

# Introduction: Aboriginal Youth in the Northern Territory: Disadvantage, Control and Hope

Kate Senior, Richard Chenhall  
and Victoria Burbank

Perhaps the most important contribution of anthropology to the study of adolescence is the emphasis it puts on understanding the cultures within which adolescents operate. (Schlegel and Hewlett 2011, 287)

Young people are poised on the brink of maturity, of arriving at a life stage in which they are best able to contribute to the wellbeing of humankind or to do it great harm. Thus, it is vital that the challenges and possibilities of adolescence be well understood and addressed. In Australia, such understanding is most urgently needed with respect to Aboriginal youths. Not only must they adjust to their changing bodies and minds (e.g. Tanner 1990; Casey 2015), but, as Ute Eickelkamp (2011, 9) has observed, 'they need to cope with racism, discrimination, cultural insecurities, intergenerational trauma and the socioeconomic marginal status of their families'. They are also required to do all this in the complexity of intercultural environments that we argue must be included in our ethnography if we are to understand the challenges and achievements of these young people.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Though defined variably, 'adolescence' is a term anthropologists have long used to refer to the transition between childhood and adulthood. Schlegel and Barry (1991, 10) use the term 'youth' to label a stage between adolescence and adulthood when 'a full social adulthood is delayed many years beyond puberty'; however, we find 'youth' and 'adolescent' sometimes used interchangeably and do so ourselves. Both of these terms may be contrasted with the word 'puberty', which refers to the physiological changes that take place around this time, most notably the onset of fertility (Tanner 1990). In contrast, labels like 'youth', 'adolescent' and 'teenager' are socially constructed life periods and are, therefore, variable across societies. For different usages of words for adolescence see: John and Beatrice Whiting's Foreword in Burbank (1988, xii), Tanner (1990, 58) and Schlegel and Barry (1991, 1–4).

Thanks to scholars like Merlan (1998, 2005) and Hinkson and Smith (2005), the recently rediscovered concept ‘intercultural’ (Vogt and Albert 1966) has provided a useful assist for portraying the circumstances in which Australian Aboriginal people live. We see an ‘intercultural’ space as a social environment constructed largely by the sustained interaction of at least two distinct populations, each of which brings to the interaction an ethos and associated identity derived from ‘different forms of experience, knowing and practice’ (Merlan 2005, 174). Due to their different histories and the consequent inequalities of knowledge, wealth and status, the respective bearers of these different traditions, may, as is clearly the case between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, have more or less power over others, and themselves, in this space. The difficulties of Aboriginal youth, we cannot help but assume, arise, in large part, from their often disadvantaged positions in these intercultural interactions. However, it is not cultures that meet, but individuals (Vogt and Albert 1966, 61), and individuals invariably have varied experiences, however much shared their histories may be. Thus, it is these individual experiences that are created by, and brought to, intercultural encounters. We also recognise that each of the communities represented in this collection has arisen from a distinct series of intercultural encounters and events, and each occupies a different physical and social environment. Many of these responses, as demonstrated in the following chapters, are grounded in resilience and adaptability, and are ones in which young people uniquely draw upon their skills in both the traditional and globalised world (see also Allen et al. 2014). This collection presents accounts of youths as individuals, or as part of groups, coming of age, and engaged in and accompanied by positive and negative experience in various intercultural spaces.

## **The Vicious Cycle of Social Disadvantage**

Anthropology can be seen as the study of human behaviour and experience in a larger context, whether that context is delineated as a particular set of sociocultural circumstances and/or as the evolutionary history of humankind. We would like our readers to understand that most of the young people and adults of whom we speak in these pages are living in intercultural circumstances that can fairly be described as risky, uncertain and stressful. These are circumstances that clearly arise

from inequality, subordination and control, and have long been associated with an array of problems, some of which are discussed in these papers: inadequate education, precocious pregnancy, delinquency, violence, high rates of incarceration, poor health and associated high mortality rates (e.g. Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Burbank, Senior and McMullen 2015).

Diane Austin-Broos (2011, 11) has said: ‘To grasp the circumstance of remote Aboriginal people requires an understanding of both cultural difference and inequality’. In the last few decades, academics have paid considerable attention to the latter condition. In so doing, some have identified social arrangements and processes they have labelled as ‘the social determinants of health’ (Brunner and Marmot 1999; Marmot and Wilkinson 1999) and as ‘structural violence’ (Farmer 2004). These conceptualisations enable us to better identify at least some of the reasons why the fortunes of particular human lives are far better or worse than others. In this effort, we recognise the importance not only of cross-cultural but also intersubjective translation. Because the factors we identify are external to the person, notice of them alone can only presume specific effects (see Burbank 2011, 12–20, 80). Therefore, we attempt to understand youths’ experiences of the complex sociocultural environments that affect their current and future lives through firsthand engagement with them.

The social determinants of health are generally understood as any set of circumstances or events that cause unhealthy stress—that is, an unhealthy activation of the human stress response.<sup>2</sup> This causes a ‘fight or flight’ response that has served humanity well, but, in our current environments, its prolonged activation, in circumstances that we can rarely fight against or flee from, leads to ill health, self and socially destructive behaviour and, possibly, early death (Marmot and Wilkinson 1999; Sapolsky 2004; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). Typical examples of these circumstances include protracted experiences of discrimination, subordination and control (e.g. Kawachi and Kennedy 2002; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). Institutions and social arrangements that create these inequitable and unhealthy experiences have been described as forms of ‘structural violence’ (Farmer 2004). These may be specific institutions, such as prisons, and

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2 We are not saying that all ethnography should include relevant discussion of biological factors. Anthropology is, after all, enriched by its notoriously interdisciplinary practice; anthropologists routinely find illuminating material for their ethnography in areas as diverse as the health and biological sciences, economics, education, various philosophical arguments and myriad other domains.

practices, such as prison regimes of security, punishment and rehabilitation. They may be forms of social inequality, such as rigid class or caste systems. Racism is an apposite example of this latter form of structural violence: here a political entity, such as a nation-state, subjugates a segment of its population on the basis of perceived difference, whether physical, cultural or both (Gravlee 2009; Paradies 2016).

Unhealthy stress is generated by the relative powerlessness these arrangements entail (see Sapolsky 2004). Humans may be especially stressed by negative judgements made by others when they have little control over an outcome (Dickerson and Kemeny quoted in Wilkinson and Pickett 2010, 38). These arrangements and the stresses they generate are often, if not always, accompanied by relative poverty. Hence poverty's manifestations, in such things as poor housing and nutritionally inadequate diets, may be understood as outcomes of structural violence, as may the premature morbidity and mortality in populations that systems of inequality disadvantage (Carson et al. 2007; Marmot 2011). Powerlessness and poverty also lead, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, to behaviours that further disadvantage already disadvantaged populations. Such behaviours and their consequences found in Aboriginal Australia include truancy, premature child-bearing, vandalism, substance abuse, suicide<sup>3</sup> and forms of violence and delinquency that lead to incarceration (Burbank, Senior and McMullen 2015; Senior and Chenhall, 2006; Senior and Chenhall 2008a; Senior, Chenhall and Daniels 2006). The contributors to this volume identify and discuss the impact of intercultural arrangements characterised by prolonged histories of discrimination, subordination and control by outsiders that are found in these communities and that either contribute to or hinder the emergence of disadvantage, affecting the lives of the youths who inhabit the pages of this book.

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3 In their global survey of inequality and its correlates, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010, 175) have noted that the relationship between suicide and social inequality is an unexpected one. More suicide is to be found in relatively egalitarian societies. We suggest that although Aboriginal Australians usually occupy a subordinate status in Australia, the communities in which they often reside, especially, perhaps, in remote and rural Australia, are characterised by an ethos of egalitarianism (e.g. see Burbank 2014).

## **Aboriginal Young People in the Northern Territory**

Recent research has demonstrated that, throughout Australia, all-cause mortality for Aboriginal young people is double that of non-Aboriginal youth, with approximately 60 per cent of all deaths related to intentional self-harm and road traffic injury (Azzopardi et al. 2018). The Northern Territory has the lowest overall median age of all states and territories at 32.4 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2016). It also has the highest rates of youth suicide, teenage pregnancy, substance misuse and imprisonment (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2015).

Aboriginal youth in the Northern Territory are often defined by the deficits in their health and wellbeing as measured by routinely collected data (e.g. AIHW 2015). For example, notification data in the Northern Territory in 2016 shows that young people aged 15–24 have the highest burden of sexually transmitted infections (Kirby Institute 2018, 93; NT Government 2016). Their rates of teenage pregnancy are seven times higher than the national rate for all teenage women (Li et al. 2006). The high rates of substance abuse (Clough et al. 2004; Senior and Chenhall 2008a; Senior, Chenhall and Daniels 2006) and suicide (ABS 2010) among Aboriginal youth are also recorded. Many Aboriginal youths are described as experiencing poverty, including unhealthy and inadequate diets and substandard and overcrowded housing (Seemann et al. 2008; Brimblecombe et al. 2013). These experiences are described as influencing school attendance, educational outcomes, unemployment and incarceration (Government of Australia 2010). These measures of health and wellbeing are centred on the values of the dominant non-Aboriginal population and rarely include values that Aboriginal people regard as essential for wellbeing (Senior 2003). Values related to family, connection to country and engagement with traditional practices are absent from these indicators (Chenhall and Senior 2018).

## **Guidance and Control of Youth, Past and Present**

As the statistics presented in the last section indicate, the life circumstances for young people in the Northern Territory can be challenging and responses to these may cause consequences that reverberate throughout an

individual's life. It may be a time when young people have more freedom to act and, at the same time, are more vulnerable to harmful influences. The developing youth brain, which enables acquisition of greater social-cognitive and social-affective intelligence, may render young people more vulnerable to such influences and encourage risk-taking behaviours, especially when peers are present (Blakemore and Mills 2014, 197–98; Chein et al. 2011; Crone and Dahl 2012, 646; Worthman and Trang 2018, 452). And, as Schlegel and Hewlett (2011, 286) suggest from their exhaustive review of the literature, 'adolescents whose lives are lived at the intersection of two cultures' may have even greater difficulties. This is clearly a time when adult guidance and control are more important than ever, yet may be tested by the adverse effects of intercultural settings.

The forms of government characteristic of pre-colonial Australia have long been a topic of debate,<sup>4</sup> for, as John Bern (1979, 127) has observed, no anthropologist has encountered an Aboriginal society untouched by colonial intrusion. These debates have been further complicated by the considerable social and environmental variability in which the myriad Indigenous language groups are located. Clearly, however, Aboriginal peoples have employed, and continue to employ, forms of social control apart from those imposed from outside. Much like Mervin Meggitt (1962, 247) and Robert Tonkinson (1974, 63), we think it safe to say that, currently, 'Aboriginal' social control is exerted largely through the 'family',<sup>5</sup> on the one hand, and religious practice, on the other, although the legitimacy and effectiveness of both have been severely undermined by the progressive encroachment of Western laws, social arrangements and material goods into these communities.

In past times, guidance and control of youth appears to have been effected largely through 'puberty rites' or 'initiation'. The following is an account of the kind of ritual that once took place on Melville Island, off the northern shores of the Northern Territory, when a girl reached menarche:

I first married to Black Joe when I small girl. He grew me up [introduced to sexual activity]. He made me woman with his finger. One day I think I'm woman [the first menstrual flow]. I little bit shamed. I go bush all alone. I sit down. Nanny Goat Jenny follow

4 For overviews of these debates see Bern (1979) and Hiatt (1996).

5 'Family' is the Kriol/Aboriginal English word used in south-east Arnhem Land to distinguish a set of 'close' kin from all other kin. In anthropological terms, 'family' is known as a 'kindred' (see Shapiro 1979, 57).

me up. Look about. Find me. She say, 'You *muringaleta*?' I say no. Five times she say it. By and by I say 'Yes'. She cry cry. Make me cry. She get *pandanus* and kill [strike] me on arms and back. She make tight rings on my arms, *ala same pukamani* (mourning). Can't touch food or drink. Might be by and by swell up. One week stay in bush. Someone tell Black Joe, 'Rosie *muringaleta*!' Everyone happy. Paint up. Get girl-spear and hold it in front. Can't look at husband. He come up behind and kill me with *tokwiinga* (feather ball). Then I run. Kneel by tree. Husband grab me on shoulder. Tree marked overhead. *Ambrinua* (son-in-law) get spear. Can't talk husband rest of day. (Goodale 1971, 47)

As Jane Goodale (1971, 47), who heard this story in 1954, tells us, via this ritual activity Rosie not only became a Tiwi 'woman', she became a mother-in-law. Mother-in-law bestowal,<sup>6</sup> practised at one time in a number of Aboriginal societies, illustrates a form of control over young people no longer available to Aboriginal adults. This form of bestowal meant that, from birth, girls were, in effect, married, and might join their husband at a pre-pubertal age (Shapiro 1979, 111–14). It ensured that girls, like Rosie, had a husband long before they might be interested in finding their own sexual and marital partners. Even when mother-in-law bestowal was not employed, Aboriginal people recognised that early marriage for girls was a means of preventing incorrect unions, an important concern in societies organised around designated kin statuses (e.g. Burbank 1987, 1988; Warner 1937, 65). These are derived from the principles of patrification and matrification—that is, on the recognised connections between a man and his child, and a woman and her child (Scheffler 1978, 13–38). Kin identity is also ideally derived from a legitimate conjunction of paternal and maternal statuses expressed in a 'straight' marriage. If a girl becomes pregnant by a partner regarded as 'wrong', people might ask: 'How are you gonna call the child? What's the child gonna be?' (Burbank 1987, 232). Mother-in-law bestowal, or the early bestowal of young children, apparently did much to circumvent the possibility of unrestrained sexual behaviour that might not only restrict youths' futures but also disrupt the social order.

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6 In times past, a widespread Aboriginal practice was to bestow a young female upon a man as his mother-in-law. This meant that when this young girl married and if she had at least one girl, her daughter would be given to her son-in-law in marriage. There appears to have been variations in this practice, for example, at Numbulwar a man might be given all the daughters his mother-in-law bore, whereas the Arunta son-in-law would only receive a woman's first daughter (Spencer and Gillen 1899, 559 in Shapiro 1979, 104).

Mother-in-law bestowal was once practised by the Aboriginal groups who today live at Numbulwar, initially established as the Rose River Mission. This practice appears to have been abandoned by the time that the Nunggubuyu/Numburindi settled there in 1952. In its place, women, along with their mothers and mothers' brothers, were said to have betrothed their daughters when they were infants or small children, then eased them into marriage with their promised husband sometime before menarche. Such arrangements, however, were not in accord with the Australian Commonwealth's 'standards of life', and their practise was discouraged (Burbank 1987, 227–28; 1988, 52). By 1981, although at least 18 adolescent girls were known to have been betrothed, only one had married her 'promise' (Burbank 1987, 229). Not only were Aboriginal marriage practices largely dismantled, but also the settlement provided an environment that supported youth strategies, as opposed to those of their elders. For example, the co-educational school, which all youths were expected to attend, provided a venue apart from most Aboriginal adults where adolescent boys and girls might meet. The settlement also enabled the formation of youth peer groups, an unlikely demographic possibility in pre-settlement times given the size of local groups throughout most of the year (Biernoff 1974, 274–76). Peers assisted girls in liaisons regarded as illicit by adults, acting as 'mailman', delivering messages to desired partners (Burbank 1987, 230–31; 1988, 104–05; cf. Senior and Chenhall 2008b).

Not many years after a Methodist mission was established at Millingimbi in 1923, the anthropologist William Lloyd Warner lived for several years among a group of Yolngu people he called the Murngin. His detailed ethnography includes an extensive discussion of the rites of passage through which male Murngins had to pass in order to reach adulthood and ritual seniority. This process began with circumcision. Between the ages of six and eight, boys might be taken from their mothers and other female relatives in a mock battle between men and women. This performance began the Djunguan ceremony's version of circumcision. Including the time the initiates spent travelling to invite other relatives and clans to their initiation, this ceremony might last for a period of up to three months. The mock battle marked a boy's separation from his family; until his marriage he could not live with them, although some contact was allowed. Instead, he resided in the men's camp along with a population of teenagers and older men, all of them unmarried. Male visitors travelling without their wives also stayed in the men's camp. Segregated from

women, the camp was a place of education where senior men instructed their juniors. The newly circumcised were introduced to the etiquette of gender relations and reprimanded when they were not conducting themselves as they should. They were taught about ‘totemic emblems’, ‘mythology’, and ‘group mores and traditions’. Warner (1937, 117) says of these teachers: ‘Such authority is more explicit here than one finds it in almost any other part of the Murngin behaviour, with the possible exception of the ceremonial ritual’.

Initiation did not end with the circumcision ceremony. There was at least one other ceremony necessary for adulthood<sup>7</sup> and several others required to achieve a senior ritual status. Instruction did not cease either. In the circumcision ceremony the initiates were told:

You must not use obscene language. You must never tell a lie. You must not commit adultery, nor go after women who do not belong to you. You must always obey your father and respect your elders. You must never betray the secrets that you have learned from us to the women or the boys who have not been circumcised. (Warner 1937, 278)

And messages of this kind continued to be delivered as young and older men progressed through the series of initiation ceremonies. During these years, young males were subjected not only to painful physical operations, but also to threats, food and speech taboos, periods of fasting and exclusion from their seniors’ ‘men’s business’. But, as just mentioned, they were also instructed and they were nurtured. For example, in the circumcision ceremony, boys were carried just as infants were and adult males lay beneath them and held them in their arms while the operation was performed. Both during the ceremony and afterward they were ‘watched over most carefully’ by older men:

This attention is given both to keep them away from the women and because it is felt that during a circumcision initiation, a boy should have every luxury given him and the best of everything that the group has to offer. (Warner 1937, 279)

In his resuscitation of Roheim’s ideas about psychosexual development and initiation in Central Australia, Morton (2011, 40) has reacquainted us with the concept of ‘mitigated’ aggression—‘aggression tempered by

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7 A young man might marry when he grew a moustache and beard, that is, before he completed the range of initiation.

fellow feeling and sympathy’ (Roheim quoted in Morton 2011, 40)—an attitude that Myers has described as ‘a specific conflation of “authority and “nurturance”’ (Myers quoted in Morton 2011, 40). These Murngin ritual practices and the segregation of unmarried males, both of which might also be described as the practise of ‘tough love’, were clearly an attempt to guide and control young men, although they were undoubtedly motivated by other intentions as well. As a number of anthropologists have suggested, initiation into religious life—a process that could take years—was a bulwark for a gerontocratic form of sociality (Bern 1979, 125; Hiatt 1985; Keen 1982, 621; Rose 1968, 207). Initiation, however, does not seem to have been entirely effective in this respect and young males have been thought of as sexual miscreants in the past (e.g. Meggitt 1962, 234; Hiatt 1965, 107). Perhaps they are thought to be even more so in recent times (e.g. Sackett 1978).

Beyond this control, ceremonies have other value and continue to be routine in the three remote communities represented in this collection. The question, however, is can they, in intercultural circumstances such as those of Borroloola, Ngukurr and Numbulwar, not to mention the town of Katherine, still hold the same meaning for performers and audiences, and how compatible are they with many of the sociocultural innovations introduced by the encompassing polity? Myrna Tonkinson (2011, 223) has said of Western Desert, Mardu adolescents:

Sex, marriage, parenthood and family formation are aspects of life characterised by conflicting ideas and practices. Young people’s practices do not fit neatly within either traditional Mardu or contemporary Australian norms.

For decades, anthropologists have been observing youths who are disinterested in the ritual life of their communities, at best. For example, discussing the challenges of staging a Jabaduruwa at Ngukurr in the early 1970s, Bern (1970, 17) observed:

A more general factor was the increasing European influence, particularly on the younger men ... [T]he men were doubting the efficacy of totemic myths and questioning the relevance of ceremonial performance.

Among other things, the authority that ceremonial practice previously bestowed on senior men may have been undermined by the changing settlement economy. No longer did sustenance come largely from the land, control of which was exercised in these rituals, but instead from wages and

welfare (see Bern 1979, 127). This kind of youthful disaffection is not restricted to Ngukurr. From his work at Wiluna in the Western Desert, Sackett (1978, 116) provides another example of the effect of outside influence on the perspectives of young men with an account of one youth facing circumcision:

The boy having grown up in the new environment of mission school versus camp, saw [circumcision] in a different light, however. Those positive elements both mystical and pragmatic, which had prepared his father and father's father are no longer present. The supporting myths were largely unknown and those known were sceptically received. Unlike in the past when there would have been no alternative to his following the law.

This process of disaffection is clearly not confined to Aboriginal youth in the Northern Territory.

Aboriginal Australians have long understood the importance of guiding and controlling their youth, no doubt seeing that what transpires during this life stage can have major effects on adult health and wellbeing as well as on the health and wellbeing of the social body (Sawyer et al. 2012, 1631, 1637). Today, however, many Aboriginal youths live in circumstances in which adult guidance, if not control, of adolescent minds and behaviour is either absent or without efficacy. Aside from the radical disruption of their communities and past forms of control, we argue that today this is due, in large part, to the conflicts inherent in intercultural settings, especially ones characterised by such extreme power inequalities as those found between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Thus, within the period of adolescence, which may, in Aboriginal communities, extend into what Westerners consider childhood and adulthood,<sup>8</sup> youths are necessarily making choices that have the potential for harmful long-term consequences with little adult guidance or supervision.

Adults in the communities we include in this volume attempt to regulate youths' unlawful sexual behaviour and pre-empt other forms of delinquency; they are clearly searching for effective forms of social control. As the examples above indicate, in previous times social arrangements largely ensured that young people were placed in situations where

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8 At Numbulwar, for example, at least in the recent past, girls were regarded as 'young girls', that is, as adolescents, as soon as their breasts began to develop, regardless of chronological age. Neither adolescent boys nor girls were regarded as adults until they were married and had children (Burbank 1988, 4).

adults were their constant companions and guides, whether this was a young woman being supervised by her husband and senior co-wives, or an adolescent boy in the men's camp in the company of senior men. Papers in this volume illustrate the challenges accompanying these intercultural settings that have created the circumstances in which youths are engaging in behaviours that undermine their communities and their futures. They also illustrate efforts on the part of both young people and adults, the latter both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, that may move these communities towards useful solutions or exacerbate the problems of youth.

## The Importance of Ethnography

There has necessarily arisen a substantial literature on harmful youth behaviour in Aboriginal Australia that includes attention to their early sexual initiation, substance abuse and other adverse behaviours (e.g. Azzopardi et al. 2018; Blair, Zubrick and Cox 2005; Clough et al. 2004; Chenhall and Senior 2009; Thompson, Zhang and Dempsey 2012). Such efforts provide vital information, much of which has inspired this volume. In contrast, and not surprisingly, there is a relatively small contemporary ethnographic literature that focuses on Aboriginal young people: the seemingly universal reserve of youth in adult company does not usually meld with the method of participant observation. Still, some have managed to engage youth in the field. Besides our own previous work (e.g. Burbank 1987; 1988; Senior and Chenhall 2008a; 2008b), we note Maggie Brady's (1992, 95) ethnographic treatment of youth petrol sniffers in the Northern Territory, Central Australia and Western Australia, which she sees as a means of addressing a 'major crisis of self-image and identity'. Gary Robinson's (1997) examination of the dynamics of separation and individuation in the context of changed marriage arrangements in Tiwi families inevitably led to his engagement with Tiwi youth. Three papers on youth found in Ute Eickelkamp's (2011) collection on childhood and adolescence also illustrate the complications of the latter life stage, created, at least in part, by rapid social change. David Brooks (2011) casts the most positive light on the situation of Aboriginal youth, seeing Ngaanyatjarra social arrangements and 'tjukurrpa-thinking' as ameliorative factors for life trajectories in less than ideal circumstances. In her thoughtful discussion of Mardu youth, Myrna Tonkinson (2011) suggests that premarital pregnancy may not necessarily shunt a teenage

girl off into a life of dysfunction, though it is not ideal in terms of health and education. Such a pregnancy may instead create or revive the kinds of ties that ground the social cohesion and resilience upon which so many observers of Aboriginal Australia have remarked. Marika Moisseef (2011) theorises racism's effects on the person, based on her experiences in South Australia, ethnographic literature on Central Australia and her experience as a clinical psychiatrist. Her efforts remind us of what can be a significant characteristic of the intercultural settings in which Aboriginal youth attempt their transitions to adulthood. A collection on *People and Change in Aboriginal Australia* (Austin-Broos and Merlan 2018) provides us with two more studies of youth. In his richly detailed ethnographic account, John Mansfield (2018) suggests that, lacking social legitimacy and desiring personal autonomy, male youths at Wadeye reimagine themselves as non-persons, at least in the local scheme of things, modelling themselves on figures from the outside world's heavy metal scene. In her study of the effects of removing youth from Mornington Island in order that they might study on the mainland, Cameo Dalley (2018) circumvents the difficulties of relying exclusively on conversations with young people. She speaks not only with youth but also with adults who not long before had themselves studied outside the community. Among other things, she found that the youth who benefited the most from this arrangement, according to Western standards, were the children of mixed unions, that is, one of their parents was a non-Mornington Islander. It is predominantly these students who, as adults, now live in nuclear families and are employed in Western occupations. Each of these papers reminds us that youth is a complicated life stage, further complicated for Aboriginal youth by the intercultural spaces in which they are coming of age. The papers also highlight the need for complex representations of these young peoples' lives and environments. It is just such representation that we hope this volume presents. We also hope that it will add to the small but growing understanding of Aboriginal adolescence and inform both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people concerned about the futures of Aboriginal youth.

Fieldwork is the *sine qua non* of ethnographic research. Its principle technique, participant observation, requires living in the community of study and participating in community life. It also requires paying close attention to what is being done and said, what activities are taking place and the characteristics of the setting—in a word, the world as it is at the

moment of observation.<sup>9</sup> Participant observation is usually accompanied by the use of other techniques such as self-reflection, autoethnography, linguistic analyses, interviews, questionnaires and other eliciting devices (the reader will find examples of these in the chapters that follow). Of course, extensive and detailed notes are kept of as much of what transpires as possible.

When working in urban settings, as several of the contributors to this volume have done, the community of study may not be as circumscribed or assessable as is the case when research is set in a remote community. Over the last few decades, in particular, anthropologists have become quite adept at doing ‘fieldwork’ in unconventional locations including health services, courtrooms and prisons, as the reader will soon discover. Even work in remote communities, however, may sometimes take the anthropologist beyond the boundaries of a local setting. For many of us, our work today may be extended during shared expeditions to locations outside the study community, via telephone conversations and social media contact.

## The Chapters

The editors of this book have had a long engagement with exploring the lived experience of the social determinants of health with a particular focus on young people. This scope was extended by including insights from PhD students and community researchers, which were discussed at an Australian anthropology conference in 2016. The majority of chapters in this book focus on remote communities in the Northern Territory, including Ngukurr, Yirkala and Numbulwar. Authors discuss the conditions in these communities in which the youth population live, and the changes and controls to which they are subjected. Authors also illustrate the potential for local conditions and large structural and political changes to influence Indigenous lives and life chances. These effects, however, are not limited to remote community contexts. Indigenous youth experience similar conditions in more urban settings. This collection includes studies of young people living at Borroloola, Katherine and incarcerated in the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre at

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9 This can be done, of course, only to the extent that it is possible without distressing or disturbing people.

Darwin. It thus enables us to present a panoramic view of Aboriginal youth in the Northern Territory, and the disadvantage, conflict, health statuses and hope that characterise many of their lives.

Most of the contributions to this volume attempt to reflect the firsthand experiences of Aboriginal youth. Ethnographic research has enabled us to focus on individual lives and reveal something of youth perspectives. We have sometimes been able to provide accounts of their actions, decisions and motivations and thus present material with the potential to help the non-Aboriginal segment of Australia understand the reasons behind actions considered to be problems. We have also been able to provide at least the beginnings of an 'experience near' grounding for appropriate and effective policy and programs of support. The editors of this volume have long-standing collaborations with several remote Aboriginal communities and engaged people from these communities as co-researchers to provide direction to the research process and to collaborate in the production of these chapters.

This collection begins with a short autobiographical piece by Angelina Joshua, a young woman from Ngukurr, that frames the first five chapters, all of which are located in this community. Joshua tells us how she negotiates the kinds of social factors that often characterise remote Aboriginal communities: seemingly irrelevant schooling, overcrowded housing and substance abuse. Most painfully, she describes losing her mother at age seven and her father and grandmother as a young adult, losses of a kind that are widespread in Aboriginal families and communities. In this life story, we see how people who might have the greatest interest in, and ability to guide and control, specific youths are lost before their time. A shortage of not only willing but also able adults appears to be one of the factors behind the problems youth both create and face today. Angelina is a long-term research associate of Senior and Chenhall and has been involved in various projects since her youth. She attended the conference in Melbourne and gave a version of her chapter to frame the other papers.

In Chapter 2, Chenhall, Senior and Aboriginal colleagues from Ngukurr, Trudy Hall, Bronwyn Turner and Daphne Daniels, explore the hopes, dreams and plans of a group of young women in Ngukurr. Young women in Ngukurr worked with the authors on a body mapping activity that encouraged them to empathise with a hypothetical character and think deeply about that person's choices and future. This revealed important

information relating to their hopes and dreams with respect to their future aspirations for work and relationships. Although young women's narratives of their futures and the choices available to them remained very limited, the visual method provided an important insight into the way that young women were engaging in a radical re-imagining of self. This chapter also serves as an introduction to the Ngukurr community and its circumstances to frame the chapters that follow.

Placing their discussion of youth leadership at Ngukurr in the context of three generations of leaders, Senior and Chenhall's conversations with young men help them identify young peoples' understanding of leadership, the ways they enact it and the disjunction between their own, the Ngukurr community's and the larger society's ideas of who Aboriginal leaders should be and what they should do. Here we find a portrayal of the difficulties that Aboriginal adults may face in the governance of their community. We also find a unique, though imperfect, solution: self-governance by the young themselves.

The next two chapters, by Danielle Aquino and Greg Dickson, present happier, though not uncomplicated, pictures of young peoples' lives. Aquino's work, focusing on youth food choice in Ngukurr, demonstrates the difficulties of food importation and how this challenges health promotion statements around healthy diets. This chapter portrays the kind of environmental complexity in which outsider information and entrenched local practice may collide, the kind of encounter often noted in accounts of intercultural settings characterised by inequality and rapid change. Nevertheless, a growing appreciation of 'traditional' foods may be countering what appears to be a universal human appreciation of fat and sugar (Breslin 2013) and local norms regarding the proper response to children's demands, including demands for unhealthy kinds of food. Dickson, a linguist, examines young people's knowledge and use of bush medicines in the community of Ngukurr, including their knowledge of traditional language terms for various plants and their associated uses in healing. He challenges views that such knowledge is deteriorating and portrays the considerable extent to which young Aboriginal people know about, and use, bush medicines. His research indicates the persistence of at least some forms of Aboriginal knowledge, a notable example as Western medicine has been practised at Ngukurr for over 100 years. He may be providing us with an example of a youth-generated maintenance of cultural tradition that may sometimes be found in intercultural settings.

Moving the focus away from Ngukurr to the nearest regional centre, Friderichs's paper describes young peoples' knowledge about, and use of, both Western and Aboriginal forms of health care. Her ethnographic study is located in Katherine, another town populated by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but one that is somewhat larger than Ngukurr and closer to Darwin, the Northern Territory's largest urban centre. Its intercultural nature is of particular interest with regard to the diversity of its Aboriginal population and the various identities held by the youths with whom Friderichs worked. Not surprisingly, she found an array of diverging and overlapping ideas about health and healing available to Aboriginal young people. The variety of this information undoubtedly affects what they know about health and the choices they make with regard to it. Like Dickson and Aquino, Friderichs presents the complex and contradictory information that Aboriginal youth receive in the intercultural settings they inhabit and the difficulties these present to those desiring to create appropriate forms of guidance.

Sue McMullen and Kishan Kariippanon continue to paint vivid pictures of the life circumstances of Aboriginal youth. McMullen's paper compares sexual activity and pregnancy in two other towns in south-east Arnhem Land, further east towards the Gulf of Carpentaria. The furthest, some 437 km south-east of Ngukurr, is home to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and, with a range of liquor outlets, is known for both violence and alcohol abuse. This is a significant part of the context in which youth pregnancy and child-bearing occur and the life prospects of 'young girls', that is, young females, may be established. In Kariippanon's study, which is set in the remote Yolngu community of Yirrkala and an associated outstation, we see an example of intercultural sociality that surrounds both the anthropologist and the youth he is there to understand. We are able to see the circumstances that lead to his conclusion that social media, rather than enhancing the youth experience, may be exacerbating some of the long-existing problems they face. His study also illustrates some of the ways in which new technology can undermine adult control of youth misbehaviour, though such technology may also promise new ways of exerting it.

In 2016, Darwin's Don Dale Youth Detention Centre, largely populated by young Aboriginal offenders, became the focus of national attention with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Four Corners* program's public exposure of young inmates' mistreatment. This was followed by the Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children

in the Northern Territory in 2016–17. Just years before this inquiry, Pippa Rudd had been engaged in an ethnographic study of the juvenile justice system in Darwin when she lost her battle with cancer. The chapter on juvenile (in)justice was completed by Kate Senior and Jared Sharp. Drawing on Rudd's field notes and interviews with three 18-year-old Aboriginal inmates of the Don Dale correctional facility, the authors trace the pathways in and out of the correctional system as they are perceived by its youth prisoners. Although it is not unusual for young Aboriginal people to spend some time in jail, and these youthful inmates sometimes compare it favourably with life 'outside', incarceration is far from an ideal condition for a developing young human. While this chapter is based in Darwin, these experience of youth incarceration would be well known to youth in remote communities. It presents an intercultural space that has not often been examined, particularly from the perspective of young people themselves.

The final chapter in this book, by Burbank, draws on autobiographical material that covers a 30-year period from a senior Numburindi man. Sawyer's story allows Burbank to address the question of guidance and the benign control of adolescent behaviour in another intercultural space. This paper suggests the importance of individual motivation in the domain of self-control, a factor that needs to be considered in the construction of programs and policies, but one that is highly individualised.

We anticipate that readers will find in this book a greater understanding of the day-to-day lives of at least some Aboriginal young people, and some of the adults who care for or neglect them. We also anticipate that readers will finish the collection with a better understanding of the circumstances, processes and factors that affect youth health, wellbeing and future prospects in their intercultural environments. We hope that readers will, at least, glimpse the multiplicity of these circumstances, processes and factors, and the complexity of their interaction. We also hope that readers will consider whether or not future policies and programs of intervention or assistance advantage these youth and their seniors in their already beset circumstances:

[Most] important is the creation of conditions where Aboriginal people have enough incentive and motivation, and enough capacity to change, to make improvement in their own lives. Large numbers have done so. (Sutton 2009, 12)

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This text is taken from *Indigenous Australian Youth Futures: Living the Social Determinants of Health*, edited by Kate Senior, Richard Chenhall and Victoria Burbank, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.