aborigines would eventually participate in the wider economy as full members and contribute to it as well as benefiting from it. On the other hand, Love was not certain if the mission could develop industries which would sustain the people. Therefore, he suggested that the basic economic structure of Aboriginal society should be maintained as nomadic, instead of introducing various socio-economic changes.

He resigned from the League in 1961 to protest against the establishment of the Woomera Rocket Range in the area.
Duguid's attitude and view of the Aborigines were very clearly stated in his address in 1941, "The Future of the Aborigines in Australia" and his idea on the basic principles of the mission can also be found here. In this address, he used the word "civilizations" to describe the cultures of both the Europeans and the Aborigines in equal terms. It was clear that Duguid saw the Aboriginal culture as being as sophisticated as his own. Thus, he insisted that the authority of the traditional leaders in their society should be respected. In his address, he criticised the churches' and the governments' treatment of the Aborigines, and suggested various measures to be taken for the Aborigines in different environments.

He valued the tribal Aborigines' economic independence most and criticised some scientists, especially anthropologists, for treating the people as if museum specimens, and disturbing their economic system. He accused some researchers of giving food in exchange for performing rituals and showing sacred objects and thus undermining the people's economic independence. In order to give the tribal Aborigines a fair chance to survive in the white-dominated Australian society, he argued that the land in which they lived had to be securely retained, and contact between the two cultures controlled. In this way, the missionaries could control not only the speed, but also the agents of change.

He repeatedly emphasized that there should be freedom of choice on the Aboriginal side when they were faced with the change. Therefore, he said, the people were free to stay or leave the mission as they desired, and also they could make their own decision as to whether or not they accepted a particular element of Western culture into their own. Thus, in the slowly controlled process of change, Duguid argued, the Aboriginal people would have enough time to choose and incorporate a new element into their own system:

I said earlier that coming and going between the two races was inevitable, but if it is gradual enough the native will have time to classify new objects into his system, and any English word used will have an aboriginal context (Duguid, 1941a:9).

Duguid recognized the existence of a system in the Aboriginal culture and aimed at the emergence of a new form of culture by incorporation without, in his words, "culture clash." He criticised the religious institutions and people who were sent with

2Duguid knew some anthropologists of this period. He met Donald Thomson in Cambridge in 1937 and he travelled the Petermann Ranges with T.G.H. Strehlow in 1939.
the aim of "saving" the Aborigines. The practice of some churches of denying Aboriginal belief systems and judging them as the devil's influence was also criticized. About the recruitment of missionaries, Duguid strongly emphasized that only trained and healthy people would be able to do something worthwhile for the Aborigines.

Duguid had a very positive and optimistic prospect of the future development of the Aboriginal economy. He presumed that the cattle and sheep industry in Central Australia would develop further and would eventually require skilled stockmen and shearsers from the Aboriginal population in the area. By training the Aboriginal men in Ernabella in this kind of job, he hoped that the mission would supply more skilled labour to other parts of Central Australia. Education in basic arithmetic and English would make it hard for the white people to exploit the Aborigines. He wrote that,

... in the future, understandingly trained aboriginal people quietly prepared for their own place in the economy of the nation will be available when required. ... it will be the cattle stations of the Territory under the Federal Government that will derive nearly all the benefit of the training of these natives (Duguid, 1941b).

The Rev. R. Love also had a strong influence on policy making in Ernabella mission. Furthermore, as a capable superintendent in the very early period, his administration determined the initial direction of social change in Ernabella. Love had long experience in working among the Aborigines before his appointment in Ernabella. Between 1920 and 1927, he worked in Mapoon. From 1927 to 1940, he worked in the Kimberleys at Kunmunya Mission among the Worora. He showed a deep understanding of the Aboriginal culture of the Worora in his book *Stone-Age Bushmen of To-day*(1936). Yet, Love had a more conventional Christian missionary attitude than Duguid, and he believed European culture and Christian belief were superior to Aboriginal culture. It was reported by Lommel, who participated in an expedition in north-west Australia, that Love "taught the Aborigines not to mention in his presence any sinful subject such as magic or sex"(Lommel,1950:22). Accordingly, the Aborigines from Kunmunya mission told Lommel about a new cult in the area "only after the repeated warning not to tell anything to the missionary[Rev. R. Love]"(ibid.:22).

The mission policy, which Duguid advocated, to respect the Aboriginal culture and to try not to intervene with the authority structure or the belief system was very progressive for the time. Consequently, Love respected the Aboriginal way as a system in which the people were living and tried not to intervene, in order to preserve
the traditional socio-economic structure. Yet, this did not mean that Love held as high a regard for their culture as Duguid did. Love wrote as follows in his policy statement:

I believe and hope that we may, with restraint and Christian example, gradually guide the tribes upward, gradually drop some of the coarser features of tribal life, instill a hope and ideals of higher living, and not bringing the tribes crashing down into destruction and extinction by making them dependants of the Mission, . . . (Love, 1944b:5).

Therefore, a task he wanted to achieve in Ernabella was to present a model of the "Christian way of living" for the people and then eventually, the Aborigines would realize the goodness of the European way of living and gradually adopt it because the Christian way would be obviously "better than the Aboriginal way".

As explained above, Duguid and Love differed in their evaluation of Aboriginal culture in relation to their own. Duguid regarded European and Aboriginal culture as equal. On the other hand, as is clear from his policy statement, Love never questioned the higher ranking of his own Christian way. On the point of the stability of Aboriginal culture, both agreed that the Aborigines must eventually change. Yet, the direction of change was differently anticipated between them. Duguid hoped that the Aborigines would be capable of creating a new form of culture by accepting or rejecting various elements from the European. Gradually, they would be able to combine those two cultures in a harmonious way. On the other hand, the direction of social change among the Aborigines was already set, to a Christian way of life and Love saw his job in Ernabella as to "uplift" the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines through Christian belief.

Another difference between Duguid and Love appeared in their expectations for the future of the Pitjantjatjara Aborigines. This difference seemed to come from the difference in experience between the two. Duguid had been involved in Aboriginal welfare and provided valuable support from outside, but he did not have any experience in working among the Aborigines as a missionary. Therefore, his plans tended to be rather idealistic. On the other hand, Love already had twenty years of missionary experience before he came to Ernabella. Thus, his ideas were more practical than Duguid's and he put more emphasis on administration than on achieving the ideal goal of social planning. Thus, contrary to Duguid's optimistic prospect, Love foresaw the difficulties in generating any type of employment in Ernabella. He stated that Ernabella would never be able to employ permanently
more than a comparatively small proportion of the people (Love, 1944b:4). Therefore, he suggested maintaining the subsistence economy that the Aborigines had at the time. He asserted that the mission would like to keep the Aborigines nomadic so that they would be able to rely on themselves for their supply of food in the desert. By not being dependent on the mission, Love thought the Aboriginal people were contributing to the national economy. He wrote: "Let them go off bush again, and give them opportunities to take their share of the work done for the good of all" (Ibid.). For Love, settled life on the mission for the sake of employment and training meant the destruction of Aboriginal economic and social life and eventually leading to dispossession. Consequently, he emphasized the importance of maintaining the current situation by keeping them in the mission for three months at maximum, but sending them back to the bush after that period.

It is interesting to compare Duguid and Love’s understanding of the concept of social change. Although both of them were advocates of innovative mission policy, neither of them had a clear picture of how the policy would actually be implemented among the Aborigines, and how it would affect their society. On one hand, Duguid argued that nothing could be taken away from the people without destroying their existing integrity, on the other, he predicted that they would be able to accept and incorporate new elements of European culture without disturbing their traditional society. The reason for this was, Duguid argued, that the Aboriginal people would have ultimate control over the change they would experience. Thus, the conscious decision by the Aborigines to adopt new elements would overcome any disturbance to their traditional culture. Similarly, he argued that they could reject unwanted factors of Western culture and prevent them from invading their culture. In this way, Duguid overestimated people’s ability to control every element of change in society. Even though the mission would work as a buffer in order to prevent any drastic change, adapting to new elements, such as European food, is not always a conscious decision. Consequently, Duguid mistakenly assumed that Aboriginal people would be able to choose the direction of change for themselves.

Love, however, seemed to regard culture as being made out of elements independent of each other. Thus, each component was replaceable without disturbing others. He wrote:

Their old life must be modified, to enable them to make contact with civilization, which has already reached every aboriginal in Australia, and their old way of living must be uplifted by the teaching of Christ. . . .
think we have already proved that it is possible to engraft Christianity on the tribal system of law and belief, and that to break old beliefs is futile. The new wine will burst the old bottles, in its own time: the missionary ought not to do so, lest he bursts the old bottles and has not left an adequate substitutes in their place. The tribal law is good, but tribal custom is often bad. . . . We seek to modify the latter within the former (Love, 1937).

It is not clear what he meant by "law" and "custom", but he appears to claim that "custom" could be modified without affecting "law". Thus, what the missionary wanted to achieve in Ernabella was the introduction of Christianity in order to "uplift" the Aborigines, without changing the subsistence economy and the traditional life-style. Thus, Love expected that the mission would be able to maintain the equilibrium of their economy, but that they would gradually be transformed into "nomadic Christians."

However, in reality, the Aboriginal society was transformed into something which neither Duguid nor Love expected. The change was partly due to more frequent and rapid contact with outsiders than the mission had expected. However, the main causes of change actually originated from the mission itself. The mission was established with a liberal and progressive policy, but neither Duguid nor Love realised the extent to which the existence of the mission itself would affect the socio-economy of the Aborigines and lead to change in an unexpected direction.

2.4 Implementation of policy in the first stage and its consequence: 1937-1948

The mission's policy during the early period was very pragmatic and effective: the aim was keeping undesirable white men out of the reserve and securing the departure of those already there. Since the mission did not have to make a profit out of dingo scalp trading, they achieved their aim by offering a better deal for the Aborigines than the doggers could. Only handling charges were subtracted from the bounties, and the rest was paid to the Aborigines. Around this period, a dingo scalp was worth 7/6 in the Northern Territory, but in Ernabella, they paid 12/6 for a grown dingo scalp and 10/- for a pup scalp. Naturally, the Aborigines chose to sell their skins to the mission instead of to the doggers who had previously exchanged them for a small amount of flour. The deal was so good that some Aborigines heard about Ernabella and came from the Northern Territory to trade their dingo scalps, but were rejected because they were not locals (Love, 1942a). The mission also opened a store with basic goods available so that the Aborigines could purchase flour,
sugar and tea after they sold the dingo skins. In order to attract further trading of the scalps, they improved the store in 1946 with increased stock. Although these attempts to attract Aborigines' attention to the mission proved to be successful, already there were some obvious contradiction between the policy of keeping the Aborigines traditional, and the practice of providing a better deal in dingo trading and stocking European goods to attract the people. In reality, the mission was providing incentives to participate in the cash economy and to develop a desire for European goods. Yet, the mission expected that the Aborigines would be able to retain their traditional life style without disruption because the doggers were removed from the reserve.

Ration distribution for the old and the sick also encouraged them to stay close to the mission rather than going away for a long period. In 1945, during a period of drought, emergency rations were given to all the people, and this too must have strengthened the tendency to live at the mission. The mission fed school children from the school's inception in 1940, and in the same year, the teacher noticed that there were more children in the camp who stayed for longer periods (Trudinger, 1940). Although they were free to go away from Ernabella any time they wanted, the distribution of rations and the feeding programme certainly encouraged them to stay in the area longer than usual. Medical services available at the mission were another factor that drew the people; from the start of the mission, "sick parade" was held every morning and medical treatment was given to burns and infected eyes. This also caused the Aborigines to have more frequent contact with the mission.

Rather than giving rations to all the population, the mission offered employment for men and women. The most basic policy of the institution was "No work, no food". As payment, the Aboriginal workers were fed three times a day and were given clothing. The first cash payment for all the workers was made around 1944 and consisted of one shilling a week to spend on "sugar, lollies, or anything extra" (Love, 1944a). The mission wanted to reward work mostly with material goods rather than with cash because they were afraid that non-workers would live on the workers' money and that gambling might start in the mission. The types of employment available at the beginning were still very limited. The mission inherited sheep from the previous station owner, so most of the jobs were related to sheep farming or mission maintenance. In 1939-40, twenty-one people were employed in total: work included shepherding, domestic help and other odd jobs. Later, from 1946, shearing was done by the Aboriginal men.
The food the Aboriginal workers were given as wages proved to be popular among them. The missionaries reported that "the Aborigines love sugar, flour and tea and they gladly work for them" (Ernabella Newsletter, Nov., 1941:2). Thus, the availability of European food was a major attraction for the Aborigines to come and stay at the mission. A visitor in the mission in 1943 wrote that:

The workers and their families received for breakfast plain porridge and a hunk of damper, for lunch damper and tea with sugar; for the night meal a stew made of goat's meat and vegetables, damper and tea with sugar (Cooke, 1943).

The meals seemed to be heavy in carbohydrate and lacking in vitamins. However, for the Aborigines, the food must have been attractive because of its novelty and sweetness. As long as the people did not stay in the mission too long and went back to their traditional eating habits, there did not seem to be any nutritional problems apparent. In 1948, however, the consequence of the unbalanced diet became known. The sister reported that among people who stayed at the mission for longer periods, the symptoms of nutritional deficiency could be seen (Turner, 1948).

Although Love was strongly against disrupting the subsistence economy "by bringing the tribes crashing down into destruction and extinction by making them dependants of the Mission, feeding them all in return for a show of conformity to religious teaching" (Love, 1944b:5), the missionaries used food to attract the Aborigines to religious meetings in the mission. From the early period, it was reported in correspondence and newsletters that sometimes over 300 people attended a church service (Ernabella Newsletter, Feb., 1942:4). After the service, those who attended were fed with damper and sweet tea. The rationale for this, according to the missionaries' explanation, was that people could not go hunting and gathering that day if they went to church. The missionaries tried to emphasize that the food was not the reason for the people coming to church, but rather it was their genuine interest in the religious teaching. However, during Love's period, the services were mainly conducted in English by him, which was a totally foreign language for the majority of them. Curiosity might be a motive for attending but one could reasonably imagine that the free food after the service attracted a large number of people; when the mission stopped feeding the people after church service in the 1960s, the superintendent reported a drastic decrease in church attendance and he regarded the cessation of feeding as the main cause (Edwards, 1967).

Similarly, the mission provided food after women's meetings which started in
the early 1940s. By 1946, the meetings developed into adult education and Bible classes. After prayer, the women learned hymns in both Pitjantjatjara and English, and then general knowledge such as the value of money, or English, sewing and knitting were taught. After a meeting, those attending were rewarded by evening meals in exchange for firewood. From the mission’s point of view, the women were easier to work with because they tended to stay closer to the mission even when they went gathering food. I believe that from the Aboriginal women’s point of view, the meetings and classes were probably interesting, because it was my impression during fieldwork that they generally appreciated learning new skills and acquiring new knowledge. Moreover, they were fed for the day and the women did not have to rely on their men bringing food back home, nor did they have to go out gathering food. Since the subsistence economy was carried out basically independently between men and women, their attendance at the women’s meetings and being fed afterwards did not seem to cause any problems in the division of labour between sexes. Women kept coming in and men went out for hunting while the women were attending these meetings. By attending these meetings, the women might have had a better chance than their men to be exposed by the missionaries and their wives to new knowledge. Yet, at the same time, the missionaries underestimated the women’s role in the subsistence economy, and tried to change them into the European stereotype of housewives, who minded the household and spent their time knitting and sewing.

One of the most progressive mission policies was the respect paid to the people’s mother tongue, Pitjantjatjara. From the start, Pitjantjatjara was the first language in the mission and missionaries were expected to gain fluency in it. This language policy owed a great deal to Love and R.M.Trudinger; both of them were gifted linguists. Trudinger was the first school teacher and contributed substantially to establishing the Aboriginal school in Ernabella.\(^3\) English was not taught at school for five years till 1945 because the missionaries did not recognize any need for a knowledge of English in the area. Moreover, it was thought that teaching English would encourage the younger people to go eastward from the mission (Berndt, 1951:192). However, the policy of not teaching English was attacked by the public in the South as preventing the Aborigines from gaining access to new knowledge, so in 1944 the Board of Missions decided that English was to be taught as a second language (Matthew, 1944).

\(^3\)His publications include "Grammar of the Pitjantjatjara Dialect, Central Australia," in *Oceania*, Vol.13, No.3, 1943:205-223
At school, the main emphasis was placed on teaching literacy in Pitjantjatjara. The main purpose was to "introduce the Christian Gospel and the means for knowing and comprehending it as quickly and as thoroughly as possible" (Trudinger, 1945). The missionaries thought that since teaching literacy in the native tongue should not interfere with their traditional life, their life style would remain intact, but, at the same time, they would acquire knowledge of Christianity. Trudinger wrote as follows:

From the earliest the aim of the school was to introduce the Christian Gospel and the means for knowing and comprehending it as quickly and as thoroughly as possible, chiefly through making the younger generation of the Tribe literate in their language. With this, the aim has also been to introduce the more beneficial elements of our civilized culture in the most logical way and medium available without in any way interfering with the tribal benefit and habitat of life incompatible with the Gospel, and insofar as it is vitally necessary to the continued existence of the tribe (Ibid.).

Thus, the early missionaries in Ernabella did not see any contradiction between being Christian and being nomadic. In fact, they had a romantic image of Aboriginal Christian nomads. The school teacher's statement was reported as follows: "The chief aim is to make the children literate during the next four years, so that when they lead a nomadic life with the tribe, they will be able to read aloud in their own tongue and to their own people, the Gospel stories of Mark and John which are translated into their language" (Matthew, 1943). Yet, giving schooling to the children in the mission and feeding them implanted not only Christian teaching, but also other aspects of European culture, especially a desire for European goods. In this way, the missionaries were definitely acting against their own intention of preserving the traditional life-style.

I have discussed in detail in the preceding section the mission administration in Ernabella during the first ten years. Following the mission policy articulated by the Rev. Love, the administration was aimed at maintaining in equilibrium Aboriginal society whilst gradually leading them to a Christian way of thinking. However, by using food to attract the people to religious gatherings and other activities in the mission, the missionaries were affecting other parts of the Aboriginal way of life. The Aboriginal people stayed around the mission as long as they could get European food and goods. This did not occur through a conscious decision by the Aborigines to change their culture. Consequently, the missionaries did not realize the nature of changes that were occurring until the Areyonga incident occurred in 1947.
2.5 The Areyonga incident

In 1947, Ernabella Mission faced the problem of what came to be known as the "Areyonga incident" and was forced to change its policy in order to cope with the situation. This incident showed that the Aborigines had their own information network and demonstrated independent initiative in moving to the place where the resources they desired were available. Areyonga was established in the Krichauff Ranges in 1943 as a ration depot and was run as an outpost of the Lutheran Finke River Mission. Around 1947, Ernabella missionaries realized that the people were starting to move out of the mission to Areyonga. In a letter written to F.H.Moy, Director of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory, Ernabella missionaries claimed the reason for the movement was the availability of free food and clothing at Areyonga, and furthermore, indirectly accused the Lutheran missionaries of "pauperising" the Aborigines (Coombes, 1947). In answer to this criticism, Lutheran pastor, F.W.Albrecht, wrote a letter to J. Riedel, chairman of Finke River Mission, claiming that the policy of Ernabella Mission was not realistic and could not cope with the changing needs of the Aborigines. He wrote:

If Ernabella is losing its attraction to Natives, then in our opinion, it is not because of Areyonga offering them artificial attractions . . . Above all, however, are not the members of the white staff at Ernabella living a normal life, and while doing so, are closely watched by the Pitjantjatjara people whose appetite and curiosity to try everything themselves is now well aroused? And is not Ernabella feeding workers and school children who automatically develop a desire for still more and better things? Is not some clothing and also blankets issued to Aborigines at Ernabella? If so, then, it is just impossible to let a person move about in garments today, and then expect him or even somebody with him, to go about naked tomorrow (Albrecht, 1948).

Albrecht's comments questioned the Ernabella view that the tribal Aborigines could basically remain happy with their nomadic way of life and be satisfied with their traditional material culture after they made contact with European culture. The reality was that the Aborigines did not want to stay in their traditional way especially in terms of material possessions. They moved to Areyonga where they could have much easier access to goods than in Ernabella. In 1948, Trudinger, who was then working as assistant superintendent in Ernabella, visited Areyonga, Hermannsburg and Haasts Bluff in order to inspect the situation in these areas. After the inspection trip and Trudinger's report (1948) the mission realized that they had to shift their existing policy of restricting the Aborigines' access to various goods to maintain their nomadic lifestyle. In order to justify the existence of the mission they had to retain Aboriginal people at the mission.
Trudinger found out in Areyonga that although employment was not available for most of the members of the community, the rations were given more liberally than in Ernabella. Also, the definition of "aged and infirm" was much looser in Areyonga than Ernabella, so a much wider range of people were entitled to rations. Another difference was that the store in Areyonga was much better stocked, both in variety and quantity. It had a range of food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, and furthermore it sold various clothing and camping gear. On the other hand, a much smaller range of goods was available in Ernabella. The Ernabella store stocked only flour, sugar, jam, trousers and coats; tea was rationed, but not available at the store. The rest of the materials were expected to remain traditional and to be provided in a traditional way. In Areyonga, goods were consistently kept in stock. On the other hand, the Ernabella missionaries sometimes had to send away Aboriginal dingo traders because their stock of goods in the store was not sufficient for both trading and rationing. Thus, more Aborigines were attracted to Areyonga rather than Ernabella in order to trade their dingo scalps and buy various goods in the store with the money they earned. Furthermore, they remained in Areyonga because the possibility of receiving free rations was greater.

With this incident, the Ernabella missionaries and the Board of Missions realised that their idea of keeping the Aborigines as nomadic and traditional as possible was no longer realistic, particularly as the Aborigines themselves did not want to remain totally nomadic. In order to justify and continue their existence, the missionaries had to cope with a new phase of the mission, in which the Aborigines would stay in the mission for longer periods, rather than using it as a resource and medical centre whilst still maintaining their traditional nomadic life. The Aborigines preferred to remain in the mission for longer, and keep their access to the various goods and services which were available in Ernabella, instead of totally relying on hunting and gathering. They developed a desire for and dependency on Western food and goods. This shows that the traditional Aboriginal subsistence economy had already changed, and people were ready to move to a place where a constant and reliable supply of goods was available.

On this point, the Ernabella missionaries were in a dilemma, caught between their principles and reality. As Christians, for whom the work ethic was one of the most important guidelines of their lives, they could not give food and clothing to all the Aborigines without any justification. They thought that free rationing would "pauperise" them. Yet, at the same time, the Aboriginal people's desire for material
goods could not be suppressed any longer, and they were willing to abandon Ernabella and move to Areyonga in order to acquire European goods more easily. Thus, the missionaries had to find some reasons to supply goods to the Aborigines without contradicting their Christian based work ethic of "No work, no food."

In his report of the visit to Areyonga and Hermannsburg, Trudinger emphasized the need to provide more employment for the Aborigines, especially for women and young girls. Around that period, Ernabella men could find some employment in the sheep industry and around the mission and some families were employed as shepherds. Yet, female employment was limited to some domestic work and a few teaching assistants at school. Consequently, the majority of women were not entitled to rations or meals except pensioners, pregnant women and nursing mothers. Unless some form of employment was initiated, the majority of women could not be entitled to any rations while they stayed at the mission. It is doubtful that the missionaries intended to create employment in order to maintain the women's economic independence. Rather, they planned to increase the incentive to stay at Ernabella. Trudinger wrote:

As regards to women and girls we must, I feel, find some way of establishing congenial (and remunerative, if possible) work for as many as want it, to offset the gratuitous rationing elsewhere. We could then provide a non-pauperising goods and clothing supply for all employed and even maintain legitimate added incentives—more clothing, and promise of some regular payment. I am convinced that this would account for 90% of our unmarried girls, and young married women (Ibid.).

In this way, the women's employment project was strongly promoted in Ernabella. It is important to stress that the original purpose of establishing the industry was not towards economic self-sufficiency or for production for exchange, but to accord with the basic mission policy of "No work, no food": the people had to work before they received anything from the mission. Yet, in other words, as long as they "worked" for the mission, they were entitled to receive rations and meals. In this sense, the real economic value of the men's and women's production was not of crucial importance. Thus, Trudinger wrote that they had to find some work which was "congenial (and remunerative, if possible)." Productivity was not of primary importance at the start of the employment program; the produce was only a token to be exchanged for rations and meals, regardless of the amount actually produced.

The Areyonga problem also highlighted the real purpose of establishing and continuing the mission's existence. Ernabella mission could in theory have closed at
that point, but in practice the mission could not cease its operation just because the number of Aboriginal residents had decreased. Since the mission was established by the church with donations of members of the church, the management had to adapt to the changing situation in order to continue its operation. If the mission retained its original policy implemented by Love, it would eventually lose the majority of the Aboriginal population. Thus, it had to change its basic policy in order to secure its existence. Furthermore, at the time of the Areyonga problem, Ernabella had not produced any Aboriginal converts to Christianity. As a principle, the ultimate aim of the mission was to preach the gospel and convert the people to Christianity. Therefore, it would be embarrassing for them to withdraw without achieving that aim. Trudinger reported that "Our policy must be more vigorous and positive if we are to hold the ones we have and attract others from more civilised centres" (Ibid.). Here we see another contradiction. Ernabella mission was established in order to provide necessary services for the tribal Aborigines in an area where no official services had been available before. Ten years later, when the Aborigines could find what they needed in places other than Ernabella, the missionaries had to provide something better than others in order to maintain its operation.

2.6 Assimilation policy in the mission

The development plan for the mission started in 1949 under the vigorous supervision of R.M. Trudinger, who was then appointed as superintendent. The aim of the development was to make the mission into a more attractive and permanent settlement for the Aborigines. In order to achieve this goal, the focus was placed on building more facilities and creating more employment. The list of buildings developed included a temporary eating shelter, stores, a swimming pool, church, aerodrome and a well for the camp. At the same time, the mission tried to generate more employment for both men and women. According to the mission plan, the people were going to receive more cash and rations in a form of wages than before. The missionaries also accepted the Aboriginal people's desire to wear clothes, and decided to provide them to workers.

From the time Trudinger wrote his report after the Areyonga incident in 1947 until the development programme officially started under his leadership in 1949, it seems there was a slight but definite change in the aim of the plan. It is understandable that the mission could not openly state its need to attract more Aborigines for the sake of continuing its existence. Yet, just after the Areyonga incident, the missionaries were focusing on improving the mission to provide a more
permanent settlement for the people. On the other hand, by the time the development plan started, it became clear in the official documents that the various changes were to be made in order to assimilate the Aboriginal people into white Australian society. For the first time, in the 1947 Annual Report to the Aboriginal Protection Board of South Australia, a report on Ernabella Mission expressed a more positive attitude toward social change than before:

The mission is not only supervising the general welfare of all the tribal natives in this area, but in co-operation with the Board, is preparing the younger people for the inevitable contact with civilization. Every form of education, service and training is directed toward this end, as by means it is hoped to avoid the social and spiritual disintegration which so often follows when contact is made with white people (Chief protector of Aborigines, 1947).

Three years later, in 1950, a clear statement of the change in the mission policy towards assimilation could be seen in the Annual Report. It stated that "The time has now arrived for a definite programme of education and work to prepare the people for an earlier contact with the outside world than had been anticipated" (Ibid., 1950). The report also placed emphasis on the type of employment the Aborigines would engage in. Earlier, Trudinger wanted to find employment for women which would be "congenial and preferably remunerative." However, in this report, he stated that "while the older people will still maintain themselves by hunting, the younger people are wanting to take up work which is both useful and remunerative" (Ibid.); [emphasis is added]. Thus, with the start of the assimilation policy in the mission, the emphasis was placed on preparing the Aboriginal people so they could contribute to white Australian society through their work. In this way, employment itself started to have moral meaning, i.e., the Aborigines should prove they were "useful" through their work.

These intentions were clearly seen in the assimilation policy statement by the mission written in 1957:

At Ernabella, our policy and training for usefulness, initiated about eighteen years ago and now directly involving never less than three or four hundred Aborigines, can be briefly summarized under three headings:

Firstly, attempting to implant a right attitude to work in the whole community.

Secondly, provision of and training in a many-sided programme of work of an appropriate kind.
Thirdly, the constant aim: responsibility, independence and indigenous leadership in as many spheres of work as possible.

(Ernabella Newsletter, Jan., 1957:2)

However, Ernabella mission had to solve various problems before it could prove that the people were actually contributing something to society. On the one hand, the Aborigines did not have any skills that the mission could utilize straight away. Therefore, job training had to be done beforehand. On the other hand, the work had to be economically viable so that the subsidies from the church could be reduced gradually. In this way, Ernabella mission was faced with the difficult problem of generating some industries in a remote area where few substantial natural or human resources were available. The missionaries' plan was to develop the sheep industry for male employment and to generate a craft industry for the women.

Throughout the development period, various facilities were built and established in the mission. In this sense, there were better services available for the Aboriginal people. However, at the same time, since these facilities were provided with outside help through the church, the economic dependency on the church by the Aboriginal people had increased gradually. A good example illustrating the situation is the change from their previous subsistence economy. In 1952, a people's kitchen-dining hall was completed. Meals had been served to workers since the start of the mission, but there was no eating hall in the community during the early period. Thus, the Aborigines had been given cooked food and they ate it in their own way. After completion of the dining room, all the workers and their children had their three meals a day there. The mission's aim was to provide an enclosed area to eat rather than sitting on the ground. At the same time, the mission felt that the dining hall would help the Aborigines to acquire Western manners. In the Ernabella Newsletter, it was reported that "Here the people are now sitting at dining tables, and learning to eat, while attending school and working, using normal eating utensils" (Mar., 1952:3). However, it has to be pointed out that the communal feeding system did not only make the people acquire Western table manners, but also created a greater dependence on the mission. The workers did not need to hunt for or gather their food; they did not even have to cook their meals. Instead, they could rely for their food supply on the mission, but had to follow the mission schedule from morning till evening in order to be fed.

The communal eating stopped in 1960, partly due to the nutrition deficiencies
of the meals they were served, and partly due to the lack of adequate supervision of the operation by the mission staff (Duguid, 1972:186-89). Yet, having three meals a day provided for eight years produced profound dependency on the European food supplied by the mission. By the end of the 1950s, even when off living in the bush, flour, tea and sugar were sold to the Aborigines from the mission truck which came to trade dingo skins. Thus, even outside the mission, when engaged in their nomadic activities, the people could no longer do without European food. When the mission switched to rations from communal feeding, it had to supply meat to supplement the people’s diet. In this way, the Aboriginal people’s subsistence economy based on hunting and gathering rapidly deteriorated during the 1950s.

2.7 Development of the craft industry

The plan for starting an industry for women was realized with a visit by Mrs.M.M.Bennett in 1948. She taught older women how to spin wool by adapting their traditional spinning methods, and instructed younger women in how to weave with the wool spun by the older women. The craft industry had a good beginning, and in a few months about forty women were spinning and ten girls were making rugs and weaving (Hilliard, 1968:172). Bennett was not merely a craft teacher: she was an advocate of Aboriginal rights. She spent her childhood among Aborigines on a Queensland cattle station owned by her father; he had a very sympathetic attitude towards Aborigines and protected them from exploitation by other Europeans (see Bennett, 1928). With this background she devoted her life to working for the Aborigines. In her book, *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being* (1930), Bennett outlined the legal loop holes which allowed Aboriginal women to be exploited. She also argued for the necessity of land rights for the Aborigines in order to maintain their culture.

The craft industry was originally started to increase employment opportunities for the women. However, with the assimilation policy, the industry was also regarded as a means to contact the Aboriginal women, and start their assimilation into white society. Initially, the mission did not have any clear intention of incorporating older women in any industry since they were already entitled to a pension. However, by employing the women as spinners, the missionaries believed they could attract them to the mission. In the *Ernabella Newsletter*, it was reported:

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4Her other achievement was to establish an experimental Aboriginal school in Mt.Margaret, Western Australian in the 1930s (Stanton, 1982:62).
During the year the women have spun consistently and this means that they have received much more mission influence than before. This has had a widespread effect. Their hygiene, too, has improved tremendously although still far to go (Jun., 1951:3).

When the craft industry actually started, the mission expressed great optimism for the future of the industry. It was emphasized that if the steady increase in orders continued, employment opportunities for women were good. Just after the establishment of the industry, Trudinger wrote that "so far we have sold every blanket, scarf etc., made, but the whole thing is not quite yet on a financial basis. I give it about two more months to become so" (Trudinger, 1949).

During the 1950s and the 1960s, the craft industry developed in scale and production. It offered a constant source of employment for Aboriginal women throughout the year, while male employment in the sheep industry tended to be seasonal. On average, about 50 to 70 women worked as spinners, weavers and rug-makers. In official reports, the craft industry was often introduced as a successful venture and the number of women being employed was emphasized. The mission sometimes quoted the maximum number rather than the average number in official reports. In 1951, in the Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, it was written that "all women desiring work were employed in the spinning and weaving industry at one period 120 women were at work" (Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1951). However, in the Ernabella Newsletter, it was reported that the average number of workers was about 60 to 70 and the maximum around 100 (Jun., 1951:3). Thus, it seemed there was some exaggeration in the church's report to the government.

Even though the number of women employed in the craft industry might not have been as large as the church claimed, it was true that the number of jobs the industry offered was quite substantial. On the other hand, male employment did not develop as much as the mission had hoped, and the lack of jobs for men was a chronic problem in Ernabella throughout the 1950s and the 1960s.

An important reason for the employment of so many women in the craft industry was that the wages they were receiving were much lower than those for men; with the same amount of funds available, the mission could employ many more women. Spinners were paid mostly in goods, in a form of ration or meals. Other craft workers received their wages mostly in goods and small cash payments. For
example in 1951, a craft worker's total wage, which included cash, clothing, and rations, was 4/- a week. In the same period, a male routine worker, such as a gardener, received 10/- worth of goods and cash, whilst 22/- worth was paid for the men who worked on roads and wells. This gap remained the same after the mission changed all wage payments into cash in 1966. It was recommended by the mission board that an average craft worker would receive about $4 per week when the male average was about $10 per week. Even at present, there is a clear difference between average male and average female earnings in most industrial societies. The important point is that the female workers in Ernabella were counted as "workers" and that the number of them was often used to publicise the success of the employment programme in the mission.

2.8 Problems in the craft industry

From the start and throughout the development of the craft industry, the mission had to face two questions. One was what commodity they should produce, considering their remote locations, where raw materials were scarce. The other was how they should organize production efficiently when Aboriginal women did not have job skills except spinning. The first question related to the type of craft the industry should produce and the second question related to the economic viability of the industry. I think those two questions are still unanswered in the 1980's when the economic development of Aboriginal society is considered. Thus, it is worthwhile examining how Ernabella mission dealt with these questions during the assimilation period.

Concerning the first question, one of the distinctive characteristics of Ernabella craft products was the orientation towards European taste. Although they utilized the indigenous skills in spinning, the process of actual production of the craft items was done with newly acquired skills, such as weaving, rug-making and sewing. The Ernabella design which was drawn only among women and children in Ernabella was used as a pattern in floor rugs or as an accent mark in silk scarves. Even though the Ernabella design gave a most distinctive characteristic to the craft products, they were completely oriented towards usage in European households. For example, wool products included floor rugs, woven scarves and woven cushion covers. Moccasins made out of kangaroo fur were popular in the 1960s and the early 1970s. Other products included gift tags, cards, silk scarves and wall hangings with Ernabella designs being painted on. In this way, the marketing of the craft was completely focused on non Aboriginal consumers, especially middle class housewives who would look for gifts in the mission shops in the southern states.
It appears that the mission never questioned the European orientation of the craft products. On the contrary, missionaries praised the fact that the Aboriginal women were making goods for use in European houses. For example, in 1953, the following sentence appeared in the Ernabella Newsletter: "Homeless nomads are making things for homes and glorying in it" (Sep., 1953:4). Later, the general secretary of the Mission Board wrote about the Ernabella designs as follows: "aboriginal designs of the 'technicolour doodles' variety fit in best with ultramodern home furnishings" (Stuckey, 1956:6).

However, the tendency to produce European oriented crafts made it hard for the Aboriginal women to contribute substantially to the industry other than providing craft skills and labour. The concept of the craft industry was described as follows in one of the mission pamphlets:

The whole history of the art and craft work is one of two-way partnership. We provided the materials—the Pitjantjatjara produced the art. We provided wool and weaving and rug-making techniques—the women spun the wool and used their art and their skill to produce beautiful rugs (Ernabella, n.d.).

Although what was written above was partly true, one aspect which was not mentioned was that the missionaries decided what to produce using the Aboriginal techniques and skills and trained them accordingly. Since it was hard for the Aboriginal women to grasp how their products were used in a completely foreign environment, they did not have any involvement in developing new products. That side of the business was the supervisor's responsibility, and she had to work many extra hours to cope with a large amount of work by herself.

The irony of the situation was that, as in the mission assimilation policy, the aim of developing the industry was to encourage "responsibility, independence and indigenous leadership in as many spheres of work as possible." On the contrary, what happened in fact was that the craft industry created a dependence among the Aboriginal women on the adviser. Such dependence has carried on to the present, and can be seen clearly in the batik industry. I will discuss in the next chapter the implication of this dependence which has existed throughout the craft industry's history.

Another question the mission had to cope with was how the Aboriginal women should produce the craft so that the industry would be economically viable. They
could not find a good answer, and the industry had been operated at chronic deficit. According to a 1959 survey by the mission board, the net loss was 48%, due to the high cost in production. The high cost occurred for the following reasons. Since all the workers were entitled to three meals a day and clothing, the mission had to feed inefficient workers as well as efficient workers equally. Thus, the former did not produce sufficient to pay for what the mission provided, and the latter were not given any incentive to work. Yet, the mission could not fire less efficient ones, because these women needed some employment to earn their food, and there was no alternative for those women who were unfitted for craft work. Consequently, the mission did not have any choice other than to continue the industry and to cover the deficits through subsidies.

Parallel to the development the craft industry, the economy in the mission had been changing drastically in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Provision of three meals a day as wages was ceased in 1960 and payment was switched to food rations and cash payment. In 1966, the decision was made to finish ration payments and pay all wages as cash. Thus, it was thirty years after the Aboriginal people established their initial contact with the mission in the late 1930s and the 1940s, that they were brought into the full cash economy.

This change resulted in two outcomes, one positive and one negative. Firstly, Ernabella women were not left behind in the drastic economic change: they had been joining the work force from the early mission period because they did not and could not expect others to feed them in the settlement. In other Aboriginal settlements and missions where European administration took the conventional view of defining a household and providing employment only for men, women were gradually losing their traditional role as an important part of the subsistence economy, and were forced to be dependent on their men (e.g. Hamilton, 1975). In contrast, in Ernabella, in spite of their lower wage rates, women did participate in various economic activities in the mission, especially in the craft industry, and kept their direct access to rations and cash payments. Thus, the women did not have to rely on their husbands for providing food and other goods. During the transition from payment in rations or meals to cash wages, women were in the same position as their husbands, and both could acquire new knowledge of a lifestyle based on money. Furthermore, it is likely that Ernabella women adapted to change as well as men during the transitional period, because of their high participation rate in employment.
The second outcome of the rapid transition was the increased economic dependency of the Aboriginal people on outside sources, mostly on the government. In the 1950s and 1960s, payments for the Aboriginal workers in Ernabella had continuously increased. However, it was not because their productivity had been increasing. One of the reasons was that the degree of reliance on their subsistence economy had been declining due to increased population in the settlement, and the mission's implementation of an assimilation policy. Also, the mission as an employer of Aboriginal labour, had to follow government wage guidelines. The economic prospects of the mission industries were not good in the 1960s. The sheep industry suffered from the drought and the wool price declined. The craft industry was running at a deficit.

Even in the late 1950s, the Mission Board recognised the financial problem Ernabella created and wrote as follows: "The Board has always known that the very presence of the Ernabella mission would create and stimulate acute economic problems as it endeavoured to meet the grown spiritual and cultural needs" (The Board of Missions, 1959). Consequently, the church decided to ask for more government financial assistance in running the mission and other projects.

The main project the mission planned, with government financial assistance, was to set up a cattle station at Fregon, about 40 km south of Ernabella. The future plan was to develop the cattle industry in the area and to set up satellite outposts with cattle in the Reserve. The Mission Board outlined the aim of the project as follows:

By this means the people could take advantage of the productivity of the whole of their reserve, solve much of the protein and meat deficiency problem, have ample firewood and hunting, accept local responsibility, learn pastoral management, deal more effectively with the dingo menace, demonstrate their right to hold the reserve for themselves and their children, and thus progress at their own pace towards adaptation to western standards of living which would in time mean true assimilation (Ibid.).

As we can see from this statement, the mission's plan was to create economic self-sufficiency in the long run. However, the plan did not develop as the mission had expected and those outposts were never established.

In the 1960s, the Aboriginal people started to receive more for their work, better facilities were available in the settlement and bigger development projects were carried out around the mission. However, a contradiction existed in the situation.
Instead of achieving the self-sufficiency and economic independence for which all the aid was aimed, the bigger input of government funds created a heavier dependence among the Aboriginal people and in the settlement economy. This dependence was aggravated in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is in this context that the batik industry was established and the craft women became involved in a new activity.
CHAPTER 3
Batik Industry

3.1 Introduction

From the start of the craft industry in the mission, weaving and rug making as well as painting were the main activities. However, it seemed that in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the production of woollen goods did not have good prospects. The price of raw wool had gone up and the production cost of hand spun yarn and weaving was rising due to wage rises given to the workers. Inevitably, the prices of finished products had to go up. At the same time, the increasing number of hobby weavers in Australia caused greater competition for the market and made it hard to increase the selling price, inspite of the rising cost. Around this period, the adviser introduced various ideas and new crafts. Carved stone animals were produced after a visit of an Eskimo carver, and the idea of starting leather work and clothing manufacturing were considered and abandoned. Batik production was one of those experimental new media which were tried in Ernabella, but, unlike some other trials, batik production attracted positive interest from the workers and developed considerably in a relatively short time.

At present, batik is the major product, and the industry has been providing an important source of work for women in the community. Furthermore, the batik products themselves have been given considerable attention as a new Aboriginal art form, and have been displayed and marketed in Australia and overseas.

Ernabella Arts Incorporated was established in 1974 in order to manage the industry and market products after the mission ceased its operation and the community became self-governing. The organization consists of the craft adviser who has been in the position since 1954 and the batik workers who are the members. Ernabella Arts owns a building known as the "Craft Room" in the community. Although it is called "Room", the building itself is substantial, with a display area and office as well as the workshop. Currently, there are two major types of craft products produced by the community. One is batik fabric which I will discuss in this
chapter; the other is wooden artefacts, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The way those two types of crafts are produced is quite different. The batik production is carried out by the women who are employed by Ernabella Arts. They work in the Craft Room under the supervision of the craft adviser and they receive wages from Ernabella Arts calculated according to the hours they worked. On the other hand, artefact producers, who are both male and female, are not employed by Ernabella Arts. They produce carvings and sell the finished work to Ernabella Arts. Thus, they work at their own place and pace.

There are three aspects of the industry that I will examine in this chapter. First, and of most importance, the involvement of Aboriginal women in the industry will be discussed. This aspect will include the women’s attitude to the work and to their colleagues, and the value of the economic and social return from their work. Secondly, I will analyze the industry structure, including the organization of finance and management and discuss the participation of the Aboriginal women in this side of the industry. The chapter will end with a discussion of the cultural meaning of batik for the Aborigines. As a newly adapted craft, batik does not have any traditional significance for the people. Yet, from the way they incorporate batik products into their life style, it is possible to analyze the role batik plays in contemporary Aboriginal people’s life.

Currently, the Ernabella batik industry is one of the best known adapted craft industries1 in the whole Aboriginal arts and craft industry. Ernabella was the first Aboriginal community to experiment with and start batik production. After its success, some other communities in Central Australia, such as Utopia, Pipalyatjara and Fregon, also started batik industries. Among them, Utopia batiks are marketed quite widely.2 In addition, women in other communities such as Amata and Indulkana work on batik, although they do not market the products commercially outside the communities.

The Ernabella batik industry has a special economic significance for the women who work in it. The wages they receive are their main source of income, while in other communities, income from craft activities is only a supplementary source.

1According to the Pascoe Report, adapted artefacts mean "Objects that employ traditional elements or materials but which in technology or function or form were not a part of traditional culture, but that are produced by traditional people"(p.19).
2About Utopia batik see Green, 1981.
Under the Community Development Employment Program (C.D.E.P.), people in the community do not receive unemployment benefit, but receive funds from the D.A.A. to generate employment in the community. All the workers in the community are under the principle of "No work, no money." Thus, the batik industry is providing full-time employment for the workers.

3.2 History of the batik industry

Batik in Ernabella started in late 1971 when an American artist Leo Brenton visited the community for a month teaching the technique to Aboriginal women who were working at the Craft Room. His visit was organized by the Mission Board to introduce a new medium to the craft arena. With this visit, women learnt how to draw designs on fabrics with wax by using brushes, and how to handle dyes. The production of batik fabrics started and sales rapidly increased in a relatively short time. In 1972, a year after Brenton’s visit, sales were about $300, which was only 1% of the total sale of the craft industry. But by 1974-1975 financial year, the sale increased to about $9,600, approximately quarter of the total craft revenue. At the same time, production of woollen goods was decreasing and virtually no woollen products have been manufactured since 1974. Thereafter, batik production has been the major craft activity, with painting and wooden artefact making as side lines.

In the early years of batik production, women had problems with dyes and the arrangement of the workshop. The problems with dyes was solved when a Danish artist, Vivianne Bertlesen visited Ernabella in 1975, and introduced different types of dyes which are much easier to use and give good colours. Another problem was the technique of heating wax. When Brenton taught batik techniques, he used the traditional way of heating wax, with metho-heaters. However this method proved to be very dangerous in the workshop because children often came to the Craft Room with their mothers and might knock over the wax, which could then be set alight by the naked flame. A solution was achieved by heating the wax in electric frying pans, minimising the danger of starting a fire in the building.

Batik production really expanded after three women, Dorothy, Mary and Jill, visited a batik institute in Jogjakarta, Indonesia in 1975 in order to learn more about the technique. Those three women had been trained in weaving and painting before the start of batik production and they also had four years of experience on batik.
During their Indonesian visit, they learned how to use cantings\(^3\) to draw detailed designs on fabrics. This introduction really changed the structure of the designs in their work. Before cantings were introduced the designs were drawn by brushes with bold patterns of typical Ernabella designs. With cantings, they were able to draw elaborate and delicate detailed designs on fabrics.

The experience of the Indonesian visit influenced two women, Dorothy and Mary, particularly and they retain a keen interest in obtaining new utensils for production. They are very well informed about what kind of cantings and brushes are available. For example, Dorothy wanted to order a two spouted canting from a shop in Sydney, but could not get one. Later when she learned a community staff member and his wife were planning to visit Bali for a holiday, she asked them to get one on the island. In contrast, other workers who have not been exposed to such influences are quite happy with what they have got and do not show any particular interest in new techniques. Although they might use a new type of brush when they see one unused, they never order one for themselves.

At present, batik dominates all activities in the Craft Room. According to the trading account of 1982-83, the total annual sale of Ernabella Arts was about $47,000 and the sale of batik products was about $33,500, making up approximately 70% of all sales. During the first seven months in 1983, women did some paintings occasionally for specific orders or for exhibitions, but other than that batiking occupied the majority of their working time in the Craft Room.

### 3.3 Batik products

In Ernabella, batiks started with designs on lengths of fabric, between two to three meters long, used mainly for dress making. From the early stage the women worked on both cotton and silk. The women with long experience generally say that there is no difference in difficulty in using these two types of material. However, silk needs more careful mixing of chemicals in the process of dyeing, and also requires certain colour schemes to produce clear colours in the finished product. Therefore, younger workers often prefer to use cotton, which is not so sensitive to the chemicals and gives good strong colours with most dyes.

\(^3\)A canting is a special utensil consisting of a container for melted wax with a narrow outlet tube allowing fine lines to be drawn.
Figure 3-1: An elaborate example of the "Ernabella design", in acrylic on canvas, approximately 90 x 60cm, by Jillian.
From starting with lengths of dress fabric, the range of products increased gradually. In 1983, the major batik sales consist of silk scarves, dress lengths, wall hangings and handkerchiefs. Batik garments, such as shirts and skirts are only made to order. It seems that the adviser wants the workers to concentrate on batik work. Therefore, any items which require sewing or hemming, such as garments or scarves, are processed by non-Aborigines before batiking. Garments are cut and sewn by the craft adviser, whilst hemming of silk scarves was contracted out to a group of women in N.S.W. This arrangement seems to provide neatly finished batik products at a more reasonable cost than using the Aboriginal women for the same job. However, at the same time, the adviser is required to do extra work of sewing, and when hemmed scarves do not arrive from N.S.W., scarf production has to be suspended for a while. In this way, this division of labour fragments and inhibits the production flow of the garments.

The production process can be divided into four stages (see Figure 3-2). Firstly, the women receive fabric to work on from the craft adviser and draw a rough pencilled design. The choice of a particular type of fabric is made by the adviser, depending on orders and exhibition plans. The second stage involves waxing and dyeing. For waxing, the women buy cantings for their own use from the Craft Room, but the rest of the raw materials, such as wax and dyes as well as other utensils such as brushes are provided by Ernabella Arts. The wax is heated in electric frying pans placed on the floor, with two to three women around one pan working on their own materials. The dyeing is done individually and usually several pieces of material are dyed at one time. After dyeing, each piece is dried and another waxing is done to elaborate the design. This waxing and dyeing process is repeated two to three times. The third stage is to remove the wax from the material. First, the cloth is boiled in a drum of hot water and washing powder, which is heated on a wood fire outside the building. After boiling, each item is washed in white spirit to remove the wax completely. The last stage of production is the final finishing and packaging, and this the craft adviser carries out by herself. She collects those materials washed in white spirit and takes them back home to wash with hot water in her washing machine. She told me this work used to be done in the Craft Room, but after a washing machine broke down, the adviser is doing it. Finally, each item is dried, ironed and checked for any faults, such as a hole or a tear. The materials are then sorted out according to orders and packed to be sent out.
Figure 3-2: The process of batik production

1. Drawing a rough design by pencil
2. Waxing
3. Dyeing
4. Drying
5. Boiling
6. Washing in water
7. Washing in white spirit
8. Final wash in washing machine
9. Drying
10. Ironing + checking
11. Packing + mailing
Figure 3-3: Fourteen year old apprentice Inawintji working on her batik, using her own canting.
3.4 Working environment

The batik work is carried out in the Craft Room. The Craft Room is located in a central part of the community at the foot of a small rocky hill. The building is adjacent to the main community facilities such as the council building, post office, bank, store and pre-school. Inside, the Craft Room is divided into several sections. The building itself is of concrete. During waxing, women sit on cushions on the floor, although this working position itself does not bother them. In summer, the building is air-conditioned so that it is easier to use heated wax inside the building. However, in winter, since there is no heating except the frying-pans for the wax, the women find it too cold to sit on the concrete floor to work. The dyeing and washing area does not have good drainage and women often have to stand in a pool of water with dye in it. Before boiling the material, collecting enough firewood to heat up a drum-full of water causes problems due to the lack of firewood near the community.

In spite of the conditions described above, the Craft Room offers a very convenient environment for mothers whose babies or small children need attention during the day. When they work mothers can spread blankets near them for the babies to lie on. There are always some women working in the workshop so a baby gets enough attention. Since the Craft Room is located close to the pre-school, children can come in to see their mothers when they want. At the same time, when a child starts to cry in pre-school, somebody can come and ask the mother to come over. In this way, small babies and children do not seem to provide a major obstacle in retaining employment in the Craft Room. This freedom does not seem to be common in other craft employment in Aboriginal communities. Stanley mentions that in the Tiwi Bima Wear industry, women leave the job when they have their babies (Stanley, 1983:24). Similarly, in Ernabella, employment at the school, the community office or store does not provide such a convenient environment as the Craft Room for child minding, because they have a fixed working time and place. Consequently, the proportion of women who have small children seems to be higher in batik work than in other types of employment in the community. During the first six months of 1983, out of 24 women in the Craft Room, 15 of them had a child or children below school age, or were pregnant. One woman had to leave a book-keeping job at the community office because her five year old daughter kept interrupting her work. Subsequently, she started to work on batik and mentioned to me that she was much happier to be with her daughter for a longer time.

Figure 3-5 shows the age structure of batik workers in 1983. Out of 24 women,
Figure 3-4: Angkuna working in the Craft Room whilst looking after her two year old daughter Davina.
16 are under thirty years old. Women who belong to this category have small children and quite a lot of time is spent on child bearing and rearing. On the other hand, the women who are older than 35 have finished their major child-bearing task. They might still have small children, but their eldest child is already big enough to look after their younger siblings. Women in the latter group have already accumulated a lot of experience on batik and are capable of producing good quality work at a steady pace.

As is shown in Figure 3-6.a, out of 24 batik workers, 19 are married and three are unmarried mothers in their teens. One of the single women is Dorothy who is forty years old. She had been trained in craft work since she was sixteen and is now one of the top batik workers. Figure 3-6.b shows that except for the two single women, all the workers have children at present or are pregnant. Thus, it is possible to say that the majority of the workers already have family responsibilities. Figure 3-6.c reveals a different aspect of their family responsibility. Out of 24 women, 15 women do not have a husband with a regular income living with them. Although the economic support system in Aboriginal society extends much wider than a nuclear family unit, those women's basic economic responsibility to the family, especially to children, is much heavier than those whose husbands receive regular incomes.

Another characteristic aspect of batik workers can be found in recruitment. All the batik workers are long term residents of the community. Furthermore, close kinship relations, especially mother-daughter relationships seem to be an effective means of recruiting new workers. Out of 24, there are four units of mother-daughter(s) and one classificatory mother-daughter relationship. Consequently, four out of six teenage girls have their mothers working on batik. Three women out of five in the age group 20 to 24 also belong to this category. Thus, it is likely that the younger workers were recruited to batik work partly because their mothers were working there originally. Of course, this is not the only factor affecting the type of employment one gets as a member of the community, but mother-daughter pairs in the same job are not seen in other employment in Ernabella, except in the store, which is basically run by members of one family. At the Craft Room, mothers and daughters usually sit close to each other and they come to work and leave for home together.

Training of young workers in batik skills seems to be done informally by the senior member of their closest kin and by other workers. A case I observed was
Figure 3-5: Age distribution of batik workers (Jan.-July 1983)
Figure 3-6: Batik workers and their family status. (1983)
between Milly, a girl of sixteen and her classificatory mother Mary. Milly decided to start working in batik after leaving school, so Mary let her sit next to her and drew a rough design for her on the fabric with a pencil. Thus, Milly could learn how to handle hot wax with a canting. Mary gave Milly a lot of encouragement by saying "Good Work!". Yet, after such an initial introduction, the rest of the training is done by the novice through observing the techniques and designs of other workers. Gradually, those keen observers acquire the skill to produce works with detailed designs and clear colour which are characteristic of Ernabella batik.

3.5 Batik production and the workers

Like all other Ernabella workers, the women in the Craft Room work between 8:00a.m. and 5:30 p.m. After taking a lunch break and both morning and afternoon teabreaks, 7.5 hours was the maximum number of hours worked in a day. The siren marks the start and end of each time segment and this practice is a remnant of the mission period. Although the siren keeps the same time schedule all through the year, no Aborigines will follow it as rigidly as some of European staff. In summer, activities begin early and workers started to show up before nine o’clock. But in winter, people stay at their houses till it warms up, especially since the Craft Room does not have any heating.

In practice the working hours in the Craft Room are by no means fixed by the siren. Therefore, it is hard for me to know who is in the workshop even when I was in the office section of the same building. Each worker goes in and out of the building many times a day in order to attend to various chores, such as shopping, minding children, or just to chat with other women. Similarly, starting and finishing times vary according to each woman's daily schedule. All these aspects of flexible working hours cause problems when the actual working hours have to be assessed for calculating wages. I will discuss this point further later in the chapter.

The working attitude of batik workers can be described as a combination of concentration and relaxation. Although their way of working is not bound by a fixed time schedule, they concentrate absolutely on their work when they sit at the batik. Once they start waxing designs they rarely continue chatting with other women. When they think about the structure of designs, they contemplate in silence. This kind of concentration can be seen in both the most experienced workers and in young novices. Also, when working well, the tea break may be ignored. After such concentration on work, the women usually like to relax completely by leaving the
workshop. They go outside the building and sit on the ground, chatting to other workers or women who are nearby. Since the Craft Room faces the small central "square" of the community, there are always some women about outside the building. Thus, a worker rarely has trouble finding company. Although a relaxation period is necessary after intense work on batik, the question of whether to include the relaxation time in the working time presents another problem in assessing the hours of work.

From my observation and interviews with the women, it became clear that the batik work has elements which prove very convenient and encouraging for the Aboriginal women. These might be good reasons why batik work is so popular in Ernabella as well as in other communities. Firstly, batik work allows women to have an independent and flexible working pattern particularly because the work is nearly always carried out by one woman from the beginning to the finished product and the women are very proud of this point. This method of production seems to suit the women well particularly because they often go away to visit other communities at short notice. Or, other chores concerned with family responsibility may hinder them in their regular attendance. While a worker is away, her unfinished batik will remain in a box until her return. No other workers have to wait for her return to carry on their own work. Consequently, women are able to retain their own working schedule without disturbing others.

The second advantage of the batik work can be found in the easy handling of materials during production. One of the big problems in craft work in the desert area is dust. Fine dust can creep into any building and turn everything a reddish brown colour. In addition, Aboriginal people cannot keep their hands and clothes free of dust and grease due to their living conditions. In such circumstances, batik is suitable because most of the dirt which might have stained fabrics can be washed out in the final boiling. In addition, unfinished materials can be folded up or even just pushed into a box for storing. Thus, they do not need special storage or care of materials. Furthermore, this somewhat "rough" handling of the material during production often creates cracks in the wax on the fabric giving the works interesting and unexpected colour penetrating after the final dyeing. During the production process, the women do not have to follow any foreign concept of care of the fabric in order to keep it clean and neat. This aspect, I presume, provides some confidence in the workers in their way of handling the batik.
However, the way the women handle the fabric occasionally does cause some problems. After each dyeing, the material has to be dried before another waxing is done. When a rack in the Craft Room for drying purpose was full, some women put out the fabrics on the surrounding barbed wire fence to dry, as they usually do with their own washing. Yet, some delicate materials, such as silk or organza are not strong enough to stand such treatment and end up with small holes or tears. Thus, they still have to learn how to treat fine materials, but over all, the batik work does not require impossibly high standards of care.

The last advantageous aspect of the batik work is that it allows the women to express and develop their creativity in their work. In other types of wage employment, women can use their job skills and knowledge, but batik production is the only employment where they can use their individual and artistic abilities. Furthermore, as the craft adviser points out, such freedom of expression was not possible in other craft activities they had been carried out, such as rug making or weaving. None of the two works of batik a woman produces are identical. Each material has its own design and colour scheme, however small one item might be. When the women were working on handkerchiefs, I expected they might use the same pattern at least for a few pieces. But this did not happen because each had some variation in designs or colours.

Each woman develops her own style. One woman may create her work with small motifs or on the other hand, somebody else may use bold designs. The favorite colour schemes are different, too. Some like a very colourful finish with strong and contrasting colours; others prefer to use quiet colours. However, the workers are sometimes adventurous in their styles and explore new design structure or colour schemes which they do not customarily use. It is surprising to see how different consecutive works by the same worker can be.

Concerning the inter-relationship of the batik workers, there does not seem to be any overt rivalry among them. I did not hear anybody talking behind another’s back about her work or its quality. I rarely heard any critical comments made about other women’s batik. At the same time, none of them ask for opinions on their own work during or after the production process. Younger workers are more ready to praise others’ work than more experienced workers who are able to pick up any faults in waxing or dyes.
Although there is no obvious rivalry, the workers in general agree who are the good workers among them. Both young and more experienced workers agree that Dorothy, Mary and Jane are the best workers among them. These three who receive the top hourly wages are able to produce excellent quality work which will fetch more than $300 a piece at a selling exhibition. At the same time, their knowledge of dyes, wax and utensils is wide. Thus, they are able to produce well designed work at a constant pace without any faults.

There does seem to be a subtle competition, however, over who does the best work in a certain type of fabric. During my fieldwork, Katy, a young, but good worker made a beautiful dress length piece in red and black on organza, which is considered to be difficult fabric to work with because of its stiffness and transparency. She received a lot of praise from the co-workers and the work was bought by a community staff member who also expressed her admiration openly. Soon after this incident, Mary, one of the top workers, took all the organza cloth left in the Craft Room and decided to keep it for herself. In spite of my suggestion to share the fabric with other workers, particularly with Katy, Mary did not give in. Later, the adviser told me that she regarded Mary as the best worker with organza. Thus, it seemed that she wanted to prove that she could still produce better work than Katy.

Although there does not seem to be any formal structure of organization among the batik workers, Mary exercises leadership on various occasions. She is thirty-six years old, married with two school-age daughters. She has an outgoing character, and with relatively good English, she is assigned as public relations officer of Ernabella Arts. One very unusual side of her as an Aboriginal woman is her keen interest and practical sense in money. For example, when all the batik workers received a pay rise during their adviser’s absence, she quickly calculated how much each would be able to earn at maximum, and tried to encourage the women to work more hours to receive more wages. Another example shows her keen sense as a business woman. When there was a football match in Ernabella, she baked cakes with cake mix to sell at the game. Women often talk about doing this, but Mary was the only one who actually did it. She charged $1.00 for a can of drink and $1.00 for a piece of cake and made enough money to fill up a big jar with coins. With such initiative in economic matters, she takes leadership in pricing batik fabric during the adviser’s absence, or brings up dissatisfaction with wages on behalf of other workers. Although Mary’s name is mentioned when the women have to deal with outside matters, there is no formal hierarchy or structure among the workers concerning
batik work. The two other women who are regarded as top workers did not have any formal power or authority over the rest of the women even though their knowledge and skills were better than the rest. Thus, the batik workers did not seem to organize themselves to act as a unit within the community.

3.6 Meaning and construction of the designs

Ernabella batik consists of unique and distinctive abstract designs. When the women are questioned as to whether their designs have any stories behind them, they answer "no," and claim that they create their designs anew each time. They also assert that designs do not have any cultural meaning, and that designs are not drawn as depicting concrete objects or scenery. These statements made by the women conflict with the adviser's claim that the women are subconsciously depicting the natural environment around them (personal communication). From my point of view, it is obvious that these women have an excellent ability to balance various designs in order to create a harmonious work, and have a strong sense of colour. However, it is not possible for me to deny the women's claim and argue that their designs are symbolic representation of their environment. I would rather like to claim that the workers have internalized the basic form of the Ernabella design which has been around the community and the Craft Room for the past forty years and that they are able to produce unlimited variations of the designs with occasional improvisation. Thus, although the women do not have any restrictive rules to follow when they draw their designs, almost all the finished works have the distinctive characteristics of Ernabella batik.

The designs on batik do not show any similarity to the traditional ceremonial designs in rock paintings in the area. Among the Pitjantjatjara, there is no evidence to suggest that women did rock painting in caves. On ceremonial occasions, women paint their bodies with ochre and clay, but those designs are always rubbed out after the ceremony. Another type of drawing the women do is on sand when they tell stories (see Munn, 1973), and both young and old women in Ernabella drew various designs one after another on the ground to illustrate their stories. None of these designs are similar to batik designs.

The adviser suggests that those designs done in Ernabella might have some connection with a rock painting found in Bourke (Hilliard, 1983:9). The style itself is similar to that of Ernabella (see Identity:4:7, 1982:22), but the design is believed to represent fish traps. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the Pitjantjatjara people had visited Bourke area in the traditional period. Thus, I conclude that the adviser's claim is not based on any substantive evidence.
Figure 3-7: A finished batik by Yilpi.
One possible source of the designs can be found in the way the craft workers have been recruited. The craft industry started with the aim of providing employment for young girls, who because of their youth, did not have any substantial knowledge of rituals or body painting. By using the paintings done by school children as a basis of their designs, they developed those into elaborate patterns with bright colours which had not existed traditionally. In addition, such new and untraditional art forms protected them from offending elders, as they might have done by using traditional motifs in inappropriate ways.

Only on one occasion has batik with a traditional meaning been identified, in two works by Lucy, the oldest batik worker. When I asked her about the design, she answered that her two batiks had some stories behind them and explained that they represented snakes lying in their nests. The designs themselves looked different from other batiks, with their asymmetrical patterns and motifs that old women often use when they tell stories. Unfortunately, I could not manage to acquire any further information about the stories and she left batik work shortly after she finished those two. Although other workers who are younger than Lucy overheard her claim, they did not show any interest.

There are two possible reasons why it was only Lucy who produced batiks with an associated story; her age and her craft training. She is the oldest worker, thus she might retain a more traditional approach to designing her fabrics. Also, her craft training in the past was mainly in weaving. This meant that she did not go through training in painting in Ernabella designs like the other women who have been encouraged to develop more elaborate and intricate designs with clear colours without meaning or stories.

3.7 Income from batik production: 1981-1983

In this section I will examine the economic return batik producers receive from their work. Since the wages from batik production comprise their major income source, it is important to examine how much money they receive in relation to how much they produce. To analyse the present employment situation and economic return in the batik industry, I examined the number of workers and the wages they received for thirty months from January 1981 to June 1983 (see Figure 3-8.a and Figure 3-8.b). The figures are based on records at Ernabella Arts in addition to my fieldwork data. All the batik workers receive hourly wages whose rates differ according to experience. In February 1983, the top rate was $6.50 per hour whilst
$4.20 was the minimum rate. These rates are fixed in accordance with the community employment wage rates. The payment of wages is made every Friday.

In 1981 a total of 43 women were paid wages through Ernabella Arts. Out of 43, 14 classified as regular workers because they worked more than half the number of working weeks in the year. The rest of them might attend occasionally, being present for less than half the number of working weeks. Among the regular workers, the woman who was paid most earned $6,460. Since she was not present during every working week, her average weekly income whilst at work was $134. As a whole, the average annual income of the regular workers was $3,202 and weekly income was $83.

In 1982, 29 women were paid wages, and 14 of them fitted into the category of regular workers. The top wage earned was $4,953 for a weekly average of $124. The same woman earned the least in both previous years and her annual total was $1,589, her weekly average being $59. The average annual income of the all regular workers was $2,614 and the average weekly wage was $77.

In the first six months of 1983, 24 women were paid some wages from the craft room, and 14 of them were regular workers. The highest wages during this period was $2,820 with a weekly average of $128. The lowest total was $919 with a weekly average of $63. As a whole, $1,601 was the average total income of the 14 workers in six months; the average weekly income was $92.

The number of workers had decreased year by year from 43 in 1981 to 29 in 1982 and then 24 in 1983. On the other hand, the number of regular workers remained stable at 14 in each year (see Figure 3-8.c). The total number of regular workers in thirty months was 22. Eight of them were regular in each year, 4 of them for two years and 10 workers were regular in only one year. As is evident from these numbers, the membership of the regular workers was quite stable.

This tendency for the number of casual craft workers to decrease underlines the transition of the role of the craft room in providing employment. The craft room was the major source of employment for women during the 1950s and 1960s other than domestic work and a few jobs in the mission. It offered a range of jobs in order to incorporate women into the wage system. Recently, however, the craft enterprise has closed down some sections completely, such as weaving and rug making because of their lack of profitability. The main emphasis is now on batik. Since there are other
Figure 3-8: Batik workers and their wages
jobs available in the community, the craft room is now trying to retain a stable number of regular workers who are skilled in batiking rather than providing a range of craft work for many women on a casual basis.

As for wages, it is surprising to know that there was a significant decrease in annual wages between 1981 to 1982. Ten workers worked regularly in these two years consecutively, and with the exception of one woman, all suffered a wage decline. The average annual income was $588 less than the previous year, an 18.4% drop, and the total weekly average also showed a 7.7% drop of $6. Since the hourly wage rate did not decrease, we must conclude that the recorded hours of work were less. However, it is not clear whether the workers were actually present for fewer hours in 1982. The explanation may lie in the tight budget for that year. In the 1980-81 financial year, the craft enterprise experienced an overall deficit, despite government subsidies, owing to a large increase in total wages paid. Therefore, the recording of working hours, usually rather generous, may have been more tightly controlled in the next year.

Comparing the wages in 1982 and 1983, the wage increase was noticeable. In terms of weekly average income, the workers received 20% more in 1983 than 1982. The main reason of this rise was a change in the wage rate for C.D.E.P. which occurred in February. At this time, all the workers in the craft room received about a 20% wage rise in accordance with the new rate. Comparing the 1983 weekly average with that for 1981, the workers received 10.8% more in 1983.

However, when we examine the workers who had been working regularly throughout the thirty month period, the picture changes. There are eight women who were constant workers for the thirty months. On average they received 9% more wages in 1983 than 1981. However, when examined individually, four of them have not yet reached their 1981 wages level. Thus, it is very clear that the wages in the craft room have been stagnant for the past thirty months and furthermore, taking inflation into consideration their income has decreased in real terms.

From January to June 1983, I recorded the materials each worker produced, the type of fabric, type of items and the length of finished batik. My aim was to calculate how much each worker actually produced in those six months. The amount of production was then calculated with reference to the Ernabella Arts wholesale price list. A few finished products were not recorded because the adviser was in hurry to send them out. Nevertheless, the record is almost complete for these six months.
Among 14 regular workers, all produced much less than they earned. In total, $22,415 was paid as wages, while only $8,448 worth of batik materials in wholesale value were produced by the workers during this period. Thus, the production accounted for only 38% of total wages. However, if a substantial quantity of batik were sold at the higher retail or exhibition prices, this fraction would increase. The production rate varied between individuals. The worst ratio of production to wage was for Jane who earned the top wage and also helped with some of the clerical jobs in the craft room. Although she earned most in these six months, her production revenue amounted to only 22% of her wage. Her low productivity is partly explicable because she helps with administration as well as working on batik. However, time spent on office work is much less than an hour a day. It is more reasonable to say that her commitments with her first baby disrupted her productivity, although the quality of her work was always among the best.

The most productive worker is in her forties, but even her production was only 60% of her wage. Thus, it is very clear that the wholesale price of batik is unrealistic and does not come anywhere near covering even the cost of labour. In 1981-82, revenue received by Ernabella Arts from batik sales amounted to $34,300, while the total cost of production including the adviser’s salary was $69,000. Consequently, sales recovered about 50% of the cost. This figure shows a much better result than the figure presented for 1983. The reason probably lies in the fact that Ernabella Arts have been retailing as well as wholesaling, and the retail prices were at least 20% higher than the wholesale prices. At the same time, the batik products sold at exhibitions could command still higher prices. Furthermore, in 1983, the adviser was away on holiday about two and a half months of the first six months and her absence might have affected the productivity of the industry. Thus, the return of only 38% is a minimum value, and the figure of 50% is probably more realistic.

Furthermore, the productivity of the workers varies according to who is going to use or wear the finished work. It was obvious to me that the women work harder and finish a piece more quickly when they make batik items for themselves or for their family members. In addition, when a woman is asked to do a specific order for somebody she knows, she finishes the work very quickly by working hard. For example, when a community social worker who was leaving asked Nelly to work on a skirt for herself, she completed the work in two days, which is amazingly quick. It usually takes at least a week for a worker to finish an item because she works on several items at a time.
One interesting fact is that out of seven women who were more "productive" than the rest, five of them mentioned to me on various occasions their dissatisfaction with their wages. The woman in her forties who showed the best production rate complained that her wage had not been increased since she was a single girl and she wanted to call a meeting of craft workers about the wages. The meeting was never held and she left Ernabella for the next community, Amata, with her daughters, one of whom was also a craft worker. She said she and her daughter would work in the Women's Centre there for better wages. Similar complaints were expressed by the other four women. Two of them actually stayed away from the craft room because of their dissatisfaction, and another one found a job as a rubbish collector in the community. Thus, it is likely that the most productive workers felt they were losing out compared with the rest. Furthermore, the fact that the wages for the craft workers had been stagnant for the past thirty months increased their dissatisfaction, although they were not aware of the statistics I have presented. Even though they never knew the value of what they produced they were not happy with the way they were rewarded.

Concerning the evaluation of the economic return to their work, the women often complain about their wages. They claim that wages are too low for the type of work they carry out. They describe their work on batik as "big work." When workers talk about batik manufacture, they always emphasize that one woman handles the material from start to finish and that it takes a great deal of experience to master the skill of drawing designs with wax and to acquire a proper knowledge of dyeing. Also they point out that they have to wet their hands and feet when they dye and wash material and especially in winter it is very cold. In addition, they assert, to boil a drum full of water in order to take wax out from fabric is also hard work. Objectively speaking, washing is not pleasant work especially in winter and boiling large quantities of water is not easy when fire wood is scarce.

The blame for economic problems was usually placed on the craft adviser. Women said that the craft adviser did not record correctly the number of hours worked. Their claim was that they worked for six hours, for example, but the adviser wrote down only four in the attendance book. In principle, the working hours are based on the actual time spent on batik work. The task of assessing time spent is usually done by Jane, who is excellent in both craft work and other clerical jobs. Everyday, she writes down in an attendance book the hours of work each worker had spent the day before. The names of the workers who attended the day before are in a
notebook in which each worker jots down her name when she comes in for work. Jane tries to remember how many hours each worker worked the day before and fills in a certain numbers of hours. However, a problem is that she is not always in the workshop. She had a small baby so she occasionally leaves the Craft Room. Thus, the number of hours is a guess and usually there is about a 20% to 30% over-estimate of the actual time worked. For example, if a worker spent two hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon, the record in the book would show seven hours, while three hours might be recorded as four.

One explanation of this generosity is due to Jane's relative youth as compared to other workers. She has proved to be a very capable worker, but this fact does not bestow any power to take leadership and give orders to other workers. In order to avoid any confrontation with the other women concerning hours of work, she seems to write more hours for everyone than were actually worked.

The adviser does this job herself when the financial situation in the craft room becomes tight, or when Jane is not available. Women realize that their working hours in the attendance book decrease when the adviser records them and accuse her of "cheating the hours", although the hours the adviser records usually show the true figure. Another common complaint among women is that experience does not result in any increase in wages. On one occasion, a woman complained about the difference in wage rates between the adviser and the craft workers. She said the adviser, who has been working for thirty years in Ernabella, could go abroad for her holidays, but the wage they received was too small, so they could never afford to have a holiday like her.

The women rarely complain directly to the craft adviser. The wages do vary from time to time just because the person who writes down the hours is different. Since the wages are down when the adviser handles the matter, they seem to conclude that she is manipulating the figures.

Another cause of the women's dissatisfaction is triggered by the hourly wage system under which almost all the Aborigines work in Ernabella. The craft workers with more than ten years experience might receive $5.50 an hour while unskilled teenage girls in the store are paid at the same rate. This happens because each type of employment has different scales in determining hourly rate. Furthermore, to pay hourly wages for the batik work, which is basically artistic creation, itself presents some problems in distinguishing types of employment.
Another disadvantage of hourly wages is that the women do not have any idea how much it costs to produce an item, including raw materials, utensils and labour, or how much a finished item is worth in the market. Such a lack of information often leads them to conclude, mistakenly, that their economic return is not reasonable compared to the prices the finished items can fetch. Moreover, the women get no feedback from the market; wages are fixed irrespective of the final sale price of the batik. Considering the running cost of the craft industry, the price of finished batik has not reached a profitable level. Until women can understand how the prices are fixed and how the cost of production are calculated, their feeling of dissatisfaction will remain.

3.8 Financial situation of the industry

So far, I have discussed the Ernabella batik industry in terms of the participation of Aboriginal women and the economic return they receive. Now, I would like to examine the financial situation of the industry. Figure 3-9 shows the trading results of Ernabella Arts for the past thirteen years. Total sales figures include the sale of batik, artefacts and other items. Available figures on Aboriginal wages paid to the workers were mainly for batik production. The batik sales figures are available from 1979/80 to 1982/83. Subsidy figures include grants from the Aboriginal Arts Board and C.D.E.P. funds from the D.A.A. The former covers the adviser’s salary and operation costs and the latter provides wages for trainee craft workers.

The most striking fact which becomes evident from this figure is that the wages paid have always exceeded sales in each year from 1977 to 1983. Although figures are not available before 1977, the situation may well have been the same. Consequently, in order to cover the deficit, Ernabella Arts has been receiving large subsidies from government sources to cover the Aboriginal wages, adviser’s wages and the operation costs.

The figure also clearly shows the stagnation the industry has suffered since 1976. The value of total sales has not shown any substantial increase since 1977. Actually, in the 1982/83 year, they did not reach the level of 1977/1978. Thus, in real terms, the industry suffered a substantial decrease in its income due to inflation and the rise in production costs. When we examine batik sales alone, it becomes clear that the same thing can be said for batik. Between 1979 and 1983, the sales hardly increased. This also means that in real terms there was a significant decrease in sales.
Figure 3-9: The Craft Room financial figures

Subsidies are provided by the Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB) and the C.D.E.P.
This confirms Altman's statement on the industry's stagnation (1984b:11). Although his study was mainly based on the situations in Arnhemland, the Ernabella case presents a similar picture.

This economic stagnation poses a difficult question: how can the Aboriginal workers expect to receive an increased economic return from their work when the value of sales of their products has been stagnating for the past six years? As I discussed in the wage analysis of the batik workers, this economic return for the regular workers had not shown any substantial increase for thirty months, and the workers articulated their dissatisfaction with their wages. In order to revitalize the industry and lead to further development, with increased return for the workers, additional money would be required, in the form of increased subsidies from the government. Yet, as the figure shows, the subsidies from the Aboriginal Arts Board and C.D.E.P. have not shown a substantial increase. If the subsidies remain at a similar level in the future, the industry may disappear due the decrease in the economic return for the workers, or the excessive costs of retaining the workers.

3.9 Marketing of batik

Batik items are sold locally in the community as well as retailed and wholesaled interstate. Yet, the local market has never been a significant part of the total sales. European residents of the community buy batiks as presents to send home, or occasional visitors purchase small items from the Craft Room. Aboriginal residents buy batiks either as presents for departing staff members or for wearing themselves on special occasions.

Most sales of batik come from retailing and wholesaling outside the community. The batik products are sold in various galleries and shops in major cities. Some retailers contact Ernabella Arts directly, whilst some receive their ordered goods from the Aboriginal Arts and Craft Company which functions as a wholesale agency. In

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5The grants from the Aboriginal Arts Board increased by almost 100% in the four years from 1979/80. This is mainly due to the increase in the adviser's salary in order to standardize the salary level at the rate a Clerk class 4 in the Commonwealth Public Service. Consequently, the grant for operational costs did not show any significant increase during this period.

6One rare exception was when a Christian study tour group consisting of about forty Europeans visited Ernabella for a few days bought more than $2,000 worth of batik items from Ernabella Arts.

7Today, Inada Holdings
addition, Ernabella Arts holds soiling exhibitions in southern cities in order to promote their products. According to the adviser, Ernabella Arts is now aiming at the quality market, producing works of art rather than tourist souvenirs. Consequently, the workers are now called artists in promotion pamphlets, although they are referred to as craft girls or craft women in the community by European staff. They are also encouraged to sign their names on their work. As well as holding exhibitions, the workers teach techniques at batik workshops in various cities. With these efforts in promoting their batik, as well as improving the quality, Ernabella has established a reputation in the art market for the uniqueness and high quality of their work.

Although the industry has achieved the goals of establishing a reputation, it has significant problems in marketing due to various factors. The geographical location of the community does not help. The vast distance from major cities increases the cost of transporting raw materials and products to and from Ernabella. The distance also generates problems in communications, since the community has only radio phone and infrequent mail services. In addition to these, the lack of reliable and capable marketing agencies for Aboriginal arts presents a bigger problem. The Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Company which was expected to perform this task seemed to be unsatisfactory due to delays in payment to Ernabella Arts and constant changes of managerial staff.

In Ernabella, in order to cover this deficiency, the adviser puts great effort into marketing, and tries to develop new outlets and maintain existing ones by visiting them during her holidays at her own expense. In spite of her personal dedication, marketing poses serious problems for Ernabella Arts and to promote batik products widely in Australia and possibly abroad the need for an efficient and effective marketing agency is evident.

3.10 Management of the industry and the Aboriginal women's involvement

In contrast to the autonomy the batik workers have in batik production, their involvement in the industry management and structure remains minimal. As I have described before, after production, the women cease handling the batik materials and the rest of the job of finishing, pricing and packing is done by the adviser. Therefore, for most of the workers, knowledge of anything other than actual production process remains limited.
For instance, the adviser never discuss pricing with the women. Occasionally, she shows the women good quality work which, she thinks, can fetch a good price, but they are not told how much the item may fetch. Pricing is done solely by the adviser according to a standard price list compiled by her. Consequently, the women do not have any knowledge on how to price batik material or of the value of the work they have produced. I asked several workers if they could guess the price of the articles they were working on. The answer was always the same: "I don't know." They were not even willing to guess. In their view, it seems that pricing is completely the adviser's job. However, when they make wooden artefacts the women have a very clear idea of the price they can ask.

While the craft adviser was away on her holiday, there were two occasions when the workers had to decide prices by themselves. The first case was when a community staff member was leaving and her Aboriginal co-workers wanted to give her a nice batik length as a farewell present. The other case was when a staff member fancied some material being just finished and insisted on buying it. On both occasions, since I was responsible for book-keeping during the adviser's absence, I told the workers the lowest prices possible, calculated according to the craft adviser's wholesale price list. Then, the price was marked up to retail cost mainly by Mary. In both cases, the producers of the items remained silent through out. It appears that most of the women regard themselves as incapable of fixing the price of their batik. Furthermore, since their income does not benefit from higher prices, their non-committal attitude to pricing is understandable. A similar attitude of the Aboriginal workers can be seen in other aspects of the industry organization as well. There is virtually no involvement of the workers in marketing, budget planning or exhibition planning. All these tasks are done by the adviser with long hours of extra work.

In order to understand the structure of the Ernabella craft industry, it is necessary to examine the role the adviser. She has been working in her present position for thirty-one years since 1954. According to the Pascoe Report, her term as a craft adviser is the longest in Australia (p.30). Considering the average tenure of a craft adviser at one community is of about two years, her long term surely stands out. She went to Ernabella as deaconess of the Presbyterian Church in order to teach craft work to the Aboriginal women. After taking over the handicraft adviser's job from her predecessors, she established the industry structure and developed marketing routes in the Southern cities. Furthermore, she introduced various new craft media to the Aboriginal women. After the change over from the mission to a self-governing
community, the handicraft department of the mission became Ernabella Arts and she works as the adviser. At present, her salary is paid by an Aboriginal Arts Board grant.

The adviser sees her role in the Craft Room as "administration, passing on information and ideas to the craft women, creating opportunities for them and helping them gain new experience such as trips to Indonesia, New Zealand and the State capitals". Also as adviser, she "keeps abreast of what's in fashionwise, but allows workers to make their own decisions within the limits of orders placed" (Pukatja Community, 1976). Furthermore, she has the role of spokeswoman of the industry. She is eager to talk about the industry to the public, to write articles in magazines and to give interviews to newspaper because she believes "one of the Ernabella centre's tasks is to educate the public" on new Aboriginal art (Robin, 1980:27). Also she encourage the women to participate in various art competitions to publicise Ernabella works. Without her enthusiasm and dedication, it is obvious that the Ernabella craft industry would not have developed to its present state. Yet, this also means that the industry will probably run into difficulty once she leaves.

The adviser is close to retirement. Although she has been training Aboriginal women to take over her role eventually, progress has been slow and there is nobody yet trained to a sufficient level to run the Craft Room independently. The adviser believes that pressure from relatives will be too strong for any Aboriginal women to be effective in a position of management and that the industry will, therefore, need an adviser like her to check the standard of products and supervise business matters for the foreseeable future. As for the women, none has indicated her willingness to take over the adviser's job after her retirement and their nominations of possible candidates were all ex-mission staff.

3.11 Batik and Aboriginal people

As a craft technique, there is no denying that batik is a newly adapted one which does not have any roots in their traditional culture. This fact often lead to an assumption that batik does not have any cultural importance for the Aborigines. In the Pascoe Report, Aboriginal artefacts are grouped into four categories according to a low or high degree of the Aboriginal cultural value and of western aesthetic value. According to this classification, Ernabella batik is a "decorative" artefact "of low cultural value for Aboriginals but of high aesthetic appeal for non-Aboriginals ..."(p.21). After examining the Aboriginal people's attitudes toward batik products, I
do not agree with this definition, and I would argue that batik now has an important cultural value as well as economic value for contemporary Aborigines in Ernabella.

Although, as the Pascoe Report stated, Ernabella batik has a strong decorative appeal to the Western eyes, the Aborigines do not regard the products in exactly the same way. As I have mentioned in this chapter, the Aboriginal people buy batik for themselves at the Craft Room. There are two main purposes for their purchase. One is to give batik as a farewell present for Europeans staff when they leave the community. People usually chose a length of batik material and other small items such as batik handkerchiefs or cards as farewell presents. The other usage is to wear batik garments for themselves. When the people, especially women, have occasion to visit cities, they often order shirts or skirts beforehand so that they can wear them during their trip. However this does not seem to happen when they just go shopping to Alice Springs or Adelaide, but rather when they are on official trips as representatives of Ernabella community. For example, when two health workers were going to Adelaide for further training, each ordered a skirt to wear. In another case, the members of Ernabella choir wore batik garments on the occasion of their invitation to a memorial service at a church in N.S.W.

From these examples, it is possible to conclude that the Aboriginal people do not integrate batik in their day-to-day life, but they use it when they want to express their identity to the outside world. People do not give batik product as presents to their relatives, since batik is not incorporated in their reciprocal exchange relationships. Also, they do not wear batik garments in their daily life. They prefer to buy cheaper clothes from the community store or second-hand clothes shops. Yet, when they want to express their belonging to Ernabella community, they employ batik as a means to convey that message.

Aboriginal women do not work on batik with the clear intention of expressing their identity through their artistic expression. Their concern is more towards economic matters and exploring possibilities in art forms. However, when their products are bought by Aborigines, and used in their own context, batik starts to carry a message of their identity towards outside world. Thus batik, which is a newly adapted craft, has been absorbed in the society of contemporary Aboriginal people in Ernabella, and possesses important cultural as well as economic values.
Figure 3-10: Sandy and Yipati with their daughters Tjimpuna and Carol. The batik pattern on the dresses was done by Yipati, for a special trip to Sydney and Canberra.
CHAPTER 4
Artefact Industry

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the artefact industry and artefact producers in Ernabella. Although the artefact industry has never been highlighted like the batik industry, it carries considerable importance for the women in Ernabella and presents a marked contrast to the batik industry in its organization.

I will begin the discussion by examining the historical background of the industry. I will then examine the current organization of the industry and artefact production. In the context of a general discussion of the producers' economic background, I will examine the return they receive from artefact production and conclude with a discussion of the women's participation in the marketing of artefacts.

4.2 Historical development of the artefact industry

Although the oldest record of artefact making in Ernabella is in the Rev. J.R.B. Love's article on wooden dish production (Love, 1942b), artefact production did not seem to be carried out for economic exchange between the Aborigines and people outside the mission in the early days. But probably small scale local transactions within the mission already existed. In 1947, a nursing sister at the mission wrote that she and a school teacher displayed their "collection of native weapons and curios" at school in Ernabella (Ernabella Newsletter, Nov., 1947:4). It was not clear from the article how they paid for the artefacts, but it was likely that some food was given as payment.

A Craft Room record for 1957 indicates that the handicraft department of Ernabella mission acted as an agent to send artefacts to southern cities for sale (Hilliard, 1958). This means that Ernabella has one of the longest histories of marketing Aboriginal artefacts.¹ The types of artefacts marketed clearly show the...

¹In Yirrkala, production of bark painting for commercial purpose also increased around the same period (See Williams, 1976:276).
mission's commercial intentions. They included miniature weapon sets, wooden dishes and kadaitcha boots. The weapon set, which consisted of a spear thrower and two spears, was about 1/5 normal size. Up to the early 1970s, those miniature size weapons proved very popular, and were a major part of artefact sales. The miniature weapons were sold purely for display. Such products indicated the mission's intention to market Aboriginal artefacts to the general public instead of just to museums or curio collectors. Furthermore, the small size of those items must have reduced shipment problems. The tradition of marketing to the general public rather than to art collectors, and the production of miniature artefacts is still evident in the current artefact industry in Ernabella.

Until the early 1970s, men dominated artefact production, which was considered to be an alternative to employment at the mission. Men who did not want to work for the mission were expected to go hunting for their food, and to produce artefacts to gain access to European goods through their earning. However, men who were employed at the mission also seem to have worked on artefacts. Thus, in 1963, it was reported that about 80% of men made artefacts (Hilliard, 1963). The products were mainly weapons, such as spears, spear throwers, shields and clubs. In addition, until the early 1970s, some ceremonial items were produced for sale. They included tjuringas, bull roarers, death bones and kadaitcha boots. They started to market boomerangs in the late 1960s in spite of the adviser's reluctance, and proved to have a steady market up till now.

In spite of the information showing that previously men were the major artefact producers, today it is women who dominate artefact production and sale in Ernabella. From the data I collected, it seems likely that the shift in production from males to females happened in the early 1970s. There are no records available on how the actual numbers of male and female artefact producers changed in this period. However, it is possible to trace this transition from the data on types of artefact sold.

Figure 4-1 shows the sales of different types of artefact between 1963 and 1983. From the sales of mini-spears which are considered to be typical male artefacts, it can

2 Both tjuringas and bull-roarers were omitted from the sale list in 1972 due to growing reluctance on the part of the men to produce them (Hilliard, 1973:3).

3 The adviser wrote in her report to the Mission Board that "These boomerangs are used as clap sticks in corroborees but are not often well made by our people, so I do not encourage them as an advertisement of our work (Hilliard, 1969)."
Figure 4-1: Annual numbers of typical male artefacts (mini-spears and woomeras) and female artefacts (digging dishes) sold by the Craft Room.
be seen that these reached a maximum in 1970 and decreased rapidly afterwards. A similar pattern can be seen in the sale of mini-woomerans. Thus male artefacts, which had been providing the majority of artefact sales in the 1960s, decreased in importance in the early 1970s. On the other hand, digging dishes, which are traditionally women's tools increased their sales dramatically in 1971 and reached the peak in 1972. A similar increase occurred around the same period for animal carvings, which are also produced mainly by women. Although the sale of digging dishes never reached the level of 1972 afterwards, their sales exceeded those of weapons thereafter. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that the early 1970s was the period when artefact production was taken over by women. Another change which occurred in the early 1970s was the dramatic increase in total artefact sales (See Figure 2). In 1971, value of sales of artefacts from Ernabella was $3,800 but increased to $12,500 by 1973—an increase by a factor of more than three in only two years.

These two changes in artefact production may both be related to economic and social conditions at that time. The increased interest in Aboriginal arts and crafts in the early 1970s probably influenced the growth of the industry. As Peterson pointed out, after the 1967 referendum, growing national interest and concern about the place of Aborigines in Australian society led to the establishment of Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd in 1971 (Peterson, 1983:60). One of this company's aims was to improve the marketing of the Aboriginal arts and crafts. Consequently, it acquired retail outlets in South Australia, Western Australia and Cairns, and built a new gallery in Alice Springs. As a result, annual sales of the company increased rapidly in the first half of 1970s (see Ibid., 1983:61, Table 1). Therefore, it is very likely that the Ernabella artefact industry also benefitted from the improved marketing organization, and increased its sales.

Two factors seem to be important in explaining why only women participated in the increased output of artefacts. One relates to the collapse of Amata Craft in the next door community. In Amata, the artefact industry developed in a very short time between 1970 and 1971 due to the appointment of an enthusiastic craft adviser, and annual sales reached $20,000 in 1971 (Brokensha, 1975:69). There were about thirty producers: five of them men and the remainder women (Scott, 1971: 5-37). The women produced wooden dishes and carved figures and the men weapons and shields. Unfortunately, Amata Craft suffered a big setback after the adviser left the community, with annual sales in 1973 merely $1,000 (Brokensha, 1975:69). Thus, in
order to meet demand it is likely that orders which used to be sent to Amata were directed to Ernabella around this period. Since Amata Craft had been marketing dominantly female artefacts, it is likely that the new orders to Ernabella were for similar types of artefacts.

The second factor which might have influenced the decreased production of male artefacts was the availability of wage employment in the mission particularly for men. As has been seen in Chapter 2, creating male employment in Ernabella was a major problem in the 1960s. However, as Scott reports, the subsidies from the government helped to generate more male employment from the early 1970s (Scott, 1971:9-12). Since the subsidies were mainly for male employment, the wage difference between an average male worker and a female worker became greater. For example, in 1973, the average male weekly rate was $59.60 while women at the Craft Room received between $16 to $28 (Morice and Death, n.d.:14). Thus, men had better opportunities to find employment with better wages in the mission than women, whose opportunities to get employment were mostly limited to the Craft Room.

Another factor was probably the better hourly return for the women in artefact production. Scott reported that the hourly return for the best craftswomen in Amata in 1971 was about $1.00 (1971:5-39). If it is assumed that Ernabella craftswomen would have received a similar return from artefact production, the rate would provide a considerably better weekly income than employment at the Craft Room. Women who worked full-time at the Craft Room Received $9.10 a week on average in the same year (Ibid.:5-45). Therefore, it was understandable that women regarded artefact production as a good means to earn money. As for men, who had better opportunities to earn money through employment, $1.00 per hour probably did not provide such a strong economic incentive to engage in artefact production.

Currently, women still produce the majority of artefacts for sale. During the thirteen months between July 1982 and July 1983, a total of 54 Aborigines sold their work to Ernabella Arts and of these, 46 were women. Artefact sales from Ernabella Arts in 1982/83 were about $9,900, approximately 21% of the total sale.

Figure 4-2 shows the income from sales of artefacts from Ernabella between 1969 to 1982/83.\(^4\) From this figure, it is possible to see two factors concerning artefact

\(^4\) The data are not complete. Figures for 1974 and 1977 are only for six months and for purpose of comparison with other annual figures, they are doubled. Data for 1976 and 1978 are not available.
sales. One is the fluctuation of the sales. For instance, after the dramatic growth in 1973 sales fell to less than half in 1974/75. A similar change appeared in the early 1980s, when sales for 1981/82 were only half of those for 1980/81. It is unlikely that these fluctuations were caused by drastic changes in demand for Aboriginal artefacts in general. Rather, more localized conditions have probably caused the fluctuations. The drop in 1974/75 was possibly brought about due to the competition with Amata Craft which recovered from its collapse (See Brokensha, 1975:69, Figure 3). As for the drop in 1981/82, the artefacts were overstocked due to too much purchasing in the previous year during the adviser’s absence. Such fluctuation means that the people cannot count on their artefact sales to Ernabella Arts as a reliable source of income. Since they do not have any detailed knowledge of marketing or stocking, they are not in a position to control and influence the situation.

The other aspect which becomes clear from the figure is the lack of growth in artefact sales over the past ten years, indeed sales have hardly reached 1973 levels during this period. Taking inflation into account, the real value of sales has actually declined drastically. In this sense, the artefact industry is in a situation similar to, or even worse than the batik industry and suffering from negative growth. For the producers, this means not only that they cannot count on steady sales to Ernabella Arts, but also they are not able to expect increasing economic return for their work. In conclusion, the artefact industry in Ernabella does not seem to have good economic prospects for the Aboriginal producers.

### 4.3 Artefact production

In contrast to batik production, which is carried out basically by an individual, artefact production can be characterised as cooperative work. From collecting raw material to selling the finished work, I rarely saw any women engage in the work alone. There were always several women working together to carry out each production process.

The women usually use the roots of red river gum trees to make wooden dishes.

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5Sales figures of the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Company did not indicate any sudden drop of demand for 1974 and 1975 (Peterson, 1983:61)
Figures for 1974 and 1977 were only for six months of each year, and have been doubled to give the equivalent annual sale. Figures for the financial years 1976/77 and 1978/79 are unavailable.

Figure 4-2: Total annual artefact sales from the Craft Room.
and animal carvings. In order to collect roots, women have to organize transportation to a dry creek bed, since they say that within walking distance, there is no good place for this purpose. In addition, the weight of roots is considerable to carry back, therefore they need to have a car for the trip. However, the transport arrangement often causes problems because women do not own cars, although some have driver's licences. Also they cannot count on their husbands or male relatives to make special trips to the creek because most men these days do not make artefacts and so are not interested. Therefore, they have to either find and arrange their own transport or use other occasions for root collecting. The Women's Bus, which belonged to the community, was often used for this purpose, exclusively by the women, however, after the bus broke down, they had to rely on privately owned cars.

On one occasion, I had a chance to join a tree-root collecting trip. At that time, Mary had just acquired a learner's permit and as driving practice she wanted to make a trip to collect roots for artefacts. I was asked to go with her because I had a driver's licence. Her next-door neighbour, Helen, joined us in Mary's husband's car. Before we left Ernabella, the two women decided to take an old lady, Cathy, with us because they thought that she would know the best places to go. After driving about 20km, directed by Cathy, we arrived at the creek bed and they spent about three hours collecting roots. Such membership of a collecting trip seemed to be typical. Usually, in one car, three to four women who are either related or close friends go together with an an older woman, who has knowledge of where to go.

Arriving at the creek, the three women dispersed and started to look for good roots. The pattern of root collecting I observed, closely resembled Hamilton's description of food collection by Mimili women regarding their efficiency and joint effort (1980:12). Although they helped each other to locate a good area for collection, the actual digging and cutting was carried out individually. Small roots which can be found close to the surface are dug out by crowbars; bigger roots which lie deeper in the sand are first dug out by a shovel and cut by an axe. Each root, after being cut

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6Love wrote that the women used tree trunks of white-stemmed gum for a wooden dish (Love, 1942b:215). Brokensha also mentioned branches of mulga, bloodwood and quandong were used as well as red river gum tree roots as raw materials for artefacts (Brokensha, 1975:49). However, I did not observe any raw materials other than roots being used during my fieldwork.

7Lack of access to transport is a big concern for Aboriginal women. At the ANZAAS conference in 1980, "tribally oriented" Aboriginal women expressed the need to own a community truck to collect materials for artefacts and to go for ceremonies (Gale, 1983:175).
to appropriate size, is carried to the campfire. Although some roots are not distinguishable each other for me, women clearly remember which piece belong to whom when they unload the roots at Ernabella.

In collecting trips, younger women tend to look for thin roots which are close to the surface. On the other hand, older women often try to dig out bigger roots near the tree trunk. It takes much more work to dig out bigger roots because of their size and depth. Cathy, in spite of her age, spent almost an hour tackling a big root which was lying more than a metre deep without any help, while the younger women wandered around for a short time to get smaller ones. The younger ones said that they collect thinner roots to make small animals and wooden dishes because the adviser asked them to produce small items. Thus, marketing factors influence the type of raw materials collected by young women. Furthermore, it seems that small artefacts are advantageous because they are portable during the production process. It is quite common for women to have ten or twenty half-finished artefacts and tools in a bag, so that they can work on them wherever they go.

Why do older women prefer to work on bigger items, when it is harder to get the raw materials, and they are harder to sell? I could not get any clear answers but from my observations, I speculate that their reasons lie in their a desire to make "real" artefacts. They prefer to produce a wooden dish 40 to 50cm long, which can be used for actual winnowing or carrying things, instead of making a small dish for use as a souvenir pin holder. A similar thing can be said for carved animals. They often make life size lizards instead of miniature ones.

Another reason for producing small items is that waste due to accidental damage is minor. When difficult parts are carved, such as the legs of a lizard or the hollowing out of a wooden dish, a crack may be caused occasionally by mistake, and the piece has to be discarded. When working on a big item, the wasted work would be greater than for a small one. Once I observed a skilled craftswoman, who was carving a big goanna, made a mistake, and its leg was cracked. As a result, she tried to change the goanna into a snake by adjusting the carving, but the finished work did not have a flat belly and looked strange for a snake. Only well experienced craftswomen dare to produce big works.

After Mary, Helen and Cathy collected enough roots, they sat around a fire and had a rest before going home. Cathy had already started to work on her wooden dish
and Mary and Helen discussed what they were going to carve out of their roots. When they saw the size and shape of roots, they decided what kind of artefacts were suitable. For example, small digging dishes can be made out of a relatively thick root, whilst a wooden snake is carved out of a thin curved root. They showed me how they would split the roots, and what kind of carvings they were going to make. They also asked for some advice from Cathy on carving a wooden dish from a particular shape of root. The older woman gave them brief instruction using her own piece as an example. After the rest, we drove back to Ernabella. The roots being collected were unloaded in front of each woman's house. The amount each collected supplied enough raw materials for two weeks work even after some of the roots were given away to relatives and other old women who did not have the chance to go out in a car.

Compared to batik production, the process of collecting raw materials for artefacts shows greater levels of initiative and co-operation between the women involved in the activity. As I have already mentioned, collecting roots for artefacts shows similarities with traditional food gathering activities. They use similar tools in a similar environment, i.e., out in the bush, away from the community. The way women help each other by giving information on the best locations and providing transport shows the cooperation among them. Discussion among the women on artefact making takes place in a relaxed atmosphere around the fire, and experienced ones give advice on techniques for making particular types of artefact. Such exchanges of information were not noticeable among batik workers in the Craft Room. They were much more individualistic in their attitudes towards their work.

In contrast to batik work, in artefact making, the women organize their activity and make decisions from the outset. When they want to go to the creek bed to get raw materials, they have to arrange transport. Some might try to get a lift, or alternatively drive there if they have access to a vehicle. Either way, the arrangements have to be made by themselves. On the other hand, in batik production, most of the organization, such as ordering raw materials, is done for them. In artefact work, women also made decisions on what to produce, depending on the market situation. Thus, younger ones prefer to produce small carvings because they are easier to sell. Women do not participate in such decision making in batik production, mainly because marketing is carried out away from Ernabella. Yet, the decision making which occurs from the beginning in artefact production surely increases their motivation and their control over their economic activity.
Figure 4-3: Working on artefacts at a dry river bed after collecting river-red gum roots.
Artefact carving can be divided into four stages. Firstly, the bark of the roots is stripped by hand, and the roots are cut into appropriate sizes for the artefacts which the women have decided to make. Then, a rough shape is carved using a short-handed axe. The next stage is to carve detailed parts, such as the legs of a lizard, still using the axe, but holding it by the blade in order to control it well. Finally, the surface of each item is smoothed by a metal file or sand paper, so that it will be ready to be incised with heated wire. This poker work on artefacts will be discussed in the next section.

As in collecting raw materials, in the carving process women work in a group and help each other by teaching useful techniques. Women get together at somebody's yard or in the community ground in a group of three to six, just enough to sit around a fire. The members are usually related to each other or neighbours. There is always a lot of talking around the fire. Some talk about community or family matters and some seek advice on how to carve a difficult part of an artefact. Sometimes, a more experienced woman will make the rough outline of a carving for somebody else. For example, I observed that Dorothy made rough shapes of erect lizards for another woman, who in return carved flat lizards for Dorothy. In addition to acquiring advice, women have a good chance to observe other workers' techniques. When Tracy, who is regarded as the best artefact producer both by Aborigines and Europeans, was carving a bird, several women came to see how it was done and they experimented for themselves afterwards.

Such groups also provide a social occasion for the women: their talk often included things about the community, and happenings in their daily life. Sometimes, gossip is exchanged. On one occasion, when I went out with six women to the creek bed just outside Ernabella, some older women started to sing and dance while the others worked on artefacts. Singing and dancing did not have any significant ritual meaning. Rather, it was done for entertainment. Such a relaxed atmosphere does not exist in batik production. In the workshop, each woman remains mostly silent and concentrates on her work. Visitors are often discouraged from entering the workshop by the adviser, who is concerned that they would disturb the work and reduce efficiency among the workers. When batik workers want to have a break, they leave the workshop and go outside.

The skills of handling axes and chisels requires a lot of practice. To carve a wooden lizard 5cm long and 1cm wide with a hand-axe definitely needs a steady
hand. A big wooden dish is carved out by an axe and chisel to only 2-3mm thickness, so the process demands a delicate touch in handling the tools. Indirect training in the use of tools starts quite early. I saw a three-year old child imitating her mother in holding an axe and a root as if she was working on them. In food gathering, in which young children often participate with their mothers, they learn how to aim at and hit a precise point with a crow bar or an axe. Yet, the real training in producing artefacts starts in the mid-twenties when they have some spare time to sit around a camp fire during the day while they mind their children.

Figure 4-6 shows the age distribution of 45 Ernabella women whom I saw making artefacts during my fieldwork. The youngest was 26 years old. As is evident in the figure, women between 45 and 49 were most numerous. Compared to batik workers, the age distribution is much wider. Also it is clear that artefact producers are generally older than batik workers (see Figure 3-5 in Chapter 3) As regards productivity, that of the women in their forties seem to be the highest, my observations showing that they produce the greatest the number of items. Older women, especially pensioners, might have more time for themselves, but as I mentioned before, they tend to produce bigger works. Also, due to their age and weak eye sight, their production is not as efficient as the middle-aged women. The younger women who are in their 20s and early 30s have more energy, but their children, who are still young, tend to disturb a continuous flow of production. Consequently, the middle-aged women seem to produce more items, with a neat and clean finish.

One of the most interesting characteristics of women's artefacts in the area is the incised patterns on carved animals and wooden dishes. All the artefacts women produce these days have such patterns. The incision is done by a piece of fencing wire about 30cm long, bent into a loop at both ends. One end serves as a handle whilst the other end is heated in the coals of a fire so that a curved line can be burnt into the wooden artefact to form the design.

Incised designs are done on carved animals and wooden dishes by women. The finished lines do differ between skilled producers and learners, but the difference in patterns is not as great as batik work and there does not seem any ownership of a

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8I did not see any men drawing designs with incision. When a man carves a wooden animal, the incision is usually done by his wife.
Figure 4-4: Hollowing out a large root using a short-handled axe to make a wooden dish.
Figure 4-5: Carving a large flat lizard from a river-red gum root, using a special long-handled chisel.
Figure 4-6: Age distribution of female artefact producers (1/1983-8/1983)
design by a particular woman. Yet, in spite of the similarity in the shapes of carvings and the patterns, a close look will reveal that none of them are identical.

Love's account of the making of traditional wooden dishes in the 1940s indicates that they did not have this type of design drawn on the back. They were finished with fluting by using a stone adze to make parallel grooves, and ochre was rubbed into the pattern (Love, 1942:217). According to D.A.C. Hope, who was superintendent at Amata in 1971, the incised designs originated in Ernabella (Hope, 1971:4). However, I could not acquire any relevant information on the origin of the technique during my fieldwork. Around the same period, David Abrams, who was the craft adviser in Amata, encouraged the craftswomen to burn on the back of wooden dishes designs which had stories associated with them. According to Brokensha, he aimed to revive the traditional art of sand drawings in a new form. 9 (Brokensha, 1975:47).

At present, both Ernabella and Amata women use the same technique to incise lines on the artefacts. However, the designs seemed to have developed in different directions. In Amata, women produce beautifully decorated wooden dishes with stories illustrated on the back. The stories chosen are based on myths of the area, and often taken from the Seven Sisters myth 10 and other stories which related to their birth places. On the other hand, in Ernabella, designs on dishes have curved lines, but women claim that the designs do not have any meanings behind them. Furthermore, this claim was made by all the women regardless of their age. Once I commissioned a wooden bowl from Cathy, who was respected as a knowledgeable woman in ritual matters. I knew she was very familiar with the Seven Sisters myth so I asked her to draw a design which was related to the myth. She made a wooden dish whose back was filled by lines, but she said they did not have any meaning. She also said that she did not know how to draw stories on the back of wooden dishes.

Such different approaches to the art form are puzzling because these two communities are closely located and the traffic between the two is always busy. Visitors often include artefact producers who sometimes try to sell their works in the other community to earn some cash. It seems likely that one reason for the difference

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9See Brokensha, 1975: Plates 6.3:4 and 6.3:5 as examples of those designs with stories.
10This myth is about seven sisters who were chased by a man named Nyura. According to the myth the sisters travelled through the Pitjantjatjara area in order to escape from Nyura and finally went up to the sky to become the Pleiades.
is the degree of encouragement by the craft advisers in each communities. In Amata, where they specialize in artefact production, a couple was sharing the craft adviser’s position and, the wife spent considerable time with the craftswomen to encourage the drawing as well as to record some of the stories. Thus, the craftswomen received enough incentive to express their new art form on the wooden dishes. On the other hand, in Ernabella, artefacts have been always regarded by the adviser as a side line to the major Craft Room activities of weaving and more recently batik. Therefore, the adviser does not give as much encouragement to artefact production as she does for batik. Moreover, in Ernabella, people are asked to produce small items for ready sale. This means there is not much space to illustrate stories.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, it seems that the encouragement from outside and the size of artefacts determine whether this new art form will develop or not.

\subsection*{4.4 Artefact sale}

Once the artefacts are finished, the producers have to exchange them for cash. They can sell them wherever they want to. In recent years, it seems that a growing number of Aboriginal craftswomen have started to explore the possibility of selling their work outside Ernabella, a point I will discuss later in the chapter. However, Ernabella Arts still plays an important role as a place where the women can sell their work. So I will examine the economic return to the producers using the data I collected in Ernabella.

At Ernabella Arts, artefacts are bought up by the adviser once a week, on Tuesday afternoons. After lunch time, the craftswomen and men bring their work to the Craft Room and wait for the adviser. Inside the Craft Room, each place their artefacts on a table to be examined by the adviser who decides the price according to size and the finish. After counting the number of artefacts, she calculates the total payment to each person. The price for each item is not give to the people. In some cases, artefacts are refused due to their rough finish and the adviser gives an explanation to the producer but there is no argument between the adviser and the craftspeople about the quality of the work in such cases. Usually, a producer receives a cheque for the amount which can be cashed at the bank.

\textsuperscript{11}The size of dishes is a very important factor for expressing meaningful stories. When the Aboriginal Arts Board had a meeting at Ayers Rock in March 1983, an Aboriginal woman brought three wooden dishes in different sizes. On a full size dish of about 40cm length, she had a full story based on myth. The medium sized dish of 25cm had drawn on it only part of the design from the big one was drawn. Then the small dish had some incised pattern of lines, but it did not have any meaning.
Figure 4-7: Various wooden artefacts bought by the Craft Room.
There are three sets of data available for analysis of the current economic return from artefact making in Ernabella. The first is the record of purchase at the Craft Room from July 1980 to May 1981, and the second is the record from July 1982 to December 1982. Both these records were kept by the craft adviser and the names of recipients of money and the amount paid were reliable. The third set of data was collected during my field work in 1983 from January till July. During this period, I was either present at the time of purchase or was able to check the purchased artefacts later. Therefore, it was possible for me to gather additional information such as the name of the actual producers of the works. Analysis of these data gives the total number of artefact producers and the income each producer received from artefact sales to Ernabella Arts.

Regarding the number of people who sold their work at the Craft Room, the data indicate that the number had been decreasing (see Figure 4-8). During the eleven months from July 1980 to May 1981, 72 people sold their artefacts to the craft room. Out of 72, 61 were women and 11 were men. From July 1982 to December 1982, the total number was 50, 43 of them female and 7 of them male. In the first seven months in 1983, the number decreased to 15 people in total, comprising 11 women and 4 men. Although there have been changes in the number of craft people, the proportion of female producers to male producers has not changed significantly. In 1980-81, 85% were women, in 1982, 86% whilst in 1983, the figure was 73%. Therefore the decrease did not occur predominantly in either sex, rather it was a general phenomenon for both men and women.

In 1980-81, the top female producer received $719 in total from Ernabella Arts in exchange for artefacts. During this period, the top ten female producers' average total was $442. In 1982, the amount increased considerably for the period of six months compared with eleven months figures in 1980-81. The top female producer earned $767 during this period, similarly the top ten earned more for the shorter period and the average for all artefact makers was $429. The figures for 1983 show a big drop not only in the number of craftspeople but also in the value of sales to the Craft Room. Even the woman who earned the most received only $233 and the average for all eleven female producers was $160. The figures for male producers show a similar pattern as those for females although their income was much smaller. In 1980-81, the top male producer received $755 in total, and the average of all 11 male producers was $216. In 1982, the men did not benefit from increased sales as the women did, and the top male earned $255. For the seven male producers of that
Figure 4-8: Number of artefact producers who sold their products to the Craft Room.
year $102 was the average. In 1983, the figures show a drop similar to that of the female producers, and even the man who earned the most received only $70 in total. The average earning of four male producers amounted only $40. In conclusion, according to these figures, the amount of money the producers received from artefact production was not substantial enough to support them.

In order to examine the economic return from another angle, the hourly return for artefact production was studied. According to the data I collected through observing the working process on a medium size (approximately 20cm) lizard, women spent about 15 minutes carving out a rough shape. Then, they spent about 2 minutes filing the surface. Finally, it took about 13 minutes for drawing designs on the back of the animal. In total, it took about 30 minutes to produce a medium sized lizard. Other types of animals such as snakes were produced in a similar time. Thus the principal determinant of the time taken was the size of the artefact. The craft women were able to sell such medium sized lizards for about $2.50 to $3.00 each at the Craft Room. In this sense, the hourly return on their work could be estimated about $5.00 to $6.00 maximum. However, in reality, no craft people worked constantly on their artefact without any interruption. The actual production time for each artefact was much more than this calculated time for the collection time for raw materials has not been included in my estimate. A more realistic hourly return for their work may be about half of the estimated figure above, i.e., between $2.50 to $3.00.

There are a few data available on Aboriginal craft activities for comparison with Ernabella data. According to Altman's study, the average return for female artisans in the Maningrida region, Arnhem Land, was about $0.80 in 1979 and 1980 (Altman, 1983:11). He included the time collecting raw materials in the calculation, which I did not. Even taking this difference into account, it is likely that Ernabella women receive a better hourly return than Maningrida women. Pascoe estimated that an Amata woman received about $3.50 per hour for carving snakes in 1981 (Pascoe, 1981:25). This figure is higher than my estimate but in view of the uncertainties involved of the circumstances, the agreement is quite good.

Interestingly enough, although the hourly return from artefact production is much lower than batik production, actual production values in those two economic activities are not so different. Batik producers are paid between $4.20 and $6.50 per hour, but, as was discussed in Chapter 3, more than half of that amount is paid through subsidies. In other words, if the artefact producers were able to receive the
same level of subsidies as batik workers, their hourly income would be comparable. At present, since the craftswomen do not have any formal organization, unlike Ernabella Arts, they do not receive any subsidies from the government. Yet, these figures indicate that the artefact industry in Ernabella has the potential to provide substantial income for producers if it were subsidised at the same level as the batik industry.

Since it is clear that artefact production alone does not provide sufficient income to support the workers, it has to be assumed that each producer must have other sources of income. Consequently, the financial background of artefact producers is of interest. There were 15 artefact producers who sold their artefacts to Ernabella Arts during my fieldwork. All of the four male producers were old age pensioners. Among eleven female producers, four were pensioners, three were employed in batik production and two received wages from the community. Only two women, who were sisters, did not have any fixed employment during the period. Yet, one of them had a husband who had a steady income from the community. The other had a sick baby and retarded child on top of four other children. Therefore, it was very hard for her to stay at work for long periods. Since her husband was away in Alice Springs, her only regular income was the family allowance. Yet, over all, it is worth pointing out that out of fifteen, thirteen producers had their own individual and substantial income other than from artefact sales.

A similar outcome was found among the producers in 1982. There were 50 men and women who sold artefacts to Ernabella Arts between July 1982 to December 1982. Out of seven men, four were age pensioners, and three were employed in the community. There were 43 female producers. Ten of them were not living in Ernabella in 1983, so it was not possible for me to check their situation. Out of the remaining 33, only one did not have any particular employment at that time. Therefore, it is clear that almost all the artefact producers in 1982 and 1983 had a stable sources of income of their own in the form of either pensions or wages. In other words, the producers do not rely on the income from artefacts as a major income source but regard it as supplementary.
4.5 Artefact marketing by the Aboriginal women

I have shown so far that Aboriginal women control the production side of the artefact industry. The women also play a major role in marketing. What they are looking for is a stable and reliable market where they are able to exchange their products for cash. In order to get to such a market, the women utilizes various resources available to them.

For a long time, Ernabella Arts, or the Craft Room, has been regarded as the major buying agent for Aboriginal craftspeople. Such recognition still exist among craftspeople. This was evident from the fact that people waited until the adviser came back from her holidays in March 1983 before they started to produce artefacts. However, from the data available, Ernabella Arts has been losing its position as the major agent. As can be seen in Figure 4-8, the number of craftspeople who sold their products to Ernabella Arts has been decreasing drastically. During 1983, it seems that craftswomen in general wanted to sell their work outside Ernabella. Women often spoke negatively of the prices they got at the Craft Room and claimed that they could have a better deal outside the community. The information I collected about who sold their work to the Craft Room in 1983 supports this impression. Not only the decreasing number of craftspeople, but the producers who chose to sell in Ernabella mainly did not have any choice in selecting a better market. They were either very close to the adviser personally or did not have access to transport. Out of 15 men and women, 8 of them were pensioners and they generally did not have much mobility between the communities. And one woman rarely went away from Ernabella because of her retarded child and lack of transport. Out of the remaining six, four of them were craft workers at the Craft Room so that they had closer ties with the adviser than other craftswomen.

The difficult financial situation of the Craft Room in 1983 did not allow it to spend much on purchasing artefacts from the Aboriginal people. The Craft Room was then suffering from cash flow difficulties. The artefact purchases it made in the first half of the 1982-83 financial year were over $10,000, being almost equivalent to the annual purchase of 1980-81. Furthermore, sales from Ernabella Arts to outside outlets were not promising and seemed to suffer from over-stocking.\footnote{Although the Adviser sells the artefacts with a 33\% mark up (personal communication), the financial result does not show any significant profit. In 1982-83, the profit Ernabella Arts made from artefacts sale was merely $48.00.} Thus, due to
Figure 4-9: Old Makinti polishing her wooden artefacts with margarine before sale to the Craft Room.
lack of available cash, the adviser could not spend much money on purchasing artefacts from producers in the latter half of the financial year. On the other hand, producers seemed to expect that they could sell their work at the same rate as in the first half of the year. In addition to this problem, the planned trip and batik exhibition in Japan in September 1983 dominated the adviser's activities, with her concern to prepare a good batik collection for that. As a result of all these factors, the adviser was constantly discouraging producers from coming to the Craft Room to sell artefacts by saying that there was not enough money available to pay for them.

In spite of the problem in selling artefacts at Ernabella, the producers did not stop making artefacts: forty-five women were working on carvings during my field work. This means the actual number of female producers did not decrease in the latter half of 1982/83. This raises the question as to where those who could not sell their work at the Craft Room went to market their artefacts. They appear to have started to look for outlets outside Ernabella in order to have access to a more reliable market. This development was an innovative and positive step in their participation in the industry.

In order to find a better place to sell their artefacts, the women collected a lot of information. Where they would go to sell carvings frequently came into conversations. Often, it was the case that the information they got did not give a full picture of the situation, and sometimes the women had to face disappointment when they realized their expectation would not be fulfilled. However, the amount of information they collected, and their enthusiastic attitude to trying to find a better market was something which I did not find at all in the Ernabella batik industry. Furthermore, after collecting information, the women actually organize themselves to realize their aim of getting access to a better market.

In 1983, the craftswomen had four possible places that they could sell their works outside Ernabella, namely Alice Springs, Amata, Ayers Rock and Adelaide. The women gave Alice Springs as their first choice to sell their artefacts. According to the data collected by Koyama and Matsuyama of the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan, from April 1981 to March 1982, a total of $4,109 worth of artefacts were sold to the Centre for Aboriginal Artists and Craftmen in Alice Springs by those who said they were from Ernabella. This gallery was owned by the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Company and is the major gallery of Aboriginal arts in Alice Springs. On the other hand, in Ernabella, $2,248 worth of artefacts were
purchased during the period from July 1981 to May 1982. Although these two periods were not exactly concurrent, about 1.8 times more artefacts were sold in Alice Springs than in Ernabella.

Aboriginal craftswomen claimed that they could sell their carving at better prices in Alice Springs than in Ernabella. I could not compare the purchase prices in those two places directly during my fieldwork. However, in July 1982, a flat lizard approximately 10cm in length returned about $1.50 to $2.00 in Alice Springs. In Ernabella, a similar size flat lizard was purchased for about $1.50 in June 1983. Therefore, it is likely that the gallery was paying better prices then for similar products. In order to illustrate their claim, Mary told me of her successful trip to Alice Springs. Her daughter broke her arm and needed to see the doctor in Alice Springs for a check-up, and Mary was flown to the town with her. In order to utilize the occasion, she decided to take her carvings to the town to sell. In addition to her own work, she bought $100 worth of carvings from the Craft Room on credit. She told me later that she sold the Craft Room stock for $120 and made $20 profit. From this information, it seems reasonable that the price in Alice Springs was at least 20% better than in Ernabella.

As we can see in Mary’s case, people use various opportunities to take their artefacts to Alice Springs. When other people are going to the town on some errand, craftswomen either ask for a lift or if there is not room for extra passengers, they ask somebody in the car to sell their artefacts in Alice Springs for them. Or if somebody who works in Alice Springs is going back to the town, they would ask the same thing of that person. An Aboriginal man who worked in the Pitjantjatjara Council often went back to the town with various artefacts in the back of his car.

Thus it is apparent that it is not unusual for producers to ask somebody to sell artefacts on their behalf. Records exist which indicate such activities in Ernabella. For example in a record at Ernabell Arts, Tony, the Aboriginal pastor, brought in $318 worth of artefacts to sell, and his wife brought $200 worth on the same day. Similar mass sales to the Craft Room by other people can be found. I am confident that the artefacts sold in such large quantities were not made by themselves. Rather, most of the carvings must be made by other people, possibility from outside Ernabella, i.e., communities which did not have any access to craft marketing, and those who brought them to the community sold them on behalf of the producers. My reasons for such a supposition are based on my observation during my fieldwork of
the general pattern of artefact production. It would be very difficult to accumulate one's own artefacts to a value of more than $200 for a considerable time. The total weight would be quite heavy for transporting and lack of appropriate space for storage would cause problems. Producers generally chose to sell their products every week when they have chance. Another example which illustrates a similar activity is that a woman sold carvings worth $180 on September 27, 1982 and again October 7, receiving $235. It would be very hard for any Aboriginal craftswoman to produce more than $200 worth of artefacts by herself in ten days. Indeed, at $2.50 per hour, this would compound to more than eight hours of carving each day. Furthermore, she was not known as a skillful craftswoman at the time, due to her bad eyesight.

From these examples, it is clear that some Aboriginal people act as middlemen between the producers and the Craft Room or the gallery in Alice Springs. However, it is unlikely that they charge any commission for their service. Such service seems to be still tied to kinship relations.13

Even though crafts people are able to receive 10 to 20% better prices for their artefacts in Alice Springs than in Ernabella, after taking the cost of petrol, vehicles and time into account, the actual cash profit from selling works in Alice Springs would not be so great. Yet, people still insisted that Alice Springs was the better place to sell. The craft people regarded the chance to earn cash in the town as a immediate means to obtain goods at cheaper prices than in Ernabella. When they went to Alice Springs with artefacts, they never came back with cash. Instead, they returned with loads of goods such as clothes, blankets and radio cassette players which they bought with the money they received. Having a certain amount of cash in hand in Alice Springs means more than in Ernabella because there is a greater variety of commodities available at cheaper prices.

Even though the return for each item would be better in Alice Springs, the craft people were not in a position to negotiate for a better price. When they visited the gallery to sell they went to the office which is at the back of the gallery. They put the carvings on the floor to be examined by the gallery manager and received cash for

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13 In 1974, Andy who was a leader in the community tried to establish an artefact marketing business with a grant from the Aboriginal Arts Board. He bought up some artefacts, but his attempt did not last very long. When I interviewed him, Andy did not want to talk about it. According to the craft adviser, the main reason for his lack of success was that his relatives demanded special treatment and this did not coincide with his business interests.
the items the manager bought up. There was no opportunity for discussing prices on individual items. Furthermore, control of the artefact supply in Alice Springs was carried out by pricing rather than informing the Aborigines which were the popular lines. For example, when a couple from Ernabella brought music sticks to the gallery, the manager gave only a slightly higher price for the larger music sticks in spite of the fact that the larger ones were almost twice as big. As the manager explained later, she wanted to discourage people from producing large music sticks because they were not as popular as medium ones. By giving relatively better prices for smaller pairs, she wanted craft people to think medium size music sticks were better in economic return. Although such a way of controlling the supply of artefacts might be effective from the manager's point of view, for the craft people their work did not receive an appropriate and reasonable economic return.

As well as Alice Springs, Amata was also talked about by the craftswoman as a possible place to sell their artefacts. Amata Craft specializes in marketing artefacts to various outlets in southern cities and has started to accumulate a reputation for the quality of their craft. The annual sale in 1982-83 was about $34,000, and about $27,000 was spent on purchasing artefacts from craftspeople (P. Yates, personal communication). This figure is about 2.7 times as much as Ernabella Arts spent on artefact purchasing. Therefore, Ernabella people wanted to sell their works in Amata because they thought they could sell them more readily. In addition, they claimed that prices were better in Amata. Some people took their carvings with them when they visited Amata and tried to sell them at the craft centre.

However, the craft adviser in Amata was reluctant to buy artefacts made by Ernabella people. He said since he was employed by Amata community, funds should be spent on purchasing from Amata people rather than Ernabella people. Although some Ernabella craftswomen could manage to sell their work, most likely through their relatives in Amata, Ernabella craftswomen could not find a ready market in Amata.

The rumour that Amata Craft would buy up any amount of artefacts from anybody at better price started to spread widely in Ernabella when Amata Craft held their Annual tent shop at Ayers Rock in June 1983. Since the shop was situated at the Climb where tourist start their climb on the rock, the business went very well. As well as selling artefacts, a few Aboriginal craftspeople gave demonstrations of carving for tourists. In Ernabella, people were saying that as long as they could get
to the tent shop they would have no problem selling their works and many women started to produce more artefacts with this optimistic prospect.

The trip to Ayers Rock was planned and abandoned many times by different women, but on a weekend towards the end of June, the selling trip finally took place. The leader of the trip was Penny who had easy access to a minibus which was owned by her son. About ten craftswomen joined the trip. Penny's son was the driver and the only male member of the trip. Each woman had a big bag-full of artefacts with her to sell at the Rock. When they arrived, they found that the Amata people had left, but Pipalyatjara Craft was opening a shop at the same location. Most of the members were able to sell their artefacts successfully and received about $80 to $100 each.

Almost the same group of women organized a shopping trip to Adelaide about a month later after their trip to Ayers Rock. It seemed that they spent their earnings from the Ayers Rock expedition on train fares. Penny assumed leadership in arranging the tickets and accommodation in Adelaide, and each woman took a lot of artefacts with them to sell in the city. Furthermore, they were planning to demonstrate their dancing and earn extra money from admission charges. With their savings and relatives' donation as well as their expected sale of the carvings, they said they should have enough money to enjoy themselves and do shopping. A week later, the women came back with loads of second hand clothes purchased in Adelaide. They did not demonstrate their dancing, but they sold their artefacts successfully in Adelaide.

These examples of Aboriginal women's marketing activities clearly show their positive involvement in achieving their aim of finding a better market for their artefacts. They collect information, they organize themselves as a group for a selling trip, and they arrange their own transport for themselves. They did not need any help or assistance from their men-folk or from European staff. In this sense, the women are managing matters for themselves. As I have described in this chapter, other aspects of artefact production also show the women's control over their own activities. By contrast, in other economic activities in Ernabella, especially batik production, there is little active involvement by the women.

Why do women play such different and contrasting roles in these two types of production? I think the difference in environment and social situations in which batik
and artefacts are produced seem to offer some clue to understanding the difference. For artefact production, most of the activities are performed in an environment familiar to Aboriginal women. Collecting raw material at the creek is a similar activity to gathering food in the bush. Artefacts are carved in their domestic environment in company with other women around a camp fire. Marketing artefacts involves considerable mobility, but the places they visit are not totally foreign to them. Especially, Amata and Ayers Rock are situated in traditional Pitjantjatjara country. In all these activities, the women are required to make their own decisions on what to carve depending on their perception of market and aesthetics, and determine where to sell them depending on their access to transport and information.

On the other hand, the batik industry offers a working environment in which the women have control only in the production process. In addition, the operation of the batik industry is much more complex than the artefact production. Raw materials are brought in from outside and the arrangement of ordering is done by the adviser. The transactions relating to orders and sales involve writing statements, invoices and cheques, and knowledge of banking, which the Aboriginal women are not familiar with. The Craft Room does offer a convenient environment for young mothers to work with their children, but the workshop does not offer the same environment and atmosphere as their own back yard with a camp fire. Furthermore, the women are under the supervision of the adviser while they work. They might have freedom to choose and explore designs on batik, but in other matters, the organisation of the Craft Room is clearly defined and the adviser retains the position of supervisor. The women do not play any significant roles in deciding what type of materials and items they should produce. Consequently, they lack knowledge of marketing and they do not have much chance to make decisions concerning the operation of the industry as they do in artefact production and sale.

Another factor is the average age difference between two groups of workers. The average age for artefact producers is around the mid forties, and is higher than for batik workers. In Aboriginal society, women in their forties play important roles in social interactions and rituals. They are more active than younger women in various matters in the community, such as political and religious activities. It is likely, therefore, that artefact producers have better capability to organize themselves and become involved in positive decision making on production and marketing.

The last point I want to make about the greater involvement of the women in
artefact production is related to the women's control over their income. After the trip to Ayers Rock, almost the same group of women went to Adelaide with the money they had earned. From this incident, it seems to me that when women have control over their income from artefacts they have more incentive to participate and become involved positively in artefact production and marketing. On the other hand, the weekly wages from batik work are regarded as regular income which is used to support the family, being used to buy food and other basic necessities.14

4.6 Artefacts and Aboriginal culture

Compared with batik, the recognition wooden artefacts receive is not generally high. They are always classified as craft rather than art. Prices for each piece are much lower than for batik items and, so they are considered more as souvenir items than art work. This tendency is shown particularly clearly in Ernabella by the emphasis on producing small items for lower prices.15 In addition to these aspects, the fact that carved wooden animals are a newly adapted craft for the Aborigines tends to decrease their cultural meaning and results in them being labelled as "fun things" (according to the craft adviser) rather than as an expression of their culture.

However, I will argue to the contrary that the artefacts do reflect certain aspects of Aboriginal culture and are indeed an important cultural expression. As I have described, they collect the raw materials in an environment they are familiar with in gathering activities. The technology the women use for collecting and carving is basically Aboriginal, but with adaptation due to the use of modern tools. Lizards and snakes are the most common animals to be carved, but occasionally birds or wombats are also made. The way the animals are posed in the carvings reveals the Aboriginal people's sharp observation of their behaviour. Sometimes, two lizards of the similar shape are carved to make a "married couple". In this way, their perception of their own society and family is reproduced in their carvings. Also what they carve reflects their natural environment and is constrained by traditional values. Kangaroos, which are familiar animals as much as lizards or snakes in the desert, are never carved. The reason is, I was told by an Aboriginal woman, that they are sacred and should not be carved out in shapes. On the other hand rabbits, another common

14 This point I have made has to be studied further, including a more detailed study on the expenditure pattern for each source of income.

15 The adviser also mentioned her concern over the ecological impact of digging out big roots of the trees to carve big artefacts. However, it is not clear how much damage a tree will receive by losing a root.
animal in the Centre, are not carved, but probably because they are newly introduced animals and they do not have any significance in Aboriginal culture except as food.
CHAPTER 5
Community Economy and the Craft Industry

5.1 Introduction
I will examine the role of the craft industry in the Ernabella economy. I will begin by analysing the sources of income and employment in the community and then turn to consider the economic and social significance of craft work in the general community context. I will end the chapter with a discussion of the women's concept of "work" and how they regard their experiences in employment.

5.2 Ernabella community and the community income
The population of Ernabella was 372 in June 1983 as shown in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1: Population of Ernabella (June, 1983)
(Source: Pukatja Community Records)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-59</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two possible sources of income for the Aboriginal population in Ernabella, employment income, paid as wages, and non-employment income, in the form of social security payments. At present, there are various employment opportunities available in the community for both men and women, and the wages from these jobs are the major income source for most of the population. Social security payments include age pensions, invalid pensions, widow pensions, supporting parent pensions and family allowances. In Ernabella, no unemployment benefit is paid, due to the arrangement between the community and the federal government when the Community Development Employment Programme (C.D.E.P.) was adopted. I will discuss the C.D.E.P. later in this chapter.
The number of workers in 1983 totalled 124, which included both full-time and part-time workers (see Table 5-2).

Table 5-2: Labour force in Ernabella (June, 1983)  
(Source: Pukatja Community Records)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total employed</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the number of the workers to the whole population, about one third of the Aboriginal residents were working with the ratio of workers in the adult population (15-59) standing at approximately 60%.

Table 5-3 shows the types of employment available in Ernabella in 1983. There were six employment sources in Ernabella and most of the workers were paid hourly wages for their labour. The first type was community work, which employed about 70 to 80 Aborigines in work areas such as the bank, housing construction and road maintenance around the community. The wages for these workers were paid through the C.D.E.P. fund. The second type of work was the store which had three divisions: supermarket, deli, and clothing shop. The store employed 10 to 12 shop assistants whose wages were paid from the revenue of sales. The third type of employment was the school. There was one qualified Aboriginal teacher and six teachers' aides who were paid by the South Australian Department of Education. The clinic offered the fourth type of employment for three women as health workers and they received their wages from the Department of Health, South Australia. Batik production offered employment for 12 to 15 women as I have discussed in previous chapters; half of the workers were paid their wages from revenue and the rest from the C.D.E.P. Lastly,

1 Although the community office distinguished full-time and part-time workers, the difference between the two types of workers is not clear cut. Aboriginal "full-time" workers do not usually work 35 hours a week and the hours worked often vary from week to week. Thus, the distinction between the two categories often depends on the European adviser's personal opinion.

2 During my fieldwork, there were only five Aboriginal men who received fixed annual salaries. They were the council chairman, a teacher, a Uniting church minister, a Pitjantjatjara Council representative, and a National Aboriginal Council representative. The last two were away from the community most of the time.
Table 5-3: Ernabella employment (June, 1983)
(Source: fieldwork)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of workers</th>
<th>hourly rates</th>
<th>source</th>
<th>work areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>4.10-6.50</td>
<td>C.D.E.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>store</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>5.50-6.50</td>
<td>sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>annual</td>
<td>S.A.Dept. of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clinic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>S.A.Dept. of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>craft room</td>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>4.10-6.50</td>
<td>sales &amp; C.D.E.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artefact</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>approx. 2.50</td>
<td>sales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artefact production offered self-employment for some men and women and they earned their income by selling their products.

Social security payments were also very important income sources for the people. There were 25 pension recipients in June 1983, including 17 age pensioners. Including the dependants of the pensioners, a total of 37 people relied on social security payments for their living expenses. In addition to the pensions, family allowances provided a regular source of income for many families. In June 1983, there were 150 children who were eligible for the allowance in the community. Table 5-4 shows estimated figures for the total social security payments to the community for a week in June 1983. The total amount was about $3,300 for a week.
Table 5-4: Social security payments made to Ernabella for a week in June 1983
(Source: fieldwork)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of social security payment</th>
<th>Number of recipients</th>
<th>Estimated amount($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age pension</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid pension</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting parent pension</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow pension</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family allowance (children)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-5 shows the incomes the Aboriginal population in Ernabella received for this week in June 1983.³

Table 5-5: Income to Aboriginal residents at Ernabella for a week in June 1983
(Sources: Pukatja Community Records, Ernabella Arts, and fieldwork)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount($)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community workers</td>
<td>12,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store workers</td>
<td>1,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft room workers</td>
<td>1,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artefact producers*</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health workers*</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher's aids*</td>
<td>1,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social security*</td>
<td>3,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>----</strong></td>
<td><strong>----</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,940</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: estimated figures

The estimated total income for the residents was $20,940. When this amount is divided between employment income and non-employment income, 81% of the community income falls into the former category and 19% into the latter.

³It is important to point out that cash from other sources might have been received, such as from relatives. At the same time, it is likely that Ernabella residents gave part of their income to their relatives outside the community, therefore, the total income to the community would probably even out.
European staff's incomes were not taken into consideration in my analysis of the community economy. This is because their incomes did not circulate in the community a great deal. Most of their shopping for groceries and other goods was done in Alice Springs, or by mail-order from Adelaide. A limited amount of money was spent at the store to buy groceries, or at the Craft Room to buy batik items as presents. However, in neither case were sales to European residents a significant fraction of the total.

5.3 Analysis of economic change in Ernabella since 1970

In order to trace the change in the community economy, data for 1970, 1979 and 1983 are compared. For each year, the ratio of employment income to non-employment income paid is calculated together with the weekly per capita income.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>1979</th>
<th>1983</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers' income as % of total community income</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-employment income as % of total community income</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income per head per week($)</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>47.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1970, the weekly income per head was $4.25. Employment income comprised 54% of the total community income, whilst non-employment income was the remaining 46%. In 1979, the figures show a change in the ratio of employment and non-employment income. The former increased to 69% and the latter, consequently, decreased to 31%. Weekly income per head had increased to $28.00, which was 6.6 times more than the amount in 1970. By 1983, the employment income fraction had further increased to 81.3% and the weekly income per capita increased to $47.87. Thus, the figures indicate that the community income has increasingly been supported by wages and the proportion of social security income has decreased accordingly over the thirteen years.

In 1970, the economic situation was not promising. There was a general lack of employment opportunities in the mission. Although the majority of women worked
for the Craft Room, men had problems in finding jobs, and a labour exporting project (fruit-picking in the southern part of the state) was tried out around that time. After the community became self-governing in 1974, generation of employment opportunities continued to be a very important consideration. In 1977, Ernabella was one of the communities to start the C.D.E.P. as a pilot project. After its implementation in 1977, the C.D.E.P. increased employment opportunities in the community with more money available for wages. In addition, people who were being trained could also receive wages. Thus, the increased proportion of wage income in 1979 compared to 1970 is due largely to the influence of the C.D.E.P. The further increase in the proportion of wage income, by 1983 was probably due both to the C.D.E.P. and also to the availability of other employment opportunities, such as store work, health work and teaching at school. In addition, the drop in the number of age pensioners in Ernabella from approximately 30 in 1979 to 17 in 1983 accelerated the decrease in the percentage of social security income.

The current Ernabella economy depends on the C.D.E.P. very heavily and it is necessary to examine how the community economy is structured around the C.D.E.P. According to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the C.D.E.P. was defined as a "conjoint system of community development and employment as an alternative to unemployment benefits" (D.A.A., 1978:1). This meant that Ernabella community decided to receive bulk funds from the D.A.A. instead of receiving unemployment benefit cheques individually. Funds are allocated quarterly, and used to pay the wages of the Aboriginal workers employed by the community. The amount of money allocated is calculated according to the total of unemployment benefit which would have been paid to the community residents. Ten percent is added to cover insurance and recurrent costs such as tools. According to D.A.A., this project aims to "enable a community, through its Aboriginal council to have control of its workforce and to manage and direct its use" (Ibid., 1978:3). Table 5-7 shows the amounts the community had received from 1978 to 1983.

In order to gain a clear picture of the community economy, I will firstly examine what kind of roles the C.D.E.P. plays in the community economy. It has often been assumed by whites outside the community that, with C.D.E.P., employment and wages were freely available for the Aborigines to take up. Thus, they think it is up to the Aborigines to determine their lifestyle by earning their living in the programme or refusing to be incorporated in the scheme. At the
Table 5-7: C.D.E.P. fund allocated to Ernabella
(Source: Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978/79</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979/80</td>
<td>386,419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>492,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981/82</td>
<td>443,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982/83</td>
<td>416,904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

beginning of the programme in Ernabella, some newspapers reported on the C.D.E.P. with the headline "Black’s choice: Money or bush" (Brisbane Courier Mail, July 13, 1977). The implication of the article was that it was up to the Aboriginal people either to work for the community and receive wages, or to go back to the bush and survive on hunting and gathering, with no cash income. Interestingly enough, this choice of lifestyle presented by the C.D.E.P. scheme was almost identical to the choice the Rev. Love offered in the early mission days. However, the difference was that in the late 1970s, it would be impossible to live totally on hunting and gathering, without any cash income. Although the article gave the impression that the people had the option to determine their lifestyle, in reality, they did not have any option but to work for cash payments.

Furthermore, the general impression is that the C.D.E.P. enables Aborigines to earn as much or as little as they want. Thus, in another newspaper article, the programmes in Ernabella and Fregon were reported as follows:

The community councils . . . will exercise a flexible approach to the work done. If some Aborigines want to work only two days a week this will be allowed, but they will be paid only for the hours they work (Sydney Morning Herald, July 13, 1977).

Such a report is misleading because it implies that Aboriginal people have total control over their income, and if they want to earn more they should work more hours. At the same time, if their weekly income is low, that is their own problem for not working enough hours.

By just looking at the figures in Table 5-6, it seems that the Ernabella economy has increased its self-reliance because the degree of dependency on social security income had decreased over the last thirteen years. However, we cannot forget the fact that the majority of employment exists because of the C.D.E.P. Since the C.D.E.P. scheme is a substitute for unemployment benefit, a big proportion of the
wages paid actually originated from social security funds. Furthermore, there is always a maximum limit on the amount of money which can be allocated to the community from D.A.A., since the sum is decided according to the number of men employable. Thus, if all men worked, on average they could not receive more than unemployment benefit.

Among the community workers, there are, of course, some who work longer hours than average and earn more. However, if everybody wanted to work 40 hours a week for 52 weeks, the annual wage for each worker would be about $10,000. Thus, with the C.D.E.P. funds available in 1982-83($417,000), the community could employ only 42 workers as opposed to 124 which was the actual number of workers in 1983. Young in her analysis of remote Aboriginal communities comments that "In general, communities which have a larger wage component have higher per capita incomes" (Young, 1981:256). Yet, this cannot apply in Ernabella because of the difference in the economic bases between Ernabella, with the C.D.E.P., and the three Aboriginal communities which she studied. People in Ernabella do not receive unemployment benefit while the Aborigines in those communities she studied have employment opportunities as well as unemployment benefits. Therefore, as can be seen in Table 5-8 the income per capita remains almost the same for Ernabella and the other communities which do not have C.D.E.P. Aboriginal people in Ernabella might appear to be self-sufficient by earning their living through employment; however, in reality, their economic prospects do not go any further than the range of subsidies.

In addition to the limitations to increasing individual incomes, the operation of the C.D.E.P. posed some problems in Ernabella. The intended benefit of the C.D.E.P. is to allow the community to decide how the money is spent in the short term as well as the long term, so that the community is able to plan various projects according to its needs. The original intention was to increase the participation of the Aboriginal people in decision making in such areas as the allocation of funds and the types of employment. It is not clear, however, that this has been achieved. Up till 1981, the community office used to display names of workers and amount of wages paid every week so that people could see how the C.D.E.P. funds were spent each week. However, in 1983, this practice was discontinued and the Aboriginal people were left uninformed about the management of the funds.

To make the situation worse, in 1983, there were constant conflicts between the


Table 5-8: Income analysis on five Aboriginal communities

(Sources: Young(1981) for Yuendumu, Willowra & Numbulwar
Stanley(1983) for Nguiu)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Pop.</th>
<th>Wages</th>
<th>Social security</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernabella</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>15,385</td>
<td>6,771</td>
<td>22,156</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6/1983</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>28,948</td>
<td>6,664</td>
<td>35,612</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuendumu</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>31,357</td>
<td>23,492</td>
<td>54,849</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willowra</td>
<td>1/1979</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>1,625</td>
<td>7,461</td>
<td>9,086</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6/1979</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>6,093</td>
<td>7,461</td>
<td>13,554</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/1979</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>6,093</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>16,893</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbulwar</td>
<td>4/1979</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>21,376</td>
<td>7,546</td>
<td>28,922</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguiu</td>
<td>1980-</td>
<td>1082</td>
<td>38,679</td>
<td>35,547</td>
<td>74,226</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1082</td>
<td>38,679</td>
<td>35,547</td>
<td>74,226</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In February, while the craft adviser was away on holiday, the financial situation of Ernabella Arts became poor because the expenditure on wages was high although the production of batik slowed down considerably. Subsequently, income from sales did not flow into Ernabella Arts. Realizing the situation, the community adviser told the craft women that the C.D.E.P. funds were abundant, so the community would be able to help the Craft Room's financial difficulty by paying the wages of all the craft workers. Furthermore, a wage rise of 20% was announced for all the community workers around the same time. However, in contradiction to this largesse, the accountant claimed that the community was almost bankrupt because of over spending of the C.D.E.P. fund. At the end, the money ran out for a short while and the council had to ask the store manager to lend some money from the store to cover community workers' wages. This incident caused a lot of tension among the community adviser and the accountant over the allocation of C.D.E.P. funds and nobody, neither other European staff nor Aborigines had any clear idea on how much money could be spent on wages each week. Often the two staff made contradictory statements about the financial situation of the community causing problems which affected other sectors of the community.
European staff and confusion in the community. The Aboriginal people were constantly worried as to whether there would be enough money for wages.

In spite of those problems it is true that the C.D.E.P. has made a positive contribution to Ernabella since its inception. First of all, the number of jobs available in the community certainly increased after the start of the project. Through the training which was organized with the fund, the people acquired various skills and a substantial contribution was made to community management by the Aboriginal workers. For example, in the council office, three women were trained to be book keepers and eventually the council decided not to employ a full-time European book-keeper. In this sense, the C.D.E.P. helped the "Aboriginalization" of labour within the community.

Another advantage of the C.D.E.P. in Ernabella is that women are able to acquire employment in the community with the same conditions as men. Table 5-9 shows the ratio of male and female workers to the adult population in four Aboriginal communities including Ernabella.

**Table 5-9: Labour force in four Aboriginal communities**

(Sources: Pukatja Community record for Ernabella Young(1981) for Yuendumu, Willowra & Numbulwar)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Male workers</th>
<th>Female workers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1(%)</th>
<th>2(%)</th>
<th>3(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernabella</td>
<td>6/1983</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuendumu</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willowra</td>
<td>1/1979</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6/1979</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbulwar</td>
<td>4/1979</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: 1 = Male workers/ Adult male 2 = Female workers/ Adult female 3 = Workers/ Adult population)

Ernabella figures not only show a higher percentage of adults working, but also indicate a high female participation rate in employment, with 65.7% of adult women working in Ernabella, a figure much higher than those of the other Aboriginal communities. Furthermore, in Ernabella, more women than men are engaged in employment.
The high female participation rate in employment is not a recent phenomenon in Ernabella. As I have described in Chapter 2, the craft industry had been providing employment opportunities for the women since its start in the late 1940s. In 1970, according to Peterson, the number of female workers exceeded that of male (Peterson, 1977: 142). In this sense, the situation was already similar to that of 1983 in 1970. However, there exists a clear change in the degree of economic and social contributions that the women were making between these two periods.

In 1970, in spite of a large number of women employed in the mission, their work areas were limited. In 1970, 93 women were employed. However, 84 of them were craft workers, and the rest were in a limited range of jobs: four sheep minders, one hospital worker, one baker, one teacher and two domestic workers. Also the economic return from women's employment was much lower than men's. Male workers' average weekly wages were about $21. On the other hand, women's earnings were considerably lower. For craft workers, the total weekly wage bill was only $200, giving a paltry $2.40 per craft woman per week (Ibid.).

In 1983, the situation was different. A large number of women still participated in the workforce, just as in 1970. However, the degree of their economic and social contribution to the community has increased considerably. The work area the women participated in was not limited to craft work and a few other jobs. Some of the women worked in community administration, such as the council office and the bank. The clinic and school also employed women. These jobs not only paid top hourly wages but also are important for community welfare. In this way, the contribution of women workers to the community has increased, and the role of women in employment has become not only important but indispensable.

The high degree of female participation in employment in Ernabella seems to have its roots in the craft industry, which has been continually offering training opportunities for the women. There are three aspects to the high female participation rate in employment. Firstly, the women have been able to retain their direct access to resources for their livelihood through participating in employment since the start of the craft industry. Although originally the wages the women received from craft work were much lower than the average male wage, the women did not have to depend totally on their husbands. Secondly, craft work provided an introductory training to other wage employment for the women in the mission. All girls who left school used to be recruited to craft work. During their training in craft work, they
acquired experience of the European work style through providing labour and receiving wages. This training and the experience they acquired gave some women confidence in their abilities in a work situation and they eventually tried out new types of work in the community. Lastly, relating to the previous point, the accumulation of experience and knowledge acquired in employment appeals to the people's highly valued concept of being "knowledgeable" (ninti). Thus, women are often very proud of their employment history and they often told me in detail the types of work they had previously done.

A final advantageous aspect of the C.D.E.P. is that it is a good system to distribute available cash among members of the community. In principle, the C.D.E.P. can offer every employable member of the community, both male and female, direct access to a cash income. Actually, the number of workers in Ernabella was much more than the number of men who would be entitled to unemployment benefits in a conventional system. This point is clearly shown in Table 5-10, which gives detailed figures of a wage analysis made by the community office for the week ending November 18th, 1982.

Wages for the workers shown in the table were all paid from the C.D.E.P. fund with the exception of store workers and some of the Ernabella Arts workers who received wages from revenue. The Table shows some interesting aspects of wage distribution in the community. Despite the differences in working areas, the average weekly employment in each area was about 15 hours per worker and the average income earned, $78.81, was quite similar among the different types of jobs. When this average weekly wage is compared with the standard rate for a pensioner, $77.25 a week, there is a striking similarity between these figures. A general expectation that employed members of the community could and would earn much more than pensioners disappears. From the analysis of the available figures, it seems that a result of the C.D.E.P. is to distribute the available fund evenly among the workers at the social security payment level.

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4There was no regulation in the community concerning the maximum hours of work a week.
Table 5-10: Ernabella wage analysis, week ending Nov. 18th, 1982
(Source: Pukatja Community record)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work area</th>
<th>$ earned</th>
<th>Number of workers</th>
<th>Hours worked</th>
<th>Average hourly rate($)</th>
<th>Average hours</th>
<th>Average $ earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing association</td>
<td>576.85</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>15.57</td>
<td>82.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernabella Arts</td>
<td>1036.00</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>13.72</td>
<td>57.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store</td>
<td>538.30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>15.42</td>
<td>76.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community work</td>
<td>2582.07</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>470.5</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>15.68</td>
<td>86.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises</td>
<td>660.38</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>94.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Petrol Car parts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstations</td>
<td>2488.00</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>80.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7881.60</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: Wages for Housing association, community work, enterprises and outstations were paid from the C.D.E.P. fund. Part of Ernabella Arts wages were also paid by the fund.)

5.4 The craft industry in the Ernabella economy

Table 5-10 indicated that 18 women out of 100 community workers were employed in batik production; this number indicates that the Craft Room was not the major employer of women any more. Among different types of jobs available in the community, batik production still offers the largest number of position for women, but the craft workers are no longer the majority of female workers any more. Their income does not contribute a substantial part of the community income. As Table 5-5 showed, batik producers' wages were only 5% of the total community income. Thus, although part of the batik producers received their wages from the sales, the importance of the batik industry as an income source to the community was no bigger than any other employment opportunity available in Ernabella.

The average weekly income of the batik workers at $57.55, was substantially lower than the community average of $78.81. I think the lower average resulted from two factors: first, there were more younger workers doing batik work who received the lowest rates as junior workers; second, some women worked less than 10 hours a
week and received low weekly wages, either because they were still in training or because they had family responsibilities with young children. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the flexible work schedule batik production offers was quite an advantage for those women who had various commitments to their families. Yet, at the same time, this meant some women earned as little as $30 to $40 a week when they could not work regularly.

Although the average wage for the batik producers was lower than the rest, a different picture emerges when each worker's income is examined. The women who work on the batik production regularly (see Chapter 3) earned at least the average wage as compared with the rest of the community workers. For 1982, the average weekly income of 14 regular workers was $77 which was almost the same as the community average. Therefore, it is quite possible for the women who work regularly to earn at least the same level of weekly wages as the community average. Moreover, some skilled batik workers receive better wages which are between $100 and $120 a week. Thus, it is likely that the potential for earning higher wages than the average provides a strong incentive to seek employment in batik production, especially for the women who are not qualified for other high wage jobs in the community.

As for artefact producers, the analysis in the previous chapter showed that earnings could not produce a living wage. Thus, almost all the producers had some other constant and substantial income either from employment or social security and the income from artefact production must be considered to be supplementary.

5.5 Social roles of the craft industry

As far as wages go, there are some types of job available for women where they could receive better wages than most of the batik workers. In the clinic, the school or the community office, women could receive top wages through working with the European staff, as their assistants. Since they are trained to acquire and accumulate special knowledge and skills, their hourly rates were high in the scale. In addition, since their working hours tend to be almost the same as the European staff, they work longer hours compared with average workers. Consequently, their weekly wages were much higher than the community average. The women in these jobs were required to have a good command of English, some basic arithmetic, punctuality and regular attendance at work. Women who do not have a chance to acquire such knowledge, or whose circumstances do not allow them to be punctual and regular in attendance, would find it hard to retain these jobs.
In such circumstances, batik production provides excellent alternative employment. The batik workers have access to a reasonable income even if they do not have a good command of English or are not punctual. For example, Ann had six children; the youngest was still at pre-school. In addition to her family responsibility, she was not an outgoing person and her command of English was not good. In this sense, she would not fit into employment at the school or office. Yet, she could regularly earn more than $100 a week at the Craft Room because her work was consistent and good. Another example was Alice who had three small children and was expecting a fourth. As with Ann, Alice was very quiet and would not have fitted in any of the jobs working with European advisers. However, with her talent in art, she was one of the top workers in Ernabella Arts. If there were not the batik work, it would be very difficult for these women to find adequate employment. Furthermore, the batik work offers them a chance to earn a higher level of income than the community average.

Similarly, artefact production provides the means to earn some cash for both men and women regardless of their employment or social security status. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the employment structure of the artefact production is very informal and there is no guarantee of receiving cash just by providing labour. However, the artefact producers seem to enjoy their involvement in and management of the production process and marketing activities. Since there is no other employment available in the community which Aboriginal people can take charge of completely, the artefact industry not only gives an alternative means to earn money but also a chance to develop and realize various activities using their own initiative.

Lastly, the craft industry has a social significance as the major productive activity carried out for economic exchange. The only other production for sale in Ernabella was of grapes and vegetables grown at the farm managed by an Aboriginal family. Their products were mainly consumed within the community. On the other hand, batik and artefacts are sold in the wider Australian market, which means the existence of economic transactions between the Aborigines in Ernabella and the outside world. Although the scale of this transaction is not sufficiently large enough to establish a strong and stable economic basis for the community, it indicates two things. One is that the Aboriginal people are able to participate directly in the wider Australian economy not only as consumers but more positively as producers. Another is that the craft industry is actually producing objects which are for sale and
bringing back cash to the community. Although the batik industry is heavily subsidised, it is still capable of paying about half of the workers' wages from its revenue. The artefact industry is going strongly even though it does not receive any substantial financial or administrative help directly from the government. In this sense, the craft industry indicates that the Ernabella economy is not totally dependent on subsidies from the state.

5.6 Aboriginal women and "work"

In Ernabella, the women still produce artefacts even though there are employment opportunities available for them with better hourly returns than carving, and there was no sign of dwindling production. Moreover, some women intentionally choose to do carving when wage employment opportunities are open for them. A good example which illustrate this situation was Dorothy's case. She was one of the top batik producers and her hourly rate at the Ernabella Arts was $6.50. Yet, sometimes, she stayed away from the Craft Room and worked on artefacts at home. For example, in July 1983, she did not work on batik at all for a few weeks in spite of constant requests from the craft adviser to come back. The adviser explained that Dorothy just wanted a break from batiking. Another explanation which can be given was that her elderly father was camping in her yard at that time and he needed a lot of attention. Yet, even after these specific situations had changed, I saw a similar pattern of work: she worked on carving when she could do batiking and earn $6.50 an hour. This is one example, but it was quite common to see a similar pattern among the other women, too. They engaged in artefact making when they could earn better wages through community employment.

In the community, there was no regulation on the maximum number of hours an Aboriginal worker could work. Therefore, if anybody wanted to work 35 hours a week, there was no problem. Yet, the working hours of the Aborigines in different types of jobs interestingly averaged out at around 15 hours a week as I have pointed out. During the fieldwork, I often heard comments and complaints made by the European staff about the lack of enthusiasm and responsibility of Aboriginal workers. They often said, "Work is there to be done, but nobody wants to do it." Such comments, in many cases, lead to criticisms that the Aborigines are apathetic and irresponsible.

Contrastingly, in spite of the low economic return, the women work on artefact production with eagerness and enthusiasm. How is Dorothy's choice to work on
artefacts to be explained when she could earn more than twice as much doing batik? In order to understand the situation fully, it is important to examine the difference in attitudes and concepts between white Australians and the Aborigines towards work and employment.

An important aspect to take into consideration in understanding Aboriginal people's working patterns and attitudes is how they see "work" itself and furthermore, how their concept is different from the general concept prevalent among white Australians. Throughout the history of Ernabella, the most strongly emphasized concept by missionaries and European staff has been the work ethic. Working itself has been regarded as a virtue and a valuable deed. This way of thinking has come out especially strongly in Ernabella because the Presbyterian Church itself is noted for its emphasis on hard-work and frugality. Even after the mission ceased its operation, most of the community staff was recruited through the Uniting Church. It was quite normal therefore for these staff members to believe in the work ethic which has been a strong tradition in Protestantism and to regard their role in the community as spreading this ethic to the Aborigines.

In addition to the work ethic, both missionaries and the present community staff possess a certain idea of "what is work" and apply their definition of work in community management. Therefore, in the mission period, any activities which did not relate to the mission were not classified as "work." The Aborigines could go for hunting or gathering for themselves, but, from the missionaries' point of view, they were not working. A similar definition is applied under the C.D.E.P. at present. Hunting and gathering or ritual activities are regarded more as recreational activities which should be practiced on weekends and after work. Gardening in the community to grow grapes and tomatoes is considered as work and workers are paid wages from C.D.E.P. However, collecting witchetty grubs and berries are regarded as leisure activities.

In addition, both missionaries and European staff as well as the government believe that community work and employment will bring about economic change in the society and eventually lead to self-sufficiency. During the mission period, employment was seen as rescuing the Aborigines from detribalization by preventing them becoming dependent on hand-outs from white Australians. Employment under C.D.E.P. is also regarded as an alternative to unemployment benefit which people call "sit-down money." Thus, by working for the community, the people actually earn
their living rather than counting on social security cheques. However, in reality, self-sufficiency has not been realised. With the limited income within the community, there is no other option but to depend on government subsidies to generate and maintain the current level of employment.

Lastly, the missionaries and government agencies which fund the community consider the employment programmes should be effective in improving not only the economic side but also the social side of the community. Thus, during the mission period, it was thought that employment would help people to adjust to sedentary living in the settlement, which would in turn lead to better education and health, which however has not always eventuated. Similarly, at present, with employment incomes, people are expected to raise their living standard by spending their money to gain better housing and health care as well as better access to material possessions. However, major purchases tend to be cars and videos. In addition, another aspect which has been emphasized often is that work and employment would give the Aborigines self-respect and pride in themselves. Thus, according to the D.A.A., the community is able to "combat the social problems caused by idleness combined with the payment of unemployment benefits" (D.A.A., 1978:1)

Aboriginal attitudes to work are different. They do not detest work itself, indeed they are often proud of the experience and knowledge they have acquired from their jobs. Yet, generally speaking, Aborigines do not work in the community to achieve social status among their own people or to accumulate money to secure their social status. Primarily, they work to earn their living. Consequently, they do not work longer hours than necessary to meet their needs in daily life or achieve savings for a particular target. They might think employment would give some solution to the social problems they have at present, but they do not see "working for the community" itself as providing the most effective answer for coping with the various problems.

For the Aborigines, it seems that social relationships have ultimate importance in maintaining a stable society. Peterson has already pointed this out in his study of the Aboriginal community economy in Central Australia in 1970 (1977:145). Activities, such as hunting, gathering and various ceremonies provide chances for the Aborigines to establish and develop their social relationships. During these activities, they acquire traditional knowledge of their environment and their culture through those who are related to them. People have opportunities to establish and maintain their social relationships while they engage in those activities.
On the other hand, the wage employment currently available in the community does not seem to provide any chances for the Aborigines to establish or strengthen their social relationships. Through my observation of batik workers during seven months of fieldwork, I realized the women did not develop new social networks based on their employment which were important enough to lead to further activities as a group. They were friendly to each other at the workshop and there did not exist any hostile competitiveness among the workers. Yet, the social ties were still based on their kinship rather than the social relationships they establish in the work place. Even at the workshop, closely related kin usually work together most of the time by sitting close to each other. Once outside the workshop, each woman went back to her own family and relatives for any other activities. Thus, they do not seem to regard their colleagues at work as providing a relationship as important as their family and relatives. On the other hand, among white Australians, work has a crucial role not only in providing income, but also in widening the social network. Often, the network they acquire at employment is valued as much as or more than that of their relations. Thus, the Aborigines and the white Australians have a different perspective on where they seek to develop their important social relationships. From the Aboriginal people’s point of view, community employment does not nourish the social relationships they value.

In contrast to wage employment in the community, as I argued in Chapter 4, artefact production is carried out in a social and work environment of which the people have a thorough knowledge. Through working on carving, the women develop and maintain their social relationships which are also relevant in other spheres of their daily lives. In addition to this aspect, artefact work offers opportunities to explore new activities in marketing without any supervision by Europeans. I argue, therefore, that these unique aspects of artefact production and marketing attract many women even though they could receive better hourly returns in wage employment.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the socio-economic change the Pitjantjatjara people experienced in Ernabella since their contact with white Australians. I have focused on the development of the craft industry and the involvement of Aboriginal women in it, both in the past and at present.

In Chapter 2, I traced the history of the mission from its outset and discussed why, in the late 1940s, the mission decided to establish the craft industry. In the discussion, I pointed out the failure of Duguid and Love to predict the consequences of social change on the Aboriginal society and of the effect of the mission's influence on the people. In spite of their liberal attitude to the Aborigines, I argued that they underestimated the influence the mission would have. By providing food and other goods to the Aborigines in return for attending mission activities, the mission was inadvertently creating a desire for and dependence on European goods. As a result of the Areyonga incident, the missionaries realized that their intentions did not correspond with Aboriginal needs or perceptions. At the same time, this incident showed that Aborigines would utilize their own information network and mobility to gain better access to European resources. In this respect, Aborigines themselves were able to change the direction of mission policy. The Areyonga incident also highlights the dilemma in which the mission, found itself, where by its very existence, it caused unwanted changes to Aboriginal society. In order to secure its own existence, the mission officially adopted the assimilation policy and aimed at settling the population in Ernabella and providing employment to teach skills and the work ethic.

The craft industry was established for women in order to achieve these purposes. Yet, from its the outset, it had problems of financial viability and in finding a suitable product. In spite of those problems, I argued that the industry played an important role in involving women in the socio-economic change the mission went through in the fifties and the sixties. Lastly, I pointed out that Aboriginal people's economic dependence on the church and the government increased
greatly during the assimilation period. Various projects were carried out in the mission, but they transformed the Aboriginal society and its economy without achieving the aim of providing an alternative economic structure which would eventually provide economic self-sufficiency for the community.

In Chapter 3, I pointed out both positive and negative sides of the batik industry. It has become clear that women have autonomy and control over batik production and they show pride and confidence in their knowledge and skill in the production process. Furthermore, the work itself provides a chance for women to develop and express their artistic ability. Such a job is not available in other sectors of employment in the community. In addition, the working pattern and the work environment at the Craft Room fits well with their responsibilities to family and children, so that they are able to keep working even with small children. The batik industry enables women with children to retain their own independent source of income.

However, although there are many positive aspects to the production of batik the economic prospects for both the industry and the workers are not so good. The industry has been suffering from stagnant development for the past six years. This means that although the workers are becoming dissatisfied with their income there is little that the craft adviser can do about it. The workers' incomes have not shown any significant increase for three years and some workers have expressed their dissatisfaction by leaving the job. Yet, when I examined the production rate of workers, the figure show that their wages are already heavily subsidised. The workers produced batik goods valued at less than 50% of the wages they received. In order to cover the cost without reducing the economic return for the workers, the industry has no choice other than to depend on government subsidies in order to sustain the operation. My analysis showed that despite the relative autonomy of the women as producers, the industry is still divided on a European manager/Aboriginal worker basis. Workers do not take an active part in management and marketing and the management structure places great dependence on the craft adviser. More training would be necessary if the women are to become involved in aspects of the industry other than production.

In Chapter 4, I examined and analyzed women's involvement in the artefact industry. After discussing the women's increased participation in the production since the early 1970s, I examined the economic return the women receive at present.
Their economic return from the work was much lower than from other employment, especially batik work, and their total income from it was not sufficient even to provide basic necessities. The stagnant development of artefact sales through Ernabella Arts over the past ten years suggests that the prospects for the industry are not good. However, as I have argued, the women are not merely accepting the situation passively. They participate in the production process and marketing activities positively and with self-motivated enthusiasm. The examples I presented illustrated that the women are able to manage their own economic activities, at least at a local level and that the artefacts they produce relate to their own cultural knowledge and perception of their natural and social environment.

In Chapter 5, the role played by the batik and artefact industries in the community economy were discussed. In spite of a high proportion of income in Ernabella being derived from wages, the community economy is heavily dependent on government subsidies. The C.D.E.P. scheme which plays the most important role in the community economy at present, provides opportunities for Aboriginal women to earn wages. However, I argued that economic development is constrained within the threshold of subsidies the government allocated. C.D.E.P. funds are kept to a level equivalent to the level of social security income benefits payable to the community. The consequence of this is that although the level of income evens out at the social security level for the majority of the working population, there is no scope for raising the level without further dependence on subsidies.

Batik and artefact production not only provide the sole commodities being produced in Ernabella, but also provide opportunities to women to earn cash. Batik production, is an important source of alternative employment for women, especially those unable to work in the community administrative positions. Using their artistic skills, batik workers are able to earn competitive wages. Finally, I compared the attitude to "work" between Europeans and Aborigines at Ernabella and argued that their expectations and attitudes are quite different.

After fifty years of economic changes, Aboriginal people have lost their subsistence economy based on hunting and gathering, but have not acquired a new economic base which is able to support them independently of government subsidies. The prospect of establishing a self-sufficient economy is quite remote. Certainly, the craft industry itself cannot solve the problems since it is either heavily subsidized or provides a very low return.
However, it would be wrong to conclude from this that development of the craft industry has been a failure. Although economically it has a long way to go before it breaks even, in social, educational and occupational terms, it has been in many ways successful. Even at the individual level the success of the industry should be assessed in more than strictly economic terms. The high participation rate of women in wage employment at present is not simply due to economic necessity. The women clearly show pride in their ability and working knowledge as well as in their ability to earn their own income. At the same time, the women have a chance to improve their knowledge and skill in the job training they receive. In this way, they are able to improved their status through their jobs as well as their incomes. The fact that the women are already in the workforce makes it more feasible for them to take on new types of job. Moreover, since they themselves appreciate the accumulation of knowledge, it is not so hard for them to find the motivation to gain further training and so improve their job performance.

Although the craft industry does not provide grounds for optimism about the future for economic self-sufficiency, it is still of great significance. As visual objects, both batiks and artefacts appeal, not only to white Australians but also to Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal women who live in remote areas of Australia, there are not many opportunities to both express themselves and demonstrate their existence to white Australians in southern cities. Under such circumstances, the batik and artefacts they produce are the expression of their own creativity, which provides to non-Aborigines a new perspective in understanding Aboriginal people's culture. At the same time, the Aboriginal people's own appreciation of batik and artefacts is heightened by the realization that their products have a wide audience among white Australians. Furthermore, understanding of the production process and the women's involvement in various aspects of the industry should provide a better appreciation of their skills and a deeper understanding of current Aboriginal culture. During the work process, especially in artefact production, women combine traditional aspects of their gathering activities and work organization, with innovative and positive involvement in marketing. Thus, the way the women organize themselves illustrates clearly how Aboriginal women today are trying to harmonize traditional and contemporary roles in their economic activities.

My analysis of the way the women participate in batik and artefact production brought out the difference in their involvement. In batik production, in spite of their autonomy in the production process itself, women's participation in other aspects of
the industry remained minimal. By contrast, in artefact production, the women control both their own production and also their marketing at the local level. This difference leads to the question of how the involvement of the women in the batik industry can be increased. I believe the level of participation of the batik workers in management and marketing should definitely be increased. Dissatisfaction with their wages, which was clearly expressed by the women, was mainly due to the lack of information and understanding of the industries' structure and its economic situation. Encouraging further participation should enable women to appreciate more clearly what they are engaged in and where they stand.

On the other hand, the complete Aboriginalization of the industry needs careful consideration. I pointed out at the beginning of this thesis that the Aboriginal art and craft industry is at the interface of two cultures. The present structure clearly shows that what the Aborigines produce is bought by non-Aborigines, and this structure will not change for the foreseeable future. Consequently, the successful management of the industry and marketing of the products requires deep understanding on both sides as well as competence in handling business matters. In this respect, the involvement of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the industry will most likely provide the best approach to matters which cross the interface between the two societies.

It is beyond the scope of my thesis to propose an alternative approach to achieve self-sufficiency in remote Aboriginal community economies. Presumably, in spite of the limitation I have pointed out, creating and maintaining employment for Aboriginal people will be a main focus of Aboriginal policies. Yet, my examination revealed that the way white Australians define and value "work" is not the same as the Aboriginal person's perception of "work". In Ernabella, this Aboriginal perception of "work" has been maintained even though the Christian work ethic was strongly promoted throughout the mission's history. Therefore, the implementation of employment programmes should be carried out carefully with this difference taken into account.

The question I posed at the beginning, of how the Aborigines can attain the same standard of living as white Australians without losing their cultural identity, remains unanswered at the end of my thesis. It seems that nobody can answer it except the Aborigines themselves. My analysis of Ernabella history showed that attempts to provide the solution by the missionaries or the government have not
achieved their aims. Although the craft industry in Ernabella does not provide a solution now, or in the immediate future, it offers the women a chance to earn income as well as expressing their artistic creativity. The women choose to work on the production of batik and artefacts and they are proud of their work. By engaging in work that they are good at and enthusiastic about, the women are in a position to learn about and participate in wider activities relating to craft production. It will take a long time with much trial and error before they can find the answer to the ultimate question. Assistance, both financial and technical, needs to be given to the people during the process. Yet, I believe the answer should be determined by the Aboriginal people themselves. The craft industry in Ernabella provides a good working base for this purpose.
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