This paper argues that the interaction between Lutheran missionaries and Arrernte people at Hermannsburg mission was shaped by different body practices and discourses. Notions of sickness, causation and healing were central to the ideas of the body. Both missionaries and Arrernte paid attention to these somatic states in their social interactions. Lutherans attempted to reinforce an individualistic notion of the body, while Arrernte people continued to believe in the fundamental interconnectedness of the person with ancestors and kin. In the new social environment of the missions, the indigenous socio-somatic view of a person remained flexible enough to accommodate aspects of Christian ontology and ritual.

Following the publication of Foucault’s theory of power, most historians interested in the body have studied it primarily as a site of subjugation and dominance. This approach has proved to be very valuable in exploring the everyday techniques of body control. Indeed, the mission system could be explained as a colonial extension of Foucault’s two classic regimes of power; the hospital, and the prison. In this colonial context, most scholars discussing religious change and its somatic manifestations for indigenous people have successfully applied Foucault’s paradigm to tease out the ways in which missionaries have reformed and disciplined indigenous bodies.¹

But an emphasis on power and subjugation does not fully explain indigenous understandings of the body. Western Arrernte perceptions of self and body emphasized a person’s spiritual and somatic interdependence with kin and ancestors. This body concept is difficult to grasp when relying on Foucault only. More helpful are Thomas Csordas’ views of the body as

embodiment of social and religious relationships. The belief that the body is a reincarnation of an ancestor and the acknowledgement that witchcraft can result in somatic changes as a result of witchcraft are only two examples of this social embodiment among the Arrernte. This social character of self and body survived in the postcontact period, but it started to reflect the changed social and religious environment. Arrernte people came to consider the missionary and the Christian God as affecting their bodily states.

This paper argues that the interactions between Lutheran missionaries and indigenous people at Hermannsburg mission were shaped by body practices and discourse. These relationships could be symbolically re-ordered in discussing, for example, the state of the body and the causality of illness and death. Indigenous people responded to the hegemonic missionary discourse by implementing several strategies: the incorporation of new concepts into existing belief systems; resistance; and what Tim Rowse has called mediation — the ability to interpret social changes ‘according to their own view of the world.’ These strategies were all at work during the period from the 1920s to the 1940s; a time of prolonged drought, famine and illness in central Australia. Sickness and illness constituted important tropes for missionaries and indigenes because both believed that the state of the body reflected the state of moral relationships. Both employed healing rituals to re-adjust disturbed relationships. In this time of crisis and changed power relations, the mission pushed out beyond its immediate locality through the agency of Arrernte evangelists.

**Lutheran Views on Bodies, Healing and Death**

Among the wide range of control mechanisms established at Hermannsburg mission in central Australia, the visible corporal change of the Arrernte was regarded by the missionary as proof that an internal spiritual change had occurred. Thus, in missionary literature the contrast between heathen and Christian was often constructed in relation to bodily matters. For Lutherans, the dichotomy of heathen and Christian bodies reflected the dichotomy of their respective moral states. As on other missions, the Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg regarded the correction of the indigenes’ body as one of

3. Rowse has coined this term specifically in regard to the indigenous reinterpretation of the rationing system at Hermannsburg mission, but I think it is a very useful concept to clarify indigenous responses in other areas as well. Tim Rowse, *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 1998), 81.
their primary endeavours. Lutheran rhetoric and practice echoed the main themes that Richard Eves discusses so convincingly for Methodist missions in Papua New Guinea. At Hermannsburg, the constant scrutiny of daily moral practice applied not only to converts but also to those who had enrolled in baptismal classes.

Achieving outward signs of a reformed indigenous body consumed considerable missionary energy. The distribution of rations played a major role in attracting Arrernte and neighbouring peoples to the mission and in the formation of power relations at the mission. This civilizing project could only be accompanied through constant control and supervision. Instilling European table manners was one method to discipline the body, as Elias notes in his analysis of forms of social control in medieval Europe. The civilization project at Hermannsburg mission was attempted with similar rigor. Pastor F.W. Albrecht, a missionary who arrived in 1926, noted his dissatisfaction with the behaviour at mealtimes. Arrernte men and women in employment, school children and the elderly received a meal three times per day, which was distributed from a communal kitchen where some of the Arrernte women worked as cooks. The missionary set out at once to discipline these meal times:

In the morning and at lunchtime I went to the eating-house to look at the distribution of the food. What a terrible sight! Like a herd of cattle they rushed to the cauldron with a terrible loud noise. Among them, teacher Heinrich yelled with a thundering voice. For a moment it seemed to be quiet, only to become even noisier. A female cook distributed the soup. A lot was spilled and stuck to the cooking pot, the bench and was trampled on by the masses. Some sat down with their food on these terribly dirty tables, eating the soup with their fingers. Others did the same in the sand in front of the eating-house. But the majority took the food back to the camp where the sharing really started. All these loafers were provided for! All day long they would laze around and then beg for their food. I felt sorry especially for the children who had to share the small amount they got.

Albrecht’s answer to this disorder was to organize everybody into a scheme of allocated seats at the dining table. “They eat by the light of the lanterns. We first distributed everything, then they were called in table by table. It went well. Everything was clean, loafers got nothing and this terrible pushing stopped.”

The regulation of food distribution was not only a control of manners; it was also an attack on Arrernte kinship obligations. The sharing of food was a social obligation well observed by Arrernte and other indigenous groups. But

7. For an extensive discussion of the rationing system at Hermannsburg mission see Rowse, 80–91.
10. F. W. Albrecht diary, 29 May 1926, Lutheran Archives, Adelaide (henceforth LA; where indicated I have translated documents from the original German).
11. Albrecht diary, 29 May 1926 (my translation).
these kin obligations transgressed Lutheran notions of earning one’s food. Missionary Albrecht had long been critical of Arrernte children and adults in employment, who received meals from the mission in the eating hall, and who shared their food with relatives who did not work for the mission and were thus classified as loafers by the missionary:

Today we saw a fine result of the new order already: the loafers are nervous. People are streaming to the teacher’s wife to ask for fancy work. Twenty-seven went bush, to return only on Saturday. The camp has become so quiet, and everybody knows what he has to do. It looks great, compared with the mess which we found when we came. In the eating-house everyone knows already his place. It’s a pleasure to see our children eating at their places.\textsuperscript{12}

Although the difference between “loafers” and “deserving” food receivers was not explicitly stated as a contrast between heathen and Christian, the missionary made it clear that he regarded loafing as unChristian and undesirable behaviour.

The concern with reforming the indigenous body produced the need to demarcate Christian and heathen bodies. This was reflected in spatial arrangements at the station, in church and in the regulation of marriages. Non-Christians were allocated a separate campsite, approximately two miles away from the mission station at the site of the present-day Ntaria community. The seating arrangements in church not only divided men from women, but also the baptized from the unconverted, by placing non-Christians at the back of the church. Such separation of indigenous bodies was not confined to the church, it was especially important in sexual matters and marriage. The blessing of marital unions between Christians and non-Christians remained a widely debated issue for the Lutherans throughout the 1920s. Successive generations of missionaries did not always arrive at the same conclusions. There were also discussions about whether or not children of these unions could be baptized.\textsuperscript{13}

Punishment also aimed to discipline the indigenous body. Corporal punishment and the withholding of food were not uncommon. Children, in particular, were targeted for disciplinary measures. The dormitory system was part of the children’s daily lives at the mission and resistance to it could be punished with a thrashing:

Great turmoil this evening. Pastor Schaber locked the boys in. Reinhard had not been there for four nights, and now the mother had brought him back with force. But he screamed incredibly for about half an hour. Then we both went there and gave him a hiding. Before I left he had to promise me to keep quiet about it. But Clara had seen everything through the window. The boy had already previously behaved violently if he didn’t get his will. Suddenly the whole camp was in an uproar — I was accused of having beaten the boy to death. Wilfred came and demanded the key to the dormitory. We go over there and the dormitory is surrounded by blacks who angrily demand entry. Then they come towards me and threaten me with their fists, demanding that I shall never touch their children again. A terrible sight! After

\textsuperscript{12} Albrecht diary, 31 May 1926 (my translation).
\textsuperscript{13} J. Riedel diary 1929, Box 16 C 5/6, L.A.
Jakobus and others had examined the boy, I told them to come back the next day. I left under threats and insults, but I did not give in. Then Moses came in my house and expected me to say that I would at the most punish the children with three strokes, which I refused. The next morning they returned embarrassed and we put the matter behind us.\textsuperscript{14}

Corporal punishment was inflicted on adults and children alike, but it was the hitting of children that brought about open resistance. From the late 1920s the male members of the church council (most of them also evangelists) administered the corporal punishments. These were the same men who demanded more moderation from Albrecht in the example cited above. Although Albrecht refused this compromise in 1926, he realized in the following years that matters of discipline were better left to the council of old men.\textsuperscript{15}

The active involvement of Arrernte men in implementing the mission rules enabled them to exercise some degree of social control over Christians and non-Christians at the station. Their position enabled them also to negotiate forms of punishment with the missionary. In doing so, they took up the Lutheran discourse of heathen and Christian bodies, not only reinforced in daily habits of eating, marriage and disciplining but also in illness and healing.

\textbf{Lutheran Healing}

The Lutherans’ understanding of pastoral care included the duty to provide medical help for the bodies of people living on the station and those who came in to seek treatment. This had a spiritual dimension — the Lutherans imitating Christ, who healed sick bodies and raised the dead ones. Native evangelists, when spreading the Christian message, took up this rhetoric. Returning from one proselytizing trip, the evangelist Moses brought 25 people from Alice Springs to Hermannsburg. On the following Sunday he gave a sermon in which he gave an account of his journey, emphasizing his preaching and his visiting of the sick. “He spoke very detailed about how often he had preached at each place and how many people had come to listen to him. He had also visited the sick and spoken with them about eternity.”\textsuperscript{16}

Mission propaganda stressed that missionaries could overcome the distrust of indigenous people by healing their sick bodies. Such change of attitude towards Christianity was often emphasized in the case of “heathens,” who were brought to the station for medical attention. Interestingly, none of these reported cases seemed to have resulted in a formal conversion. One story tells how a Luritja man, Talku, was brought in with severe wounds after raiding cattle on a station and was treated successfully by missionary Carl Strehlow.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Albrecht diary, 28 March 1927 (my translation).
  \item \textsuperscript{15} F. W. Albrecht to Charles Duguid, 24 April 1935, correspondence Duguid-Albrecht, South Australian Museum (henceforth SAM). Albrecht wrote, “As a rule, all such offenders are handed over to the old men and they deal with them.”
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Albrecht to Riedel, 25 February 1927, Box 16 A 5/6, folder “1927,” LA (my translation). Moses’ healing activities during proselytizing journeys were also reported in the following year. “In many cases Moses attended to the sick and prayed with them. At Henbury one sick person recovered again and Moses is quite convinced that God helped him and had heard his prayer.” Lutheran Herald, 10 September 1928, 298–299.
\end{itemize}
Talku did not become a Christian, but went on to become one of the main informants for Carl Strehlow’s ethnographic work.\textsuperscript{17}

Lutheran missionary identification of sickness stressed the condition of the visible body, not invisible ailments. The duty of the missionary, and of the family of the patient, was to care for the sick person in a specific physical way, which included the provision of appropriate food, medicine and shelter. Sick people constituted a separate category in the mission rationing system, receiving boiled peas, rice with meat or dripping.\textsuperscript{18} The sick body was understood as an individual with special rights within the mission system (visit of the missionary to the camp, provision of special food and medicine). This Lutheran approach to illness was undermined by Arrernte understandings of social obligations. The Arrernte shared the special rations for the sick with healthy kin. This behaviour greatly annoyed the missionary who complained that the Arrernte did not look after the sick well enough because they left them without water or firewood and ate from the special meals provided for the sick.\textsuperscript{19} The Lutheran view of the correct treatment of the sick body also had gender implications. Arrernte observances of traditional divisions of labour, such as male hunting trips, were criticised by the Lutherans as neglecting family responsibilities towards the sick person. These obligations within extended Arrernte families also contradicted the Lutheran notion of a husband being the principal carer for his wife: \textsuperscript{20} “Even Christian men do not see anything wrong with leaving their sick wives to their fate and going hunting for a week or longer, glad to be away from the sick.”

There was really only one aspect of the Lutheran model of caring for the sick that was willingly applied by the Arrernte, and that was one which did not concern the body: prayer. Although the missionaries generally complained about the lack of indigenous interest in private prayer and devotion, they readily acknowledged that Christians and non-Christians did not object to praying for the sick. Lutheran missionaries only gradually realized that when the sick prayed in a Christian manner it was not an indication of religious change, but was additional to their own healing rituals. In 1926 pastor Albrecht still declared optimistically: “I heard repeatedly heathens saying that they pray to God. One sick man pointed with a beaming face to the top and said he is happy to know the ‘good God’. In general, people do not like to be regarded as heathens any more.” But 15 years later the missionary was more realistic about the use of prayers in the case of the sick: “There are quite a number at the Jay who are pleased to have the services on Sundays, and are glad if they are visited in times of sickness. However, there is no sign that any

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} T. G. H. Strehlow, \textit{Songs of Central Australia} (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971), xxi.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Albrecht to Friends of the Mission, 1 August 1929, LA. (Part of this letter was also published in \textit{Lutheran Herald}, 14 October 1929, 332.)
\item \textsuperscript{19} Albrecht to Friends of the Mission, 1 August 1929, LA (my translation).
\item \textsuperscript{20} For a good discussion of Lutheran ideals of gender relations see Lyndal Roper, \textit{The Holy Household} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
\item \textsuperscript{21} Albrecht to Friends of the Mission, 1 August 1929, LA (my translation).
\item \textsuperscript{22} Annual Report Albrecht, B/A collection, AA 662, Box 2 of 6, SAM (my translation).
\end{itemize}
of them would come to a decision in his life to become a Christian.”

Lutheran prayers for the sick reaffirmed rather than undermined Arrernte beliefs in the power of the word over the body.

**Arrernte Concepts of Tjurunga**

The Arrernte concept of the body was the reverse of that of the missionaries. It emphasized the relatedness of ancestors with living human beings, which found its expression in theories of witchcraft and in healing practices. The somatic interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual was symbolized in Arrernte relationships with sacred objects such as the *tjurunga*, which were held to be the physical representation of the body of an ancestor. T. G. H. Strehlow, during his fieldwork in the early 1930s, noted incidents where sacrileges of *tjurunga* storehouses were punished by death. Even accidents that occurred when young men brought the objects from their storehouses in caves or in trees were seriously punished. Strehlow relates the story of a western Arrernte man who was speared to death after he dropped a *tjurunga* when taking it from the mountain cave. Another *tjurunga*, given to Strehlow in 1932, had been accidentally chipped when it was taken out of the cave. The man responsible was later speared to death. Strehlow reports that nobody was allowed to smooth the chipped edge because “the tjurunga was regarded as the actual changed body of a ragia ancestor; and the chipped edge hence represented an injury done to this personage.”

Furthermore, ancestors could sometimes reveal their embodiments in contemporary people, recognized by the Arrernte in specific physical similarities between men and their totems. For example, a man from Hale River was reported to display his swollen joints as a sign of being the incarnation of his totem, the fierce native cat. This totemic connection was central to Arrernte

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23. Albrecht to Riedel, 5 January 1945, B/A Collection AA662, Box 4 of 6, SAM.


social life. Norman Tindale’s ethnographic notes from 1929 recorded not only
totemic affiliations of his informants, but also their knowledge of the totemic
identities of their parents. 29 This relational character of the body was central
to Arrernte concepts of illness causality. Bodily deformation and illness were
perceived to result from the breaching of rules; for instance, food prohibi-
tions, 30 or the revelation of ritual knowledge to people who were not entitled
to hear it. The latter could also affect the anthropologist’s fieldwork. T. G. H.
Strehlow admitted with concern that his informants sometimes fell ill because
they revealed songs in the presence of uninitiated men. 31

Arrernte bodies were also open to the magical influence of other people.
Charms, known as “singing”, could cause a spear to inflict a fatal wound.
Spencer gives examples of men dying of wounds that they believed were
caused by magic. 32 Arrernte believed that magical objects could cause illness
and death by invading the body. This sorcery was thought to be caused by
someone who had been angered, and a “medicine man” had to be employed
to remove the magical substance or object from the body of the victim. 33 An
Arrernte healer, according to Spencer, had to undergo a dramatic transforma-
tion of his own body through death and magical recreation, which trans-
formed his body parts into magical healing stones. 34 But the performance of
healing rituals was not restricted to specialists. According to T. G. H.
Strehlow, both men and women used healing charms. 35 Strehlow lists verses
that were sung by older women over females suffering high temperatures
while the patient was anointed with fat and red ochre. Magic was implied in
the healing process and the cooling of the feverish body was believed to eman-
ate from ancestral places evoked in the healing song. 36

Witchcraft was a widely accepted explanation for illness. Missionary
sources document the continuity of witchcraft beliefs in the postcontact era,
described as rituals of “pointing the bone” or “singing.” 37 Heinrich, the mis-
sion teacher, reported in 1923: “Rufus was very ill. Already since November
he hasn’t been well. I could not find out what was wrong with him. He has
lost weight and walks around like a bewitched black (one who has got the
bone). He was so sick that I had little hope for him. Now he is feeling bet-
ter.” 38 Heinrich framed his diagnosis in Arrernte terms. Pointing the bone was
an English expression commonly used to refer to witchcraft that resulted in

29. Norman Tindale, Hermannsburg sociological data 1929, SAM.
30. B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, The Native Tribes of Central Australia [London: Macmillan,
31. Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia, 305.
32. Spencer and Gillen, The Native Tribes, 537.
33. Spencer and Gillen, The Native Tribes, 534.
34. B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen, The Northern Tribes of Central Australia (London: Routledge/
35. Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia, 650–653.
37. Spencer describes Arrernte magical sticks and the associated curses, specifically addressing
body parts of the victim. See Spencer and Gillen, The Northern Tribes, 455–463.
38. H. A. Heinrich to J. Stolz, 29 January 1926, Box 16 A 5/5, LA (my translation).
somatic signs such as unexplained and rapid loss of weight and life force; indicators of malevolent magic.\textsuperscript{39}

Especially in periods of pandemic disease, witchcraft was frequently suspected to be the cause. As Strehlow observed:

It is impossible to assess how frequently this type of magic was employed among the Central Australian tribes before the advent of the whites. Accusations of sorcery were raised frequently enough; for all sudden deaths and wasting diseases were blamed upon known and unknown medicine men and sorcerers; and ravaging epidemics such as the measles epidemic in 1899 and the influenza epidemic of 1940 were believed to have been caused by magic.\textsuperscript{40}

In 1940 a group of Pitjantjatjara men speared an Arrernte man to death because they believed that Arrernte magic\textsuperscript{41} was responsible for the death of several Pitjantjatjara people who had succumbed to influenza.\textsuperscript{42} This case ended in court, but other cases of magic were said to have been defeated by the Christian word. Titus, an Arrernte evangelist, was reported to have prevented an avenging party from continuing revenge killings linked to the death of a ceremonial leader.\textsuperscript{43} The man had been a known healer and his sudden death during an initiation ceremony in 1926 was believed to be the result of witchcraft, which had to be avenged. According to mission sources, these hostilities had continued for several years before Titus ended them by preaching to the revenge party about Jesus, who had prayed for his enemies at the Cross.\textsuperscript{44} The missionary F. W. Albrecht asserted that the Gospel had defeated witchcraft and fears associated with it: “Since Titus stopped a retaliation party years ago by reminding them of the Gospel and Jesus, we had peace. They have never tried to kill one another again, and go now without any fear into the neighbouring territories.”\textsuperscript{45}

To the Arrernte, witchcraft was not an “expression of fear,”\textsuperscript{46} but a sign of disturbed social relationships resulting in illness and death. Droughts, pandemic diseases and high mortality, particularly among children, were interpreted as signs of crisis within the moral community. Diane Austin-Broos has shown that present-day Arrernte still consider sorcery as a possible cause of death at Hermannsburg and that, “In the case of the young they expect to find the logical reasons for death among the living and not in the will of

\textsuperscript{39} Carl Strehlow noted some of the curses of the Western Arrernte, designed to bring illness and death onto the victim. T. G. H. Strehlow suspected that these charms, which were the property of only a few sorcerers, had been given to his father by Loatjira, one of his main informants and an acknowledged ritual leader and healer. Strehlow, \textit{Aranda Traditions}, 263.

\textsuperscript{40} Strehlow, \textit{Aranda Traditions}, 264.

\textsuperscript{41} Strehlow, \textit{Aranda Traditions}, 264, footnote 42.

\textsuperscript{42} Strehlow, “Geography,” 110.

\textsuperscript{43} For a description of an Arrernte revenge party at Alice Springs in May 1901 see Spencer and Gillen, \textit{The Northern Tribes}, 556–568.

\textsuperscript{44} Albrecht, “Das Evangelium im Kampf mit der Zauberei,” n.d. B/A Collection AA662, SAM. This must have been in the mid-1930s. Albrecht’s narrative places this incident after a meeting with elders in 1935, at which Albrecht was approached by the men to allow Titus to stay at their camp as an evangelist.

\textsuperscript{45} Albrecht to Riedel, 8 August 1940, AA662, Box 4, Albrecht papers, SAM (my translation).

\textsuperscript{46} The missionary discourse on Arrernte religion is dominated by the notion of witchcraft as an expression of existential fear. See Albrecht’s unpublished paper, “Das Evangelium im Kampf mit der Zauberei.”
But as the historical records indicate, some of their parents and grandparents from the 1920s to the 1940s believed that both the malevolent magic of fellow Arrernte and the Christian God were potential causes of illness and death.

**Religious Change, Illness, and Death**

Arrernte belief in the fundamental interconnection between spiritual and physical aspects of personhood continued in the postcontact period. Rather than displacing indigenous concepts of self, body and magic, Christianity added new elements. Arrernte people explain strong emotions as being caused by hot blood, but magical words or songs can calm the body fluid. The power of the word “singing,” underlies love magic and healing (or harming) and can also cool down anger during fights. This magical power of words was also ascribed to Lutheran hymns. Teacher Heinrich reported in 1923 that:

> Although Satan tries to disturb the peace on the station occasionally, it is surprising to see how Jesus is the best shepherd and protector. Recently there had been, for example, a fight between Rosa and Albertine. For some minutes there was some uproar but before I got there I heard them singing the hymn “Ach bleib mit deiner Gnade.” As soon as the fight started, some women had surrounded the fighters and sang the hymn. [. . . ] They told me that they stopped fighting now through singing, not anymore through “jabbajabba.” The singing had a good effect because the fighters threw away their digging stick and came to me admitting “We both have sinned.”

Arrernte conceptions of the power of the word over the body were complemented by the equally important social positioning of bodies on country and in kinship systems. This system of identity construction included the Lutherans and their religion at Hermannsburg. Austin–Broos observes: “Christianity’s interiority is challenged by notions of kin on country, by a practice of located sociality. When Aranda [Arrernte] people talk about Christian social order, also understood as a Lutheran order, they also give sense to that order by seeking to locate it on country and in a particular language group.”

Similarly, the Lutheran mission staff were incorporated into Arrernte society. So teacher Heinrich wrote to the Mission Board: “I find that the blacks trust me more since I discuss your letters with them in a brotherly way. While in the past they remained more or less strangers to me, Moses is always a friend and adviser to me! Nathanael calls me younger brother and all women and children [call me] ‘ajua’ (old man, father).”

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48. T. G. H. Strehlow gives example of healing charms intended to cool the blood, *Songs of Central Australia*, 653.
49. Heinrich to Stolz, 1 February 1923, Box 16 B 1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923,” LA (my translation).
51. Heinrich to Stolz, 16 August 1923, Box 16 B 1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923,” LA (my translation). This was at a time without a permanent missionary at the station when Heinrich assumed the role of missionary and teacher.
The emphasis on Hermannsburg as a Christian place is evident in the way Christian Arrernte men spoke about bodily matters to the missionary. Aware of a Lutheran desire to distinguish between “heathen” and “Christian” bodies, Christian Arrernte men, who continued the old practice of circumcision, were careful to reassure the missionary that this was not done in any “heathen” way but only by Christian men:

It has also come to light that our Christians are still circumcising the young people. As Moses emphasized to Heinrich, this would happen without ceremonies and would be done by them and not by heathen. I have asked Heinrich to get more information, while I remain in the background. Before my time teacher Heinrich had allowed them to do it if they would do it themselves and if they would regard it as a hygienic act, without heathen ceremonies and outside the context of their old heathen superstition.52

This demonstrates how skilfully Arrernte employed the missionaries’ discourse and concepts of bodies to avoid punishment.53 It also shows how little the mission staff realized that, for the Arrernte, spiritual and bodily matters were intertwined and rituals were strongly linked to place.

The missionaries felt keenly that Arrernte should use their bodies and other signifiers to demonstrate their choice of Christianity over the old religion. This expectation was reinforced by publicly displaying sacred Arrernte objects. In 1923, teacher Heinrich confronted the catechumens by displaying tjurungas during baptismal classes and asked them to make a choice between traditional religion and Christianity.54 Despite earlier missionaries’ optimism that the “tjurunga — cult” was “losing strength,” church reports continued to mention indigenous religious activities throughout the 1920s and 1930s. These mission reports are corroborated by anthropologists’ contemporary studies of active ceremonial centres in the vicinity of Hermannsburg.55 The Lutherans argued that traditional ties of social obligations amongst kinship groups had to be destroyed in order for Christian Arrernte men to proselytise among other language groups. Links to place and kin were spectacularly undermined by the desecration of the Manangananga cave. The trigger for the incident was the kin support given by Christian Arrernte during a fight at the mission station. The missionary needed a visible proof of the willingness of the future evangelists to disregard their kinship obligations and traditional religion when proselytising to other language groups.

Manangananga was an important tjurunga storehouse and the centre of the twin totem near Hermannsburg.56 In 1930 the missionary Albrecht, with at least tacit support from the Christian elders, including the traditional owner of

52. Albrecht to Riedel, 7 September 1927, Box 16 A 5/6, folder “1927;” LA (my translation).
53. The performance of ceremonies had been prohibited by the first missionaries.
54. Heinrich to Stolz, Box 16 B 1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923;” LA (my translation).
55. Tindale field diary 1929, SAM; Strehlow field diaries 1932–34, SAM; Mountford field diary 1942, Mountford-Sheard Collection, State Library of South Australia.
56. This had already been noticed by missionary Carl Strehlow who reproduced a photo of the entrance to the cave in his ethnography, but who never attempted the desecration of the place. Strehlow, Die Aranda- und Loritjastämme, volume 2, (1908), 51.
the site, opened the cave in front of a gathering of Arrernte men, women and children and revealed the *tjurunga* hidden in the cave. At the time the missionary interpreted the event as the cornerstone in the process of religious change. The community continued to commemorate it for several years with public picnics and a church service at the cave on the anniversary of its opening. This desecration occurred following several years of drought which resulted in many Arrernte deaths, yet unlike previous thefts of sacred objects there were no revenge parties against those thought responsible. This contrasts with Strehlow’s reports of severe punishment of young men who were careless in the handling of sacred objects.

Nonetheless, the sacrilege was remembered by Arrernte as the direct cause of illness in subsequent years. Albrecht himself acknowledged that people would attribute illness and death, resulting from the prolonged drought, to the hand-over of the *tjurungas*. One year after the Manangananga incident he wrote in his annual report:

I have repeatedly noticed how the many deaths during the drought are still remembered by our Christians. It seems that a great number of them still hold the opinion, even if not explicitly stated, that blacks who still possess their *tjurungas* live longer and are not as often sick as Christians. When all our praying did not help some remembered again how their fathers had once instructed them never to give away these old things, otherwise they would suffer misfortunes. Everyone who has lived through these difficult times will understand such thoughts. For most of our Christians the pain of losing a family member is too fresh to easily forget these things.

The desecration of Manangananga was part of a wider process of alienation of sacred objects as the result of contact history. Despite this process, Arrernte continued to regard any ritually incorrect transmission of objects and knowledge as an important cause of disease. In the 1960s, T. G. H. Strehlow noted that epidemics were still linked to religious crises and disturbances within the precontact moral communities:

Even in present-day Central Australia one of the commonest Aboriginal criticisms made of the new order introduced by Europeans is that the whole country has been economically ruined by the wholesale destruction of all the indigenous forms of ritual activities. Ever since Central Australia’s first major drought of 1927–29 the Aboriginal population has attributed the ensuing lengthy successions of poor and dry years to the disappearance of the older generations of ritually wise and traditionally educated elders who alone knew fully how to create rain and how to

58. T. G. H. Strehlow visited the place with the congregation. Strehlow Journal Book 1, 17 April 1932, SAM. According to Jones, the taboo was reinstated by the time Strehlow visited it again in 1955. Jones, 135–136.
60. See, for the trade of *tjurungas* in central Australia, Christopher Anderson, ed. *The Politics of the Secret* (Sydney: The University of Sydney Press, 1995), especially the chapter by Philip Jones.
promote the increase of plants and animals. Derision has been heaped on their few and ill-trained successors, whose ritually faulty performances have been held responsible for their ineffectiveness in rendering the same communal services.61

Lutheran critiques of Western Arrernte concepts of embodiment focused on the relational character of the person, that is, the close association with kin and ancestors. Before there could be active Arrernte participation in evangelizing in central Australia, missionaries believed there must be a reform of indigenous ideas of personhood. Religious change must be embodied in change of identity, to mark clearly the difference between Christian and non-Christian groups. Baldwin Spencer noted this on a visit to the mission in 1926. He remarked that he could not see how “the blacks at Hermannsburg were more civilized than anywhere else.”62

In mission-generated texts, indigenous people frame their relationships with each other within the Christian discourse of a strict dichotomy between Christian and heathen. Illness and bodily appearance were regular tropes of these narratives. Christian Arrernte men described naked, non-Christian neighbouring people, who came to Hermannsburg with an Arrernte evangelist at Christmas time, as “ignorant people from the west.”63 On one occasion these Luritja men and women were paid by the visiting director of the Adelaide Conservatorium of Music for participating in the recording of their songs.64 Christian Arrernte refused to participate and rebuked the missionary for allowing the recording to take place in the mission precinct. In this way the Arrernte Christian elders reasserted their control of the mission space.65

In Arrernte ontology, spiritual centres could cause illness in those who did not relate in the correct way to them.66 The Arrernte displayed some ambivalence over the influence of the mission locality on their bodies. We find competing views on whether or not it was advantageous to be at a Christian place during epidemics. In some cases the healing efforts of the Lutherans were rewarded with the adoption of Christian forms. During a severe outbreak of influenza in 1926 Luritja people treated at Hermannsburg responded by espousing a belief in Jesus:

Several Loritja [sic] people came in during this time. Some were completely naked and had such high temperature that they trembled in every limb. We gave them medicine and food. Because they speak a completely different language to our blacks, it is often difficult to communicate with them. But some of our Christians can understand them. They went repeatedly to them and told of the doctor who can heal them in body and soul.

62. Spencer made this remark to teacher Heinrich during his stay at Hermannsburg. Heinrich to Stolz, 11 June 1923, Box 16 B 1/2, folder “Correspondence with mission station 1923,” LA (my translation).
63. Albrecht, “Hermannsburg Congregation — A Review 1926–1956,” B/A Collection AA662, Box 5 of 6, SAM.
64. The Luritja are a language group to the south-west of the Arrernte.
65. The non-Christians who participated in the recordings were paid.
66. This causality has also been noted for other Aboriginal groups. See, for example, the work of Janice Reid on Yolngu concepts of illness. Janice Reid, Sorcerers and Healing Spirits: Continuity and Change in an Aboriginal Medical System (Canberra: Australian National University Press, [first published 1983] 1989), 50.
Yesterday, that is on Sunday afternoon, Moses came to me and told me that he had preached to them and they had told him that they too now believed in Jesus. Obviously one cannot rely too much on this statement. Especially since it was made under the impression of experienced love.  

This narrative emphasizes that the missionary was only a third party to the interactions between Christian Arrernte and the Luritja visitors. Albrecht was merely informed by Moses Tjalkabota that he had been preaching and that the Luritja “now also believed in Jesus.” But the mission records do not show that any of these people actually joined baptismal classes as a consequence of their newly found belief. Respect for Arrernte Christianity, rather than formal conversion, was the Luritja response to Christian healing.

The argument that illness was God’s punishment for transgressing the spiritual order was used by both Christian and non-Christian Arrernte. The following narratives about the relationship between Moses, the head evangelist at Hermannsburg, and a man named Arabi show how both men refer to a Christian discourse when discussing Arabi’s illness: “Recently Moses told me that Arabi, this bad heathen, is sick. He [Arabi] told two of our Christians, that Jesus appeared to him and told him ‘Arabi, this is your punishment. You know the path that leads to me. You could have gone to the mission station and become a Christian. But you did not do so, and this illness is now your punishment.’”

Arabi was a senior Arrernte man from Alice Springs, whom Albrecht had previously expelled from the station because he “enticed people to join corroborees.” Here an Arrernte religious leader who is afflicted by illness admitted that he was being punished for not accepting Christian teaching. There are, however, no records indicating that Arabi joined a baptism class.

The missionary is peripheral to this account of Arabi’s dream. The incident was related to him by Christian Arrernte. Several months earlier Albrecht had complained that the Christian Arrernte were not asserting themselves against Arabi’s influence as Arabi enticed Christians from Hermannsburg to participate in a religious ceremony. Heinrich had previously juxtaposed Moses, the transmitter of Christianity, with Arabi the leader of the resurgent “tjurunga-cult”:

Moses returned from an evangelizing journey two days ago. He had been in Alice Springs from where he reported that most of the blacks had a great “laruma” or fight and were only lukewarm towards God’s word. The news from the Jay was even less edifying. Old Arabi is there and tries his best to resurrect the tjurunga cult; he even confronts our Christians secretly. Old Arabi is very great sinner, he was at Hermannsburg during Liebler’s times and eloped with a woman who had been baptized by Liebler, she was generally known as Larilkna. For a long time he had been a police boy at Alice Well. He, like the old inkata and tjurunga doctors, felt how the tjurunga cult had been deprived of its [power] since the death of Strehlow and they are trying to resurrect it. Arabi is their leader and because there are many blacks

68. Albrecht diary, 18 October 1926, LA (my translation).
69. Albrecht diary, 1926, LA.
assembled at the Jay, he provides the Devil with the opportunity to entice these poor blind ones into his trap. Was very pleased to hear from Moses that our blacks there have so far resisted all threats and enticements. [ . . . ] Moses told me that he has delivered a sharp sermon there and that all tjurunga-celebrations ceased during his stay there. Arabi resents Moses. Therefore it was very important that Moses went there. It is to be expected that the Devil will do his best to hinder the spread of the Gospel.70

Yet these religious demarcation lines were far more fluid. In times of illness, with its implied crisis within the moral or religious cosmos, the relation between the Christian God and Hermannsburg could also be interpreted in a negative way. Indeed, narratives about the body and illness could be used to voice resistance to the mission. During the scurvy epidemic in 1929, missionary Albrecht related the following story to his readers:

This illness is of course a big temptation for our Christians and a warning for the heathens. One Christian woman told me once: jakkai, Kridstarinja inkaraka iluma (o dear, all the Christians are dying). Because we lost relatively higher numbers of Christians compared with the heathens, many asked why is it that the Christians are dying? Others mock about it. Old Mortona from Alice Springs told me:

“If a man falls sick in Alice Springs, he will recover after some days. But here where it is God’s house and God’s word, they all have to die.” He said this to stress his demand to be sent back to his old place as soon as possible. [ . . . ] Mortona told teacher Heinrich that God doesn’t listen to us because we don’t pray the right way. Instead of using Aranda, we should pray in their pidgin English, maybe God would listen. Most of the heathen are convinced that the mission is bewitched and hence it is best to stay away.71

Here we find the argument that Hermannsburg mission was a dangerous place. The high rates of illness and death at Hermannsburg were explained by traditional Arrernte ideas of witchcraft and the non-observance of the correct ritual. Mortona uses the outbreak of illness at the mission to criticize and undermine Christian religion by implying that Christians did not perform their religious rituals correctly. Instead, people in Alice Springs, like himself, would know how to conduct Christian rituals correctly (by praying in pidgin English) and thus recover from sickness.

Lutherans had clear ideas about death as a spiritually significant state of the body and about what constitutes a good Christian death. The individual’s expression of faith at the moment of death was carefully observed and stories of a good death became a favourite trope of the mission reports published in the Lutheran Herald. With low conversion numbers, these descriptions of faith were needed to restore readers’ confidence in the meaningfulness of the mission. Particular emphasis was given the frequent reciting of Lutheran hymns. So for example it was reported, “Some days ago one of the elders told me about Philipus’ death who had died during the influenza epidemic. During

70. Heinrich to Stolz, 5 December 1925, Box 16 A 5/6, folder “Correspondence 1925,” LA (my translation).
71. Lutheran Herald, 14 October 1929, 331–332.
his illness he had still enjoyed singing, especially the song ‘Fort, fort mein Herz zum Himmel.’”72

The Lutherans’ interest in the reporting of the death of Arrernte Christians echoes a general genre in Christian mission writing.73 Lutheran narratives do not report specifically on the death of children,74 although there are numerous examples of it. The emphasis is on the end of bodily suffering and the attachment to Christ in death:

Very touching was the death of a young girl who had been completely paralysed for several years. During the last weeks before her death she had to suffer a lot. But on her second last day here on earth all her pain disappeared and she looked forward to returning home. She told her family that the angels were ready to come and get her and Lord Jesus himself had come to tell her to follow. When the mother wanted to say something to her, she only replied: It is too late, I have to go now. and so she passed away in peace.75

This desire for personal attachment to Christ was not only reported for “deserving” children but also for the first generation of Arrernte Christians who had been baptised in the 1880s. One of them was Ltalatumarinja, baptized as Petrus in 1888, aged 18 years.76 Petrus was described by the missionaries as a “serious, upright Christian” who maintained his belief in Jesus during the trying times of his son’s illness. The missionary emphasized this when reporting Petrus’ death: “When I visited him once, he told me how they are still very grateful to Jesus and thank him and they wished to stay with him and not to forsake Christ [. . .] One of our old Christians told me how Petrus had confided in him that he desires to see Jesus.”77 Another Christian Andreas, while anticipating eventual union with Jesus, was not ready to join Him while his own children needed him: “When he [Andreas] visited me before he fell sick one evening, I asked him if he ever regretted to have been a Christian for so long. But he didn’t want to hear anything about that. During his illness he once told me how he had seen Jesus in his hut who had pointed to the above as if he wanted to take him along. But he had told Jesus that he still had to look after his two children.”78

The Lutheran ideal of strong emotional ties between children and their parents forms a central theme in these accounts of Christian deaths. Missionaries also emphasized the parental grieving over the death of children. Albrecht tried to console Christian parents with a Lutheran theological interpretation of death as a temporal state and the resulting promise of a final rejoicing with their children in Christ:

On that evening we stood in front of the grave of the fourth child that had died within a very short time. The young parents had already lost one child and now the Lord had taken this one as well. When I visited them, and the child was already very

72. Albrecht report, 17 May 1926, Box 16 A 5/5, LA (my translation).
73. See, for example, discussion of this topic in Harkin, 105–107.
75. Albrecht report 1926, SA Museum, B/A Collection, AA662, Box 2 of 6 (my translation).
76. Hermannsburg Mission Chronicle, Register of Baptisms, March 1879–November 1932, LA.
77. Albrecht report 1926, B/A collection, AA662, Box 2 of 6, SAM (my translation).
78. Albrecht report 1926, B/A collection, AA662, Box 2 of 6, SAM (my translation).
weak, both had their eyes full of tears. When the mother came one week later to ask to receive the Holy Communion, I tried to comfort her and told her to be grateful to the Lord despite the loss. I comforted her by saying that the Lord had led her out of the darkness of heathendom. Now they do not need to stand in despair by the graveside but can hope to see their child again with Jesus. 79

Resurrection from the dead was not part of traditional Arrernte cosmology. Thus, the individuated nature of Lutheran notions of personal body and identity was at once restricting and liberating in giving meaning to death through the concept of salvation. 80 In Arrernte conceptions, “the dreaming aspect of a person’s being might return to the conception side, but its moral personality (in European terms) is finished.” 81 According to Carl Strehlow, the Arrernte concept of the afterlife was restricted to the journey of souls to the island of the dead. 82 There was no concept of personal rebirth. The dead were only able to return as ghosts for a limited time.

The resurrection of the body became a central issue for religious change, indeed it was often the central point in the sermons delivered by Arrernte evangelists. Moses frequently turned to this topic. One of his central theological messages was the equation of Jesus with life. In 1926, Heinrich described to the Mission Board how Moses, when preaching on the previous Sunday, had recounted to his audience how the Holy Spirit had brought the Gospel to the Arrernte and how the Arrernte had realized that “their tjurungas had been wrong and that they now believed in altjiira, who is truly alive.” 83 According to Moses, Jesus alone enabled resurrection because he awoke the dead from their sleep:

To Christians death is like a sleep because Jesus will return to awake them. This is very certain because he himself has gone down this path as the first human. But, my dear Alice Springs friends, all the others will also arise one day to stand in front of the judge where they will be met by the wrath of God. Therefore come today to Jesus when he is still calling you. 84

An Arrernte woman told her mother shortly before her death that Jesus was now close and that she had seen two angels in her hut. 85 Knowing that her death was close, she made arrangements for her burial and requested that Moses deliver the sermon.

The metaphor of sleep as a specific state of the body indicated that the body did not disappear after death, but only entered another physical state.

79. Albrecht to Friends of the Mission, 25 September 1926, Box 16 A 5/5, LA (my translation).
82. Carl Strehlow, volume 1 (1907), 15–16.
83. Heinrich to Riedel, 11 June 1926, Box 16 B 1/2, LA.
84. Heinrich to Riedel, 11 June 1926, Box 16 B 1/2, LA.
Moses recounted how this conflicting interpretation of death had caused friction between him and Arrernte elders. After observing the first European burial at Hermannsburg, the young people around Moses and the elders discussed death. The elders warned them not to look at a dead person or else the ghost would hurt them. “However, we said ‘But the Lord Jesus will raise the person on the Last Day’”\(^{86}\) The old men would not have any of this, they insisted that the dead lie “decaying in the earth” and would not rise. Significantly, Moses commented that the young did not share the traditional view on death, but preferred to keep quiet in front of the elders. “Then we kept quiet, lest the old men become angry. Having denied the resurrection, their eyes became big, and we were afraid they would become angry.”\(^{87}\) Years later, when Moses preached to non-Christians about the resurrection of the dead on the Day of Judgement, the elders insisted that their version of the afterlife was not inferior to the Christian teachings. They asserted that the dead return as revengeful ghosts, until they are lifted up by a ngankara up into heaven where they stay. But Moses Tjalkabota replied, “But I don’t believe this. A ngankara cannot lift a spirit up into the sky. No way. Only Jesus can do this.” and he insisted that, “On the last day Jesus himself will raise us.”\(^{88}\)

**Conclusion**

I have argued that the historical study of religious change among the Western Arrernte can benefit from a perspective of the body. The analysis of Lutheran body politics is aided by a Foucauldian approach that focuses on social control. I have demonstrated that missionary control at Hermannsburg extended to everyday bodily matters such as food distribution, sexual relations, corporal punishment, and healing rituals. But I also argue that indigenous responses are grounded in a very different notion of the body that goes beyond the focus of Foucault. The discussion of Arrernte views of the embodied nature of social and spiritual relations requires a different theoretical approach. Indigenous interpretations of the rationing system, Christian prayers for the sick, or Jesus himself spring from a precontact system of meanings of which a person’s embodiment with kin and spirits is a vital part.

The impact of Lutheran theology and mission practice altered indigenous concepts of embodiment to some degree, but the key characteristics of Arrernte relatedness were maintained and even extended to incorporate Christian rituals. Although the Lutherans attempted to reinforce individualistic notions of the person, western Arrernte continued to perceive themselves as being interconnected with kin and ancestors. These links also shaped their somatic experiences. Thus, it is not surprising that illness was interpreted as an imbalance in these relations and healing rituals were aimed at restoring the appropriate relationship. Missionaries and the Christian God were incorporated in this net

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86. Tjalkabota, 256.
87. Tjalkabota, 257.
88. Tjalkabota, 299–300.
of social relations, and Christian rituals such as praying became slowly accepted as additional forms of curing.

The belief that illness is caused by disrupted social relations finds its expression in the practice of witchcraft. Arrernte and other indigenous people continued to voice suspicions of alleged witchcraft and to participate in resulting retaliations as a response to epidemics from the 1920s to the 1940s. Christian Arrernte at Hermannsburg, which was perceived to be a Christian place, did not stand outside this cultural logic. Christian and non-Christian Arrernte linked continued illness at the mission station to incorrect religious ritual performance. Yet religious change among the Arrernte was not profound enough to affect indigenous notions of person and body to the degree that John Barker observed among the Maisin.89 These more individualized notions of witchcraft seemed to be absent at Hermannsburg. However, Arrernte took on the idea of an individualized Christian death. The possibility of resurrection became the main focal point in the preaching of Arrernte evangelists who understood Jesus as a potent healer, able to awake them from death as if from a long sleep.