

CSSH NOTES

Diane Austin-Broos, *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past: Invasion, Violence, and Imagination in Indigenous Central Australia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

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This masterful study brings together anthropology and history to examine two critical moments of change that forever shaped the Western Arrernte world. In the wake of the invasion of Central Australia toward the end of the nineteenth century, the first moment involved the Western Arrernte's transition from a mobile, hunter-gatherer existence to sedentary, mission station life. Some fifty years later, with the advent of the federal government's policy of self-determination, the second moment entailed a state-sponsored "return to country." While this phase of history brought land rights and the cash economy to the Western Arrernte, namely in the form of royalty payments and benefits from the welfare state, it eventually led to their current marginalization in the market society. Austin-Broos's primary goal in *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past* is to account for the Western Arrernte's experience of both these moments of change. This approach makes a significant contribution to ethnographic scholarship on the Arrernte, which has focused mainly on the continuities of tradition, and to the historical study of Aboriginal Australia, which has tended to elide indigenous interpretations of events.

Austin-Broos skillfully accomplishes her goal by in each of the book's nine chapters presenting "ethnographic arguments," or what she calls "soundings" of Western Arrernte change. Compared with the standard historical narrative that follows a strict temporal sequence, this more innovative method of presentation, as Austin-Broos rightly asserts, allows for a fine-grained analysis of the intimate and the local in both the past and present. Each sounding draws from fieldwork spanning nearly twenty years, which is in turn used to inform the extensive archival and ethnographic material on the Arrernte past. The chapters are organized into three sections, the first and third of which address, respectively, the transition to a sedentary life, and to modernity. The most powerful portrayal of the structural and everyday violence inflicted by invasion and poorly planned state policy comes in the middle of the book, with its examination of social suffering and its implications for Western Arrernte sociality and the subject today.

Grounded in Heideggerian thought, Austin-Broos's main argument is that the social transformation of Western Arrernte life over the course of the

twentieth century has entailed an “ontological shift.” This shift is a passage “between worlds”: from a world that defines the subject as a relative and invests value in place to one that defines the subject as a market individual and invests value in capital and portable things. However, this language of “passage” should not be taken to mean that the market order has completely erased the hunter-gatherer order. The current milieu is ultimately the product of a long-standing competition between two “regimes of value” and ways of being, which continues to shape Western Arrernte life. In short, Western Arrernte people are “modern in their own terms but still enclaved and kin-based” (p. 205). So how is this continuity of identity maintained when the Western Arrernte exist in a world overturned by structural and everyday violence? Distinguishing this book from other ways of explaining continuity in the Aboriginalist literature, Austin-Broos argues that it is achieved through the work of imagination, especially metaphor and homology. Imagination enables the Western Arrernte to make connections to their past and to create new certainties for the future. A larger point that Austin-Broos makes in the book’s conclusion is that the capacity to account for indigenous experience—framed as ontological shift—is what anthropology can give back to history.

Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past is written in an engaging style with clear and eloquent prose. Austin-Broos combs through the historical material with meticulous care and presents vivid accounts of the day-to-day struggles of contemporary life. Indeed, I could find nothing wrong with the book. The final chapter of the third section makes the book very timely since it addresses the violence caused by the most recent developments in federal government policy. *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past* will appeal to anthropologists and historians alike, particularly scholars interested in indigenous-state relations, missionization, kinship studies, and economy. It is also a must-read for those involved in indigenous policy formation in Australia, should they care to listen.

———Carolyn Schwarz, Anthropology, State University of New York at
Potsdam

Youval Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, Jane Marie Todd, trans. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2009, 307 pp.

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The study of world slavery is presently vigorous. Rotman’s *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World* represents the most ambitious treatment of Byzantine slavery during the centuries between Justinian and the crusades, and thus addresses a serious gap. The investigation opens by outlining three ways of conceptualizing slavery: economic, social, and legal. *Byzantine Slavery* attempts to dislodge the “economic model,” here a somewhat