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Ngukurr Crying:
Male Youth in a Remote Indigenous Community

Aaron David Samuel Corn

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Preface

This report into male youth at Ngukurr was commissioned by Professor John Bern under the auspices of the Southeast Arnhem Land Collaborative Research Project (SEALCP). In my capacity as an Associate Fellow, it entailed three months of fieldwork in Ngukurr spanning September, October and November 2000, and owes much to the many residents who contributed.

My involvement with the Ngukurr community dates from 1996 when I first met local musicians at the Barunga Festival. Since then, I have visited Ngukurr three times on doctoral research into popular bands in Arnhem Land, and the network of local musicians with whom I have established a relationship over these years were also instrumental in facilitating my research into male youth during my most recent visit. To Davis Daniels, Glen Blitner, Dan Thompson, Keith Rogers, Howard Turner, Derek Wurramara and John Rogers, I am particularly indebted.

Thanks to Betty Joshua, Gwen Rami, Owen Turner, David Daniels, Steve Pelizzio, Lance and Gwen Tremlett, and Eleonora Deak for sharing their experiences and advice, to the police and legal professionals who staffed the final sitting of Bush Court for 2000 for their honesty and insight, to Rio Tinto for keeping our vehicles on the road, to Tony Joyce, Cath Suringa, Mark Grose and Michael Hohnen for their hospitality in Darwin, to Natalie Nugent for sharing her professional insight to music therapy, and to my wife, Melinda Sawers, and Alan Davison for their companionship and dedication. Thanks also to the SEALCP's John Bern, Rosie O'Donnell, Kate Senior, Mary Edmunds, Daphne Daniels, Keith Rogers, Miranda Rogers, Moses Ponto and Kim Oborn for their invaluable guidance, assistance and support. Finally, thanks are due to those people including Davis Daniels, Keith Rogers and Dan Thompson who read drafts of the report, and provided detailed and constructive criticism, which greatly benefited the final product.

Special thanks to those individuals, young and old, who contributed interviews to this study. The ideas and opinions that they shared have shaped this report and, in return, it is hoped that this information will contribute to the development of strategies for redressing disadvantage in Ngukurr and other remote indigenous communities.

Acronyms

AFL	Australian Football League
BRACS	Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CEC	Community Education Centre
CMS	Christian Missionary Society
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
EFTPOS	Electronic Funds Transfer Point Of Sale
IEB	Indigenous Education Branch
KDFL	Katherine District Football League
KRALAS	Katherine Regional Aboriginal Legal Aid Service
NSMP	Ngukurr Substance Misuse Project
NT	Northern Territory
NTDE	Northern Territory Department of Education
NTFL	Northern Territory Football League
SEALCP	South East Arnhem Land Collaborative Research Project
YMCGC	Yugul-Mangi Community Government Council

"Ngukurr Crying"

I've been everywhere, I've been here and there
I've been to the north and down south
I've been away for a month sometimes years
But I always hear you call my name
Deep inside of me you say, "Come back"
Yes, "Come back, come back"
I can hear you crying, "Come back"
I can hear you shouting, "Come back"

"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"
"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"

Here I am in this old grog town
I've got no friends, got no money to spend
I pack my bag and I'm on the road again
Another, day, another mile away
The further I go, the louder I can hear you cry
Yes you cry. "Come back"
I can hear you crying, "Come back"
I can hear you shouting, "Come back"

"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"
"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"

No mater how long I've been away
I always have you in my mind
The further I go, the louder I can hear you cry
Yes you cry. "Come back"
I can hear you crying, "Come back"
I can hear you shouting, "Come back"

"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"
"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"

"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"
"Come back. Come back"
Ngukurr crying, "Come back"

(T-Lynx 2000)

1 Introduction

This report describes the lifestyles of male youths aged 15–25 years domiciled in Ngukurr. It outlines the engagement of males in this age bracket with education and training schemes, the labour force, substance misuse, pastimes, the criminal justice system, local affairs and cultural maintenance, and assesses their attitudes toward these and other aspects of community life in the context of their aspirations for themselves and their families. It further explores the social standing of young males within the community, the community's expectations and aspirations for them, and the differences of experience that consecutive generations of local males have encountered over their years of transition from childhood to adulthood.

With the low participation of young males in education and active employment, this report demonstrates the existence of systemic disjunctures between some expectations and aspirations for youth to which community institutions and their supporters ascribe, and the goals attainable by young males under current local conditions. It also shows that traditional structures of gerontocratic authority — although integral to local precepts of family, juvenile socialisation, spiritual maintenance, political leadership and land tenure — contribute to discouraging youths from airing genuine needs and concerns, and affect adversely their motivation to effect change even within themselves.

There are many dedicated individuals of all ages in the fields of health, education, sport, the arts, local government, private enterprise, policing, the judiciary, legal aid and correctional services. These people work to offer local youths guidance and opportunities within the limitations of their abilities, time and budgets. However, at present, there is no local programme that facilitates the coordination of services and resources targeted at youth clients, or the sharing of information between vested agencies that would allow for youths to be monitored in their development and indicate potential problems as they arise. Ultimately, this report advocates that — without the programmes, services and resources available to their urban counterparts — youths in Ngukurr experience difficulties sourcing informed careers guidance, accessing professional services to coach them through their problems, and developing broader interests that might foster new strategies for addressing disadvantage in the community. These conditions are compounded by the remoteness of Ngukurr, the community's inaccessibility by road during the Wet, and the general unwillingness of youths to live away from home for extended periods.

This report is based on research undertaken in Ngukurr over the months of September, October and November 2000. My general approach in gathering data was that of an observer-participant. I involved myself in sports (football, basketball and recreational swimming) and arts (music and recreational dancing) in which young males participate frequently; travelled with colleagues and local families to Wuyagiba (outstation of Numbulwar), Mungajarra (campsite), Nalawan (outstation of Ngukurr) and Numbulwar (town); met Ngukurr people away from their home environs in Katherine and Darwin; and toward to the end of my fieldwork, toured to Jilkminggan (town) with some 50 male youths including those representing Ngukurr's Yugul Power Football Club, and local bands T-Lynx, the Lonely Boys, Tribal Vision and the Yugul Band. Attendance at a variety of local meetings, a public funeral liturgy, and a course in Kriol Awareness undertaken through the Language Centre alongside school staff further enhanced my appreciation for the scope and complexity of the research topic.

Over my months in Ngukurr, a series of events involving issues concerning young males became topics of public debate. On the afternoon of my arrival, the building that had housed the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) — the system that relays television and radio signals into Ngukurr — was gutted by fire. Males of the target age group and younger were among the most immediate suspects. In following weeks, the community took much pride in hearing that representatives of the Ngukurr Bulldogs Football Club — the reigning Katherine District Football League (KDFL) Premiers whose majority membership comprises men under 26 years — had won the Rio Tinto Community Cup. However, with opportunities arising for these young players to represent Northern Territory Football League (NTFL) clubs at weekends in Katherine and Darwin, coaches protested that parents were not providing their sons with adequate financial support.

In mid October, I attended a presentation to school staff and other interested parties by visiting officers of the Indigenous Education Branch (IEB). They outlined the findings of a report commissioned by the Hon. Bob Collins (et al. 1999) which determined that educational outcomes for indigenous children were of an unacceptably low standard throughout the Northern Territory (NT), and established that the role of the IEB — a new initiative of the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE) — would be to assist indigenous communities to implement

the report's extensive recommendations in their local schools. Poor student attendance and high attrition from secondary schooling were among those factors necessitating intervention, and indeed, Ngukurr's Acting Principal reported that there were no male students older than 14 years attending school at the Ngukurr Community Education Centre (CEC). The small minority of teenage males who were undertaking, or had recently undertaken, secondary schooling had done so as boarders in Darwin.

As October drew to a close, magisterial, correctional services and police officers associated with the Katherine Courthouse, and staff of the Katherine Regional Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (KRALAS), visited Ngukurr for a quarterly sitting of Bush Court. Over the two days of these proceedings, I noted that all but two local defendants were male and, of them, just under half were of the target age group. Charges against them varied as did the attitudes that young defendants and their families brought to court.

In addition to casual discussions with Ngukurr residents about the ramifications of these and other topics, especially for male youths, I taped a series of interviews with a small sample of local males. Of the 22 males interviewed, 12 were aged 15–25 years and 10 were older. Their general details and the aliases **(#1–22)** by which they are referred in this report are listed in Appendix 1. The aim of these interviews was to explore more thoroughly, and with sharper focus, opinions and attitudes that had been raised in conversations. Data gathered through these interviews were qualitative, and subjects were guided through discussions that spanned the topics of family and parenting, authority and discipline, spirituality, education, work, pastimes, travel, politics, the judiciary and correctional services, and substance misuse. They also provided a basis for comparing the differences of experience that consecutive generations of local males have encountered over their years of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Older men were generally more articulate and were the first to offer themselves for interview. Males of the target age group were generally less confident expressing themselves in English and, initially, regarded my motives with caution. However, as my presence at youth gatherings and the purpose of my inquiries became more familiar with the passing weeks, it was with eagerness that young males had me later record their opinions.

This report further contextualises data that I gathered in Ngukurr within that already published by the SEALCP (Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000, and Senior 2000), and within the broader literature on the health, addictions, education, (un)employment and pastimes of Australian indigenous youth. It is envisaged the qualitative data presented herein will complement the statistics published in this largely quantitative body of research. For instance, in her analysis of education and employment for young Aboriginal Australians based on data drawn from the 1986 Census, Daly (1993: 9) acknowledges that, with 53% of Aboriginal males aged 15–24 years not in the labour force nor in study, there is "a substantial gap in our knowledge of the activities of young Aboriginal people." It is the experiences, attitudes and lifestyles of youths such as these, whose routines fall outside conventional work and study, that constitute the very focus of this report.

Four sections of discussion and Conclusions follow this Introduction. Section 2 describes contextual factors affecting the lifestyles and attitudes of young males in Ngukurr taking into account the town's history and physical setting. Locally-recognised structures of family and authority, and status accorded male youths within them are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 addresses issues concerning local disadvantage among male youths in education, employment, substance misuse and criminality, and Section 5 explores their popular engagement in localised creative and sporting activities.

2 Contextual Factors

The Community Context

Ngukurr is located in southeastern Arnhem Land and lies 310 km from Katherine along the Stuart and Roper Highways in Australia's NT. The area is remote and becomes inaccessible by road with the rising of the Roper, Wilton and Phelp Rivers in the Wet Season (November - April). Ngukurr was founded in 1908 as a Mission Station by the Anglican Christian Missionary Society (CMS) at a time when peoples of the area had been affected adversely by the pastoral incursions of the decades following the construction of the Overland Telegraph (1870–73). Kriol began to emerge as the mission's primary language among resident speakers of Pidgin English in the early years of settlement (Sandefur 1986: 24). Over ensuing decades, Ngukurr continued to attract residents from groups owning *Kantri* (countries) within a 200-km radius whose original languages include Ngalakan, Marra, Ngandi, Wandarrang, Nunggubuyu, Alawa, Yolngu-Matha, Manggarai, Rembarrnga and Anindilyawka (Bern 1974).

Motivated by the purpose of bettering the lives of its residents through instilling in them Christian beliefs and values, life on the Mission Station was regulated by strict schedules of work and worship. Children were separated from their parents, housed in sex-segregated dormitories under the supervision of mission staff, and educated in English by missionary teachers while the maintenance of Aboriginal languages, beliefs and social practices were actively discouraged. The 1960s ushered a new phase of change for the people of Ngukurr. They were granted representation on the Station Council in 1962, gained rights to vote and to consume alcohol in 1964 and, in 1970, local workers struck for fair wages. The CMS ceded its powers to the Australian Federal Government in 1968 leading to the establishment of a representative Township Association in the mid 1970s and the Yugul-Mangi Community Government Council (YMCGC) in 1988 (Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000: 10–11; Bern 1976).

It was in this climate of social change that local men now in their 40s and early 50s found their first opportunities as adolescents and young men to experience life outside the mission. Their social interactions with *munanga* (white Australians) chiefly in Katherine and Darwin, and their adoption of developing technologies and expressive media brought to Ngukurr an influx of new ideas, attitudes and challenges. For many young people in Ngukurr, the late 1960s and early 1970s were defined by their introduction to commercially-recorded music, electric guitars, the music and dance styles of rock 'n' roll, and the consumption of alcohol in social settings. The late 1980s saw developments in telecommunications as Ngukurr was provided with its first telephone, and it became possible for the community to receive relayed radio and television signals under the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Community Scheme (BRACS). Through the 1990s, televisions and home videos, audio cassettes and discs, and video-game consoles all became part of the cultural milieu in which Ngukurr's young were raised. However, access to computers, telephones and motor vehicles for personal use remains limited.

The Aboriginal population of Ngukurr and its outstations is currently estimated at 1230 residents of whom 603 are male (Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000: 29). The majority of residents are not engaged in conventional employment, for which the community offers few opportunities, and most derive income through the local Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme or unemployment benefits. Males aged 15–25 years account for more than 20% of Ngukurr's Aboriginal male population and comprise some 10% of its Aboriginal population overall (Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000: 29–30).[1]

The Physical Setting

The town area of Ngukurr spans some 1500 m^2 and there are two main roads that pass through the town. The first, referred to herein as the Main Road, turns off the Roper Highway and takes a winding south-southwesterly route. Entering Ngukurr, it passes the airstrip and dump turnoffs on the left, the CEC on the right, the Meeting Hall and the Sports Complex turnoff on the left, and the top camp and the police station turnoff on the right. Veering left, it then passes the residential blocks of Ngukurr Heights (middle camp), and in between Council Offices on the right and the

[1] Nationally, it is estimated that there are 29,500 indigenous males aged 15–24 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999: 53). In 1996, they comprised only 1% of Australia's indigenous population and 45% of their number resided with parents (McLennan, stat. 1996: 1).

General Store on the left before feeding downhill into secondary roads that veer right to the Roper River boat ramp and left to Bottom Camp.

The second main road, referred to herein as the Pool Road, turns left from the first to the Sports Complex taking a straight south-southeasterly route. On the left, it passes the swimming pool, the indoor gym and basketball courts which adjoin the Meeting Hall accessed from the Main Road, the football oval, and a large expanse of bushland stretching east around the rubbish dump and airstrip. On the right, it passes residential blocks into Bottom Camp before turning right into the secondary road that forms the town's southernmost residential perimeter. Halfway along this Bottom Road, the Leisure Centre (known colloquially as the Game Shop) is situated across from Bottom Camp.

Secondary roads and walkways that pass through Ngukurr's residential blocks carry vehicular and pedestrian traffic between private residences and public venues. At nighttime, Ngukurr's roads and walkways are poorly lit by intermittent street lamps yet still carry considerable pedestrian traffic, especially among the young, despite the dangers presented by territorial packs of dogs. Some households have lights strung over their frontyards under which people of all ages may be seen playing cards.

Private residences differ in size, layout and age. They typically possess basic plumbing and cooking facilities, indoor living and outdoor porch areas, series of private bedrooms and generous yards, yet most households experience overcrowding, especially when accommodating visiting relatives (Taylor et al, 2000). Private residences are the primary loci of activities involving sleeping, parenting, family chores and gambling. They also afford secluded spaces where controlled substances (primarily alcohol, cannabis and petrol) may be taken illicitly. Most households are in possession of televisions, video machines, video-game consoles, home stereos and/or musical instruments, and as such, are also loci of private entertainment. Atkinson (1991: 26) estimates that, in remote indigenous communities, 96% of males aged 10–20 years and 91% of those aged 20–35 years watch television and home videos for entertainment.

Table 1 lists the public venues that house facilities and activities that are frequented by male youths along with other constituents of the community. In addition to private residences, general social discourse among and involving young males takes place outside the General Store and Council Offices in the mornings, at takeaway food outlets around lunchtime and dinnertime, and at the Sports Complex and Leisure Centre in the afternoons and evenings. Camp sites secluded within the expanse of bushland lying east of Ngukurr's residential area (known colloquially as Bush Club) are the putative loci of illicit petrol inhalation and, on inspection, exhibited physical evidence of regular use. The YMCGC, the CEC, the Health Clinic, the General Store and the Leisure Centre are each managed by *munanga* staff. However, all but the latter also employ Aboriginal staff in limited numbers.

The General Store is not the only outlet for market goods available to Ngukurr residents. The Yupangala Store, managed by the proprietors of the Leisure Centre, is located some 21 km west toward Mataranka along the Roper Highway in the satellite community of Urapunga past the Wilton River. The general store at Roper Bar, managed by different proprietors, lies a few kilometres further down the highway just beyond the Roper River. Both stores attract loyal Ngukurr custom, and to paying customers, offer shuttle buses in the Dry Season (April–September) and barges along the Roper River in the Wet. The road surface between Ngukurr, Urapunga and Roper Bar is graded gravel. Mataranka on the Stuart Highway lies some 200 km west of Ngukurr and is the location of the nearest long-distance bus stop. It is also the nearest retail outlet for alcohol. However, for a large sum, proprietors in Mataranka will drop alcohol orders at the ruins of the old police station just west of the Roper River (known colloquially as a grog run) [Toohey, 2000]. Beyond Mataranka, Katherine affords the next nearest outlets for alcohol, shopping and services.

Other indigenous communities are also situated off the Roper Highway. Jilkminggan lies 20 km east of Mataranka and some 180 km from Ngukurr off the sealed section of the highway. Miniyeri lies 126 km southwest of Ngukurr on the Hodgeson Downs Lease through 39 km of gravel off the sealed section of the Roper Highway, and Numbulwar lies 156 km northeast-east of Ngukurr on the Gulf of Carpentaria past the Phelp River and Vaughton Creek, and through gravel, dirt, mud and sand. Ngukurr residents visit family in Kalano (Katherine), Jilkminggan, Miniyeri and Numbulwar with some regularity but are highly reliant for this on local relatives with access to motor vehicles for private use. This demand also extends to travel to the outstations of Ngukurr and Numbulwar. Outstations may support small domiciled populations, and offer visiting kin contact with their hereditary country as

well as opportunities for camping, fishing and hunting. Serviced by roads of gravel, dirt, mud or sand, outstations — like Ngukurr and Numbulwar themselves — are inaccessible by road during months of the Wet.

Table 1. Public venues housing facilities and activities frequented by male youths

Venue ***Management***	**Facilities**	**Activities**
General Store	supermarket	general shopping
	takeaway food outlet	meal and snack shopping
	EFTPOS cash outlet	
	pay telephone	
Sub-leased to	petrol bowsers	
Private Contractors	anterior outdoor seating	
Council Offices	meeting room	official meetings
	mail distribution	
	CDEP coordination	
	wage distribution	
	correctional services	community service
	pay telephone	
YMCGC	anterior lawns and seating	public meetings
Meeting Hall		official meetings
	Sports Complex access	public functions
		Bush Court hearings
YMCGC	anterior seating	legal briefings
Sports Complex	takeaway food outlet	meal and snack shopping
	swimming pools	recreational swimming
	outdoor lawns and seating	
	indoor basketball courts	basketball training and fixtures
		public functions
	indoor stage	discos and film nights
	indoor gym	band concerts
YMCGC	football oval	football training and fixtures
Leisure Centre	takeaway food outlet	meal and snack shopping
	arcade games and pool table	recreational gaming
	in-house videos	discos and video viewing
Sub-leased to	indoor and outdoor seating	
Private Business	indoor and outdoor stages	band rehearsals and concerts
eastern bushland	rubbish dump and airstrip	*munanga* recreational walking
YMCGC	Bush Club camp sites	petrol inhalation

Contextualising Male Youth

In her national study of health among Aboriginal youths, Brady (1991a: 1–2) undertakes that "the passage from childhood to adulthood is, biologically, a human universal," and that Arnhem Landers generally perceive adolescence to be a phase when the young gain "sense" and begin to learn appropriate adult behaviour. In east Arnhem Land societies, the ages of 15–25 years in males is traditionally part of a longer period of bachelorhood that extends from first initiation by ritual circumcision (8–15 years) to first marriage (from 25 years but often much older). In Kriol, males of this age group and specific social status may be referred to as *yangbala* (the young) or *singulmen* (bachelors) respectively. By comparison, the Yolngu of northeast Arnhem Land refer to them as *yawirriny'* (bachelors). Largely through the missionary influence of the 20th century, the age of first marriage for males in Arnhem Land has decreased with young males in Ngukurr now marrying and having children from their mid teens. Customarily, much older men would marry teenaged girls who had been betrothed to them yet, by the

1950s, this practice had been eroded through the sustained intervention of Mission authorities. Since then, the shortened period of bachelorhood has not elicited greater social standing for adolescents and young men, nor has it been paralleled by improved job prospects for them.

The ages of 15–25 years constitute a significant transitional phase for males in Ngukurr as elsewhere. During this decade of their lives, most Ngukurr males will start families with their first wives; and receive personal income in the form of unemployment benefits, CDEP payments or, in rare cases, conventional employment; and have their first encounter with the criminal justice system. Although many will have left school before the age of 15, others will attend boarding schools, the nearest being in Darwin, with teenaged peers in isolation from their families, yet only a few will graduate from secondary school. As the evidence to follow attests, of those who undertake CDEP assignments or commence conventional employment, most will find their work dull and remain unmotivated to pursue further education despite its promise of improved opportunities. This general lassitude is compounded by limited local access to services and resources, and Ngukurr's inherent remoteness. As a general preference, young males in Ngukurr will divert their energies to more fulfilling pursuits that hold more immediate rewards and/or seek escapism through substance misuse.

Brady (1991a: 1–2) ventures that these and other factors — including the localised prevalence of television, home videos, commercially-recorded music, discos, popular bands and externally-recruited personnel — have contributed to the development of a distinct identity for youth in remote Aboriginal communities which finds its expression in styles of dress, hair and adornment, taste in music and general comportment. She suggests that there has been a "reduction in close one-to-one contact between mature adults and younger people," and further states that "young Aborigines, to varying degrees, also flout formal and informal rules, appear disproportionately before the juvenile courts, and engage in drug-taking which 'allows' further displays of unsanctioned behaviour" (Brady 1991a: 2).

It is true that, in Ngukurr, youths have adopted a general style of dress that differs from that of older residents. Sports-styled apparel including caps, shirts adorned with field numbers and sometimes woven from shiny materials, board shorts and running shoes are popular as are caps, vests and polo shirts featuring the logo of the Ngukurr Bulldogs Football Club. Nonetheless, there is also a striking similarity between the youthful experiences of Ngukurr males in or approaching their early 50s, and those currently aged 15–25 years. Although the impact of television and videos as later introductions has been considerable, it has been stated already that men of this older age group were among the first locals to experience, as youths, social interactions with *munanga* in urban centres, the music and dance styles of rock 'n' roll, and the consumption of alcohol in social settings.[2] Their exuberant explorations of the benefits and risks of life beyond the community in the first decade of self-determination for Ngukurr, set the tone for the generation to follow despite the fact that contemporary youths are less inclined to seek opportunities outside Ngukurr as their parents once did.

It is evident that the willingness of younger men to follow their elders' participation in ceremonies has to some extent attenuated, and that male youths do spend considerable time relaxing and pursuing recreational activities in each others' company. However, direct contact between mature men and younger males in itself is far from absent. Indeed, the activities in which young males engage are by no means exclusive to their age group, and later discussion will show how their attitudes and the practices associated with popular music, alcohol and sport, in particular, are largely learnt from older men.

Social and health problems associated with alcohol and drug misuse are also not new. They affect local people of all ages and have done so for decades with the 1970s and early 1980s being a particularly turbulent period preceding the abolition of local alcohol outlets. Similarly, young males are not alone in flouting rules both formal and informal. Although, as only one tenth of Ngukurr's population, they did appear disproportionately before Bush Court (October–November 2000) as defendants in just under half of the cases heard.

Nonetheless, it cannot be concluded that male youths in Ngukurr ascribe to the attitudes of "rebellion, resistance and refusal" that Brady (1991a: 2) suggests some young Aborigines have adopted. Older Ngukurr residents generally

[2] As one senior man (**#10**) recalls, "I'm the fellow who encouraged the original Yugul Band [formed 1969]. Music was one of the good things for young people. The old people loved the music. They'd get up and dance. They would enjoy it. The basketball courts used to be packed. There was no tension but it finished at 10 o'clock. They would shut up at 10 o'clock and go to sleep."

feel genuine concern for their young, hope that their quality of life will be, at the very least, no worse than their own, and express disappointment in response to attitudes and repeated acts of perceived youthful irresponsibility. However, they also tend to idealise past conditions under the Mission citing better standards of education and work, and greater respect from youths for the authority of elders. As the following passage of comments offered in interviews illustrates, general opinion of male youths among mature men in Ngukurr is not only varied but, on some points, is notably divided.

> *Young guys like sports. Most of the young boys are into AFL [Australian Football League]. They do follow our traditional culture. That's where they get their discipline. They can adapt to the future and what will affect them. Each boy's got his own responsibility. I don't see a problem with the boys.… It's a family involvement — not just one parent or two parents — it's a family involvement … making sure they're at work and not getting into mischief — tell them who they are. It's the elders who have the final say. [A young man should] follow the guidelines that we were taught, [and] show the community and to their people they can easily follow the straight line, follow the guidelines and be somebody. [If he] keeps in the straight line he won't have any problems.* (**#2**)
>
> *When I was young, I wasn't getting up to any mischief. My father* (**#5**) *taught me a lot. When I see these young fellas walking all night, I never used to do that. I never sniffed in my life. Some just like to walk around at night for fun and then there are the [petrol] sniffers — about six of them or seven of them just sniff along the bottom road. You get boyfriends and girlfriends down there.* (**#3**)
>
> *Boys now walking around, I don't know what they do. Mostly they're behaving. Walking around through boredom to get out of the house and go for a walk. Young fellas, they don't give a hand you know.* (**#8**)
>
> *[Young fellas] are doing pretty good — not that good — but, you know, they're doing good. [They have their] ups and downs — two cultures playing together — munanga society and our own blackfella way. They're playing on each other and, essentially, they don't know where to go. One way you got munanga law — one way you got blackfella law.* (**#6**)
>
> *That's rubbish! There's only one way to be an Aboriginal. If you're a blackfella, you follow blackfella way and blackfella way's got respect. Young people today are spoiled. They're no good. They should go back to the system of recognising Aboriginal law and not follow munanga way. Go back to that law and respect that you're an Aboriginal person. If you want to try and be munanga, no one will respect you. No-one — white man or black man — nobody will respect you. You're an idiot. That's what we tell young people. Munanga will reckon you're no good too. Respect yourself and do the things that people will respect you for. Fight for your people until you die but make sure you respect white and black, and keep on going. Young people haven't got the opportunities we had. People made us work and we earned our living by working hard. Young people today haven't got that. Young men, they can be asleep all day and still get money, and they're spoiled. They're not good now.… Young people are too lazy. If you're trying to do work, the CDEP provides the work but you've got to get up and work, hey? Do it yourself. There's a job here. Put a fence here. You get up and do it but, if you don't want to do it — if you're too lazy, that's your business.* (**#10**)
>
> *A young fella should be a blackfella — be himself. If you know you're a blackfella, you should be a blackfella. You've got the laws and our way is the only way. You can't go two ways.* (**#12**)

Youths characteristically seek out new experiences and inevitably make mistakes in the course of their progression from childhood to adulthood. For many youths, through the influence of peers and older people alike, this process involves experimentation with drugs and alcohol, and as elsewhere, general dissatisfaction with the career and broader life opportunities available to male youths in Ngukurr may contribute to escapist misuses of addictive substances which, in turn, may further contribute to incidences of criminality, risk-taking and self-harm. Although Ngukurr's youth cannot be said to have coalesced as a subculture of rebellion, resistance and refusal, gradual

changes in the activities of the young over the past decade have been interpreted by some mature residents as a challenge to social order. The development in this time of new venues such as the Sports Complex and the Leisure Centre have seen an increased frequency in afternoon and evening activities available to youths locally.

Evenings alone carry much youth and other traffic between private residences, takeaway food outlets, discos, film presentations, basketball matches, band concerts or whatever other attractions may be on offer. Whereas once there had been an expectation that youths should stay within family encampments at night, it has become difficult for mature residents to distinguish nocturnal youth traffic for legitimate evening activities from that related to substance misuse and associated crime. Mature residents report that some young relatives routinely stay out overnight and return home around dawn only to sleep into the afternoon. Compromised in their ability to partake in daytime activities including those involving education and work, these youths also become withdrawn from their families and responsibilities to elders.

3 Family and Authority

Family as Social Organisation

Ngukurr society is traditionally geared to favour the aged with elder males recognised as authoritative leaders by virtue of their age, liturgical conduct and knowledge, family influence and general life experience (Bern 1979). Consequentially, younger males stand in relationships of obligation and deference to them. Ideals of respect and family standing are manifest socially through expectations that the young should fulfil elders' directions no matter how arduous or unreasonable they may seem. As one man in his mid 40s (**#6**) commented, the young can have no identity that is separate from that of their immediate elders.

> *The only thing they can do is … what their parents tell them to do. If you [as a munanga] are over 18, you take responsibility for yourself. You're the boss of yourself but, in our culture, it doesn't matter if he's married or if she's married, father and mother are still the boss … and tell them to go to ceremony.* (**#6**)

Families are structured through syncretic systems of social organisation commonly referred to as kinship. Customarily, kinship not only regulates personal relationships, including those concerning heredity and the betrothal of spouses, but also group ownership of hereditary estates and their incumbent sacra, ceremonial participation and age-graded access to esoteric knowledge, the economic distribution of commodities and resources, and gerontocratic decision-making processes. The fundamental importance of kinship as a logic for social organisation and, in turn, social authority is best described by local conceptualisations of its absence. It is thought unnatural that people should want to live alone or be absent from kin for extended periods of time. People who are kinless are described in Kriol as *wangulu* and the imagery of poverty and destitution that this word conjures parallels that of "penniless" in English. Just as those who are penniless in *munanga* society suffer poor social standing and limited access to commodities and resources, so too do those who are *wangulu* (without kin) in Ngukurr. The often emotional responses of families toward youths behaving in a withdrawn manner are grounded in precepts of the fundamental importance of family and familial responsibility in ordering individual participation in community activities.

Kinship Schemas

As detailed in Appendix 2, in conjunction with the Yirritja and Duwa moieties there are at least three discrete yet superimposed kinship schemas that hold currency in Ngukurr. The first of these describes a relational network of Kriol kin terms that traces ego's lineage from four grandparental sibling pairs and possesses the same structural properties as those current among neighbouring Nunggubuyu and Warnindilyakwa groups. As the primary kinship schema of Ngukurr society, it provides a nomenclature that accommodates close familial relationship as well as classificatory social relationships that are described through recursive uses of the same terms. Although Ngukurr's Yolngu residents traditionally recognise a different primary kinship schema, known as *gurruṯu*, that traces ego's lineage from only three grandparental sibling pairs, the inherent adaptability of kinship as a syncretic social currency allows for the articulation of agnatic relationships between estate-owning groups across these two systems.

The second kinship schema that holds currency in Ngukurr is one of moiety subsections (*skin*) which were originally introduced to Arnhem Landers through the influence of northern desert peoples. This secondary schema provides a relational set of eight classificatory *skin* names, each with male and female variants, by which new acquaintances who possess no common kin may calculate a social relationship. This mechanism generally allows people to pursue common social transactions, including the establishment of new affinal relationships, outside their immediate families throughout the many other indigenous communities in northern and central Australia where *skin* holds currency. Although moieties are recognised, *skin* still holds little currency in the Nunggubuyu community of Numbulwar, and in Warnindilyakwa communities on Bickerton Island and Groote Eylandt. Nunggubuyu and Warnindilyakwa residents of Ngukurr, however, have adopted *skin* names that reflect their affinal relationships. Four moiety sections or semimoieties, which ideally correspond to the eight moiety subsections just discussed, comprise the third kinship schema that holds currency in Ngukurr. This schema has been introduced through the agency of Marra residents whose hereditary estates are owned not by groups discretely but more broadly by agnatic semimoieties (Bern and Lanyon 1984).

Terms also exist to describe relative agnatic and uterine interrelationships between groups, and their respective estates and ceremonies. The agnatic owners of a hereditary estate and its incumbent sacra, as passed from father (*dedi*) to son (*san*) within groups, are *mingiringi.* The intergroup and cross-moiety relationship between child (*nibali*) and mother (*mami*) constitutes the basis of the *junggai* relationship. Rather than owners, *junggai* are typically described as managers who hold the power of veto over decisions made by *mingiringi*, execute preparations for their ceremonies and oversee their ceremonial conduct. An individual will typically recognise his mother's brother (*angkul*) as his closest *junggai* and will himself act as *junggai* for his sisters' sons (*nibali*). As mutual mothers' brothers' sons, *barnga* will also recognise each other as *junggai*. The relationship between a sister's daughter's son (*greni*) and his mother's mother's brothers (*gagu*) is known as *dalnyin*. However, mutual mother's mother's brother's son's sons (*greni* or *gagu*) will also recognise each other as *dalnyin*. Ideally, *dalnyin* are of the same moiety but are of different semimoieties.

The relationship between a sister's daughter's daughter's daughter's son and his mother's mother's mother's mother's brothers has no particular name in Kriol. However, it is this mechanism that facilitates the agnatic co-ownership, as *mingiringi*, of sacra across discrete estate-owning groups within the same moiety. A sister's daughter's daughter's daughter's son and his mother's mother's mother's mother's brothers will identify each other as social brothers (*braja*), and, ideally, be of the same semimoiety and recognise a common metaphysical ancestry. In this broader sense, the terms *junggai* and *dalnyin* may also be applied to describe relationships between semimoieties. Just as an individual may recognise agnates of his own semimoiety as potential co-*mingiringi*, so too may uterines of his mother's semimoiety and mother's mother's semimoiety be recognised respectively as potential *junggai* and *dalnyin* with the remaining semimoiety standing as that of his affines.

Ceremonial Participation and Leadership

Ownership of the three restricted syncretic revelatory and mortuary ceremonies performed by Ngukurr residents is moiety and, in one case, semimoiety specific. Yabuduruwa is collaterally owned by groups of the Yirritja moiety while Gunabibi is collaterally owned by Duwa groups. Balgin, however, is considered to be the most difficult of these ceremonies to perform correctly and is owned only by groups of the Murrungun semimoiety. The liturgies of public (*garma*) and secret (*ngärra'*) *madayin* ceremonies are generally incumbent with hereditary estates to Ngukurr's north and east, and are performed by owning groups of both moieties (Bern 1987).

Collectively, these ceremonies constitute a religious framework through which males may, gradually over decades, gain positions of social authority and recognition as leaders with access to restricted esoteric knowledge through exacting performances of liturgical dance. In keeping with the deference of which they are expected, male youths are customarily initiated into their own group's ceremony in their teens. They observe the dancing of others in ceremony for many years and may not be permitted to dance themselves before their mid 20s. Mature men commonly express concern over the poor participation of younger males in ceremony and uncertainty at how this situation has arisen. To this end, the Anglican Church did much throughout the twentieth century to destabilise local religions and languages, and even though there are now few devout Christians among Ngukurr's male youths, the relevance of ceremonial experience to community life has eroded radically. This general condition is reflected in comments offered by mature men when interviewed.

> *Young people now, they don't want to learn from us — ceremony and all that in the community instead of outside with the girls. What they do now is a problem for the younger kids.… Young men should be attending ceremonies but they're smoking dope, watching videos [and] watching footy — they don't want to sit and learn. They've got no knowledge.... [I learnt] discipline, respect [and] good manners from the Mission. [I] listened to people. When the government took over, it made everything worse.* (**#4**)

> *I didn't make myself a leader. Old people said it. Work hard — leadership.… Leaders are made by the ceremony. Get up and show some capability for being a leader. Show the old people and work hard. Work every day, not for munanga sake but for your people. I spoke up very well as a young person. I had to prove myself. I had to make the old people recognise me as someone who could be [a leader].… You treat problems by respecting the people. Go through father and*

> *mother. Everybody's got to be happy with that. Use the community meetings to talk about problems and what we do about them.* (**#10**)

> *[Young males] are kind of losing the way it was before. They're losing their system — not knowing* skin. *Some of them don't know about their land and culture — where they fit in sometimes. That's changed a lot from the old times when I was growing up. I had people there telling me what to do, where I stand [and] who I am, but now, you don't do that any more. You don't tell people what to do anymore. They know themselves. Well, I don't know. It's the year 2000 and everybody changes. They're losing their culture and what they have — what the older people have. Then we won't be here.…*
>
> *When I was a young fella, I went to Darwin and my parents stayed here but I had to come back for ceremony. They came to Darwin to pick me up. It was good. You learn from your mistakes. Whatever part you have, you learn from it. Ceremony's the thing that you learn discipline from. I didn't know what my* skin *was then, who I could marry or who not to marry. A lot of the women were promised to older men. I hadn't known that when the leaders told me. Young fellas have to learn what their culture is, what their* skin *is and who they're promised to. Old men have a responsibility to teach them this.* (**#13**)

As Kriol and English have for some time been the only languages spoken by the vast majority of Ngukurr residents, the young have no access to conceptual frameworks through which liturgies still sung in languages such as Nunggubuyu and Marra, and their conveyance of cosmological references to ancestors and estates, may be understood. For men dancing in ceremony, misinterpreting sung cues also entails an element of personal risk as poor performances may attract severe physical punishments. Away from the ceremony ground, increased access over recent decades to personal income through the CDEP scheme and unemployment benefits has weakened the day-to-day economic, if not political, dependency of youths upon older men therefore diminishing their need to earn favour by this particular means.

Men now approaching their 50s (among them **#13**) remember participating in public genres of song and dance such as *langurr* yet these have not been performed locally with any regularity since the 1970s. Moreover, it is evident that performances of public liturgy have become so rare that most spectators no longer hold a sense of appropriate conduct. Ultimately, whereas local systems of beliefs together with kinship constituted a logic for existence that informed social practice as is still the case among other peoples in Arnhem Land, this philosophical framework for education and self-identification has been largely lost to youth of Ngukurr. Moreover, as more male youths opt not to participate in ceremony, this traditional mechanism by which ascension to positions of leadership within the community are determined, and therefore local structures of authority, are likely to destabilise further.

Male Youth and Authority

For the most part, it is important for youths to respect the authority and judgment of elders who hold their own and their families best interests at heart. Familial relationships between sons and parents, nephews and uncles, and grandsons and grandparents in Ngukurr are generally amicable and often affectionate. In interviews, local males of all ages cited parents, uncles and grandparents, in addition to mothers and aunts, as role models with whom they held close relationship, from whom they had learnt invaluable life skills, and who had instilled in them respect and pride for themselves, their families and their culture.

Young males are generally willing to help their families in daily matters and extend respect to their elders by fulfilling familial obligations. In this sense, their contributions to family and community life are commonplace yet far from insignificant. They are also active child-rearers with many male youths, even those as young as 15 years, having children of their own. Those in their 20s, may also fulfil the role of social parent to their siblings children. Throughout their lives, men express genuine concern for the futures of their children, nephews and grandchildren. As one leader in his late 50s (**#5**) explained, he still admonishes his 32 year old son (**#3**) by asking, "Who'll look after you when I'm gone? You know I won't be around forever." By contrast, one teenage father (**#19**) offered this account of his familial obligations and hopes for his infant daughter.

> *In my spare time, I clean my mother's house, cut the lawn, go for walks, play basketball or footy, and visit friends. I've sort of got a wife and I've got a kid. She's only two. I spend time looking after her. She doesn't live with her mother but she looks after her many times over weekends. We share responsibility. I love my daughter and, yeah, I'm worried about how she's going to grow up. I clean her mother's house too as I'm working for my mother. I'd like to give her what she likes. Clothes and things — maybe a bike.* (**#19**)

Although integral to local precepts of family, juvenile socialisation and political leadership, it is evident that traditional structures of gerontocratic authority currently offer little scope for youths to express genuine needs and concerns. Although children and youths may come under criticism from mature residents at impromptu mid-morning public meetings on the lawns of the Council Office, local processes of decision making sanction no legitimate form of recourse. Indeed, there are some young men who are privately critical of Ngukurr's current generation of leaders citing lack of direction, and mistrust of their putative dealings with and through the YMCGC but would not let these attitudes be known publically for fear of retribution. These opinions are reflected in comments offered by young men interviewed.

> *[My family] just leaves me alone. [We] walk around, look for women or whatever they're looking for. Sometimes I get really bored — nothing to do. … It is difficult to get heard. They cut you out. You can go to [community] meetings but [you] don't really say anything at them. That's just the way it goes.* (**#7**)

> *We know there are things that are going on here. Really, that's none of my business.* (**#21**)

More generally, however, this exclusion of youths from public debate has resulted in a generational lack of interest. Because youths are ordinarily not engaged intellectually with challenges facing them and their community in fields such as education, (un)employment and substance misuse, their motivation to effect change within themselves, communicate their needs to others or contemplate new strategies through which local disadvantage may be addressed is generally limited. As such, the prevailing attitude of youth toward public affairs in Ngukurr is apathy. Indeed, as found both in conversation and when conducting interviews for this study, there was no shortage of older residents who considered themselves qualified to discuss male youth yet few young males who felt confident in expressing ideas and opinions of their own. Moreover, should male youths experience personal problems that cannot be resolved by negotiations through the family, there are no independent support mechanisms or counselling services other than those offered by the Church accessible to them in Ngukurr.

4 Fields of Disadvantage

Education and Employment

As evidenced by the policy studies of Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen (1983), Miller (1985) and Altman (1991), indigenous disadvantage in education and employment throughout Australia has long been a concern for indigenous communities and governments alike. Youth disadvantage in these related fields is the specific topic of comprehensive quantitative studies by Miller (1989) and Daly (1993). More recently, an independent review of indigenous education in the NT was commissioned by the Hon. Bob Collins (et al. 1999) while Long, Frigo and Batten (2001) were later commissioned by the Federal Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) to report on the transition of indigenous Australians from school to work. The provision of schooling in Ngukurr by the local CEC was investigated by Senior (2000).

Senior (2000: 1) states that ideally, "it is essential for the school to be in a position to provide young people with important skills for their futures [as] education can lead to greater opportunities for employment and empowerment both within people's communities and outside." However, her findings show that many youths in Ngukurr do not think that they will find a job locally even if they do obtain appropriate qualifications (Senior 2000: 30). Brady (1991a: 4) asserts that "in reality" the benefits of schooling toward the likelihood of young Aborigines finding employment are not well defined citing that people with minimal schooling secure jobs of much the same status as those who left school aged 15–16 years and that, overall, Aborigines tend to work "in low-status jobs, regardless of how long they stayed at school, unless they obtained a post-school qualification." In concurrence, Miller (1989: v) further finds that, with the unemployment rate of Aboriginal youths nationwide approximately three times that of others in the youth labour market, "only a small fraction of the sizeable unemployment rate differential between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals can be sourced to differences in the average levels of marketable skills possessed by the two groups, … and is thus potentially attributable to discrimination and/or cultural differences."

Conventional employment opportunities in Ngukurr are scarce especially for youths who, generally, are deemed not to have the skills, motivation or education necessary to hold work. During the period of my fieldwork, the youngest people in conventional work in Ngukurr were a man in his late teens working in the General Store and three of the four Research Assistants of the SEALCP.[3] Of this latter trio comprising two women and a man aged in their mid to late 20s, all three had attended secondary school as boarders at Slade School in Warwick, Queensland. One of the women was awarded a Senior Certificate on completing Year 12 yet, after returning to Ngukurr, had still waited a decade before securing this job, her very first in conventional employment, with the University of Wollongong.

The range of careers within Ngukurr available to residents is limited. As a SEALCP survey (Senior et al. 2000) conducted on behalf of the now-defunct Ngukurr Substance Misuse Project (NSMP) Committee demonstrates, the preferred careers of respondents were limited to motor mechanic, pastoral work, child care, police aid, army reserve (NORFORCE), carpenter, labourer, teacher, receptionist and general trade work.[4] These vocations reflect both the manual labour undertaken in Mission times and the careers currently pursued by mature residents. To some extent, they also reflect the necessities of life in a remote community. Two teenaged interviewees (**#14**, #**19**) explained that they enjoyed tinkering with motor vehicles, and are occasionally required to assist with family repairs and would consider careers as mechanics.

Although, given adequate post-secondary qualifications, it would be possible for residents to pursue different careers, under current circumstances it would be necessary for them to move elsewhere to avail themselves of broader opportunities for work. As the Ngukurr CEC teaches only to Year 8, youths with an aptitude for such achievement find this prospect daunting not only because of the centralising importance of family life but also

[3] Taylor, Bern and Senior (2000: 41) list the YMCGC, the NT Government, the Northern Land Council, the General Store and University of Wollongong as the only employers of indigenous peoples in Ngukurr. Collectively, they provide 23 full-time and nine part-time jobs.

[4] The NSMP Committee was formed in March 2000 to consider strategies for the local prevention of substance misuse. With some success, it briefly trialed a programme of CDEP-styled landscaping work for residents affected by petrol misuse. Progress of the NSMP Committee in addressing misuses of both petrol and cannabis was reported over several editions of the *Ngukurr News* (Southeast Arnhem Land Collaborative Research Project 2000).

because completing Year 12 alone will necessitate a minimum of four years separated from the community at a boarding school. It is indeed an irony that Ngukurr, like other remote indigenous communities, rewards its best scholars by sending them away from home.

This is not to suggest that some young males do not appreciate travel. Of those interviewed, one (**#22**) stated that he enjoyed visiting Darwin while another (**#19**) who had lived with both family and billets in Western Australia (WA) suggested that he would like a job involving travel so that he could visit them. Young males also appreciate the self-sufficiency of being able to afford food, clothes, entertainment and even musical equipment within the limitations of their incomes through studentships, the CDEP scheme or unemployment benefits.[5] However, few will ever earn enough to repay loans for expensive purchases such as a motor vehicle or a private property. As one young man (**#7**) remarked, "If they brought some courses down to Ngukurr — any courses, you'd find plenty of workers around then — a head start for the real thing."

According to Altman (1991:158–60), such "locational disadvantage" is typical of limited labour markets in remote and rural communities throughout Australia. Like other Australian communities, the true extent of unemployment in Ngukurr is hidden by the under-employment of residents in short-term and/or part-time work, and their participation in the local CDEP scheme. As mentioned earlier, the majority of Ngukurr's residents, derive income through unemployment benefits or payments for CDEP work. Work on projects under this latter scheme is typically unskilled and does not ordinarily attract improved opportunities for participants to secure conventional employment either locally or elsewhere. Despite this, CDEP participation is more attractive to some residents than claiming unemployment benefits because of the latter's more restricted eligibility conditions and continuous reporting requirements.

Taylor, Bern and Senior (2000: 37–40) record that among local males some 58% of those aged 15–19 years and some 90% of those aged 20–24 years participate in the CDEP scheme — the highest rates of participation throughout the community — and list 12 projects that operate through Ngukurr's CDEP scheme.[6] During the period of my fieldwork, it was apparent that males aged 15–25 years were working or had worked recently, from fewest to most placements, for the Mechanics' Workshop, the Tyre Bay, Landscaping and Cultural Activities. According to its Coordinator (**#2**), a recent Irrigation Project had involved and had been generally enjoyed by some 60 male youths.

Trudgen (2000: 43–59) suggests that, within the regional context of Arnhem Land, this locational disadvantage is also symptomatic of a fundamental rift in communication between government agencies and the indigenous communities that they serve. Following the Mission era, local peoples were coopted into yet another system of governance very different from their own hereditary structures to which they did not necessarily understand or ascribe. In this era of self-determination, non-indigenous workers were recruited by local councils to serve as bureaucratic intermediaries for government agencies providing services to their communities and, over time, to train local people to adopt these roles. This latter goal has yet to be met and there are still few local indigenous people, other than Councillors, in key administrative positions. With particular reference to the CDEP scheme, Bernardi (1997: 5) suggests that this syndrome has been affected by the imposition of government definitions and values of work, productivity and progress upon indigenous peoples.

> *Given its presuppositional basis, the CDEP scheme has not operated to further Aboriginal self-determination. Rather, it has proven itself to be a successful technique for a European conceptualisation of self-determination whose practice has bureaucratised, commodified and disciplined the Aboriginal domain with the effect of Indigenising poverty.*
>
> *The CDEP has been yet another strategic technique for the transformation of Aboriginal communal relations. Traditional kinship relationships have been broken, realigned and redefined*

[5] Nationally, it is estimated that government payments including those through the CDEP account for 40.5% of the collective income of indigenous males aged 15–24 years (McLennan, stat 1996: 21).

[6] They are the Women's Centre, the Tyre Bay, the Mechanics' Workshop, Landscaping, the Kids' Centre, the Fish Farm, the Laundromat, Cultural Activities, the Cattle Project, the Building Program, Arts and Crafts, and Administration (Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000: 37).

> *according to European perceptions of self-management. Moreover, this bureaucratic superstructure has come to stabilise, and so capture and fix, Aboriginal mobility within its artificial network of administration.* (Bernardi 1997: 5)

Beder (2000: 9–31) establishes that the definitions and values of work, productivity and progress perpetuated by Australian governments stem from early Protestant notions of regimented work as a virtuous service to God. In this regard, prevailing government assumptions that the enfranchisement of indigenous communities into the labour market as a necessary step toward addressing their social disadvantage, and the regimes of work and worship under which Ngukurr's residents lived during the decades of the Mission are closely aligned. In contemporary Ngukurr, the policies of governments and attitudes among older residents who were raised under the Mission's Protestant work ethic have conspired to place upon youths a general expectation that they should pursue education with a view to securing work.

As mentioned earlier, the Acting Principal reported that there were no male students aged more than 14 years attending school at the Ngukurr CEC with only a small minority of older teenage males having undertaken secondary schooling as boarders in Darwin.[7] That few local youths complete Year 12 is explored by Senior (2000) with Collins (et al. 1999) finding poor student attendance, high teacher turnover, language learning difficulties, low student enrolments, disjointed administrative approaches and a 90% rate of attrition from secondary schooling among indigenous students to be contributing factors NT-wide.[8] Taylor, Bern and Senior (1999: 60–2) found that, in 1998, only 58% of local children of compulsory school age were enrolled as students of the Ngukurr CEC with only 70.5% of them attending regularly.

The attitude of young males toward education and employment is often confused by unchallenged notions of their benefits. Older residents perceive that the arduous pastoral and itinerant labour of their youth instilled in them necessary qualities for their current roles as community leaders. As one senior man (**#5**) who had been a professional ringer and boxer in his youth suggests, the current tendency among young males to stay indoors or walk around town in the company of peers is not a sufficient means by which such life experience can be attained.

> *Young people have got problems. [They've] got to work [and] do something useful. [Instead] they play footy. They're at home every day playing video games and smoking* ganja *[cannabis]. I want them to go out to work. They're not learning anything. Get out and learn about the world.* (**#5**)

In conversation, younger boys indicated that they want to work but demonstrated little insight to what type of career they wanted or what steps they might take to secure it. In an interview with one young adolescent (**#16**), it was evident that he perceived work to be a state like marriage that defined one's age-graded social status. When asked if he still attended school, he responded with "I'm married" and, soon after, interjected during his brother's interview (**#17**) to furnish the same information. It became apparent that teenage boys would indicate that they wanted to work, without much awareness of what this might entail, for two primary reasons. Firstly, having been raised in a former Mission, they are well versed in the virtue of work, and secondly, because virtually all able-bodied men laboured under this regime, work — particularly, physically-demanding work — still holds currency as a gauge of manhood. One man in his early 20s (**#21**) reports having moved from job to job even after obtaining a professional qualifications in one. Having recently come through years of heavy cannabis use, he is not working currently and disillusioned with his employment options.

Overall, youths are presented with little incentive to pursue education through schooling or secure conventional work despite the efforts of their older relatives who worked under the Mission, and over recent decades, educated themselves to work in conventional jobs both in Ngukurr and elsewhere. Externally-recruited staff still hold key

[7] Taylor, Bern and Senior (2000: 61) record that, in 1998, the oldest students attending school at the Ngukurr CEC were four boys aged 15 years, three girls aged 15 years and one girl aged 16 years.

[8] Learning difficulties among children are sometimes compounded by hearing problems. Taylor, Bern and Senior (2000: 84–8) indicate that diseases of the nervous system and sense organs account for approximately 24% of hospital admissions among local males aged 5–16 years.

positions in community administration, and as government officers, regulate the local delivery of services and determine agendas for local development. Local indigenous teachers, including three former Principals of the Ngukurr CEC and five with qualifications from Deakin University in Victoria, are among the most highly-qualified professionals in Ngukurr. However, as Senior (2000: 17–19) explains, not one still teaches at the Ngukurr CEC due to a range of personal and professional considerations including the need to balance regimented working hours against the demands of family life, and the fundamental inability of the NTDE in recent years to accept the leadership of a local Aboriginal Principal.

Faced with such examples and the limiting nature of CDEP work, Ngukurr's youths have opted to invest their time and energies into other pastimes which, for them, offer more immediate rewards. In 2000, the NTDE, in response to the findings of Collins (et al. 1999), established the IEB to implement strategies for improving the school attendance and participation, and literacy and numeracy of indigenous children throughout the NT. A broader aim of the IEB is to promote among indigenous communities, parents and students alike the social benefits that improved educational standards will bring. However, while local government agencies continue to impose upon indigenous peoples determinist definitions and values of work, productivity and progress, there is little evidence to suggest that attitudes of local youths toward education and work will change.

Substance Misuse

As evidenced in studies by Reid (ed. 1982), Saggers and Gray (1991), and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs (1999 and 2000), the general health of indigenous Australians has become a growing concern for government and community bodies. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs (2000: 4) reports that, nationally, the average life expectancy of indigenous people is 18 years fewer than that of other Australians with circulatory diseases (heart attacks and strokes), injury and poisoning (vehicular accidents, suicide and homicide), respiratory diseases, cancers and diabetes leading to three in four indigenous deaths. Although this report acknowledges that a holistic approach to improving the health of indigenous Australians must be taken, it identifies nutrition, hearing loss and substance misuse as priority areas requiring particular attention (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs 2000: 15).

With injury and poisoning accounting for 37% of admissions to NT hospitals among males from Ngukurr aged 17–24 years alone, the detrimental effects of substance misuse on the health of local youths are substantial (Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000: 84–8).[9] Moreover, that this figure remains at 32% among local males aged 25–44 years (Taylor, Bern and Senior 2000: 84–8) indicates the lasting effects of related practices adopted in youth. The substances misused most frequently in Ngukurr are petrol (*petrul*, *pedil* or *perrol*), cannabis (*ganja*) and alcohol (*grog*). Incidences of petrol and cannabis are prevalent in young males while the regularity of alcohol consumption tends to increase with age. Recently, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs (2000: 89) found that incidences of cannabis and heroin misuse have increased among indigenous peoples in central and northern Australia. Factors concerning the misuse of petrol, cannabis and alcohol among young males in Ngukurr will be discussed here in turn. Substantial research into petrol inhalation and alcohol consumption throughout Australia's indigenous communities has been undertaken Brady (1991b, 1992, 1995 and 1998, Brady and Morice 1982, and Brady and Torzillo 1995).

According to Brady (1995: 3), incidences of petrol inhalation have been reported among indigenous communities in Arnhem Land and the Western Desert since the late 1960s, and are mostly confined to people aged 10–30 years. Incidences of petrol inhalation in Ngukurr were first reported in 1975 (Brady 1992: 143). Although early action taken by the community in the late 1970s was temporarily successful in curbing the spread of this practice, petrol inhalation is now commonly identified as a preeminent contributor to poor health and social disenfranchisement among local youths. Indeed, the physiological disorders that cumulative toxicity from sustained petrol inhalation can induce, especially among youth suffering poor nutrition, are well documented by Saggers and Gray (1991: 114), Brady (1982: 73) and Gell (1995: 17–18). Immediate effects include agitation, irrationality, aggression,

[9] Nationally, injury accounts for 16.3% of illnesses among indigenous males aged 15–24 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999: 24).

hallucinations, gross disorientation and ataxic gait which, alone, may result in further injury from fights, punishment, deliberate self-harm, vehicular or mechanical accidents, dog bites and/or burns to the feet. Accompanied by weight loss, increased reflexes, tremor, slow heart rate and low blood pressure, advanced users may develop acute encephalopathy, gross seizures and choreoathetoid movements, and without immediate hospitalisation, may suffer sudden death from pneumonia, asphyxia or other causes.

It is unclear how many young males in Ngukurr inhale petrol regularly. Data collected by SEALCP staff for the NSMP Committee (Senior et al. 2000: 2 and 8) in April last year recorded 26 males and 6 females aged 13–37 years who identified as regular users. Of these 32 individuals, only two were younger than 15 years with most aged 15–20 years. In November last year, the community's Sport and Recreation Officer, a locally-raised man aged 32 years who works closely with male youths, stated that on any given afternoon he would expect to there to be approximately 15 youths gathered amidst the seclusion of Bush Club to partake in communal petrol-inhaling sessions. This figure approximates the 20 regular users estimated by interviewees (**#1** and #**7**).

Physical evidence found in clearings amidst dense bushland that are accessible only by walking tracks off the roads that border Bush Club certainly attest to their regular use by groups inhaling petrol. Items found there included campfire ashes, tins, plastic seats and damaged clothing. Discarded drink bottles from which petrol had been inhaled also littered the ground and, from many of these, their tapered tops had been removed to provide an aperture wide enough for this purpose. Overall, police stationed at Ngukurr suspect that there may be as many as 100 individuals who inhale petrol either regularly or casually — a figure that would account for just over 8% of Ngukurr's population.

Petrol is not a controlled substance in Australia nor are there laws against its inhalation. Users of petrol, however, frequently commit property offences by stealing the substance and are prone to commit further offences while under its influence. In the NT, property offences in particular carry a mandatory gaol sentence and cases of petrol-related property offences against young males from Ngukurr are heard regularly by magistrates from the Katherine Courthouse. Staff of KRALAS, who represent Ngukurr residents in virtually all legal matters, reported that one mature locally-raised male health worker had recently attempted to alleviate the relationship between gaolable property offences and petrol inhalation by supplying the substance to young users. Even so, KRALAS staff informed me that the Courts were less than impressed with his efforts. They further recounted that, after his removal and the incarceration of core adolescent boys to whom he had been trafficking, incidences of petrol-related theft, vandalism and violence had dropped sharply.

Of the adolescent males interviewed for this study, two were known users of petrol whose family was active in encouraging them to rehabilitate (**#16** and **#18**). In conversation, they appeared to be far less articulate and self-confident than their peers with fewer personal interests on which to draw. The SEALCP's report to the NSMP Committee (Senior et al. 2000: 8) found general associations between petrol inhalation, and unemployment, poor education and putative boredom among users. However, Brady (1982: 76) suggests that "'boredom' itself is a term disguising a wealth of experiences that stream in upon the Aboriginal child from all sides. These experiences are seen by some observers to be related to structural and sociopolitical factors such as the loss of land, and consequent social and cultural disruption." Communities in which indigenous peoples generally perceive their control over local administration and services to be limited are cited as being at particular risk (Brady 1982: 80). Brady (1982: 73–4) further states that, like communal alcohol consumption, group inhalation sessions such as those occurring at Bush Club are occasions for sharing, conviviality and seeking esteem among users. Even though the substance's hallucinatory effects diminish the responsibility of users, its disinhibiting influence enables them to flout the authority of elders by airing their grievances unashamed (Brady 1982: 82–3).

Ngukurr was once cited by Brady (1992: 160–66) as a model community that, from the late 1970s, had taken action to curb petrol misuse among youths. Young males who were caught inhaling petrol were beaten as punishment and then banished to Kangaroo Island in the crocodile-infested Roper River for a week with minimal provisions where they were savaged by mosquitos. Even then, some continued to misuse petrol when they returned and were beaten again. Of the mature men interviewed, one was known to have been instrumental in implementing this strategy (**#10**) and another is known to have experienced it firsthand (**#6**).

> *In my time, I used to make up my own law. Nobody liked that law but it was good for them. I'd take them to Kangaroo Island and leave them there with half a cup of sugar, half a cup of tea*

> *leaves, five bullets, no mosquito nets and two blankets for the whole lot of them, and leave them there for one week to see how they go — punishment. When I got there on Friday, they didn't touch petrol again. You talk about petrol to them and they really hate it those boys — one of them died in a car accident. They remember Kangaroo Island more than anything — terrible. It's in the middle of the Roper River. Don't think about swimming — crocodiles. …As soon as you jump in the water you're dead, they couldn't even think about swimming across to the mainland — all families.* (**#10**)

Although banishments to Kangaroo Island have been discontinued for over a decade, beatings are still a standard means of attempting to deter youths from misusing petrol. Often, beatings result in serious physical injury requiring medical treatment and, as Brady (1982: 84) suggests, serve only to deepen resentments held by young petrol users toward authority figures. Although not widely accepted among Ngukurr's residents, this professional opinion is shared by the community's Sport and Recreation Officer who further advises that many young petrol users already suffer the neglect of separated and/or alcoholic parents, and only become angrier, more resentful and further withdrawn after physical punishment.

Nevertheless, Brady (1982: 83) suggests that petrol users are often resistant to rational attempts at rehabilitation despite repeated efforts by families, communities and government agencies. With lifestyles that gravitate toward inhaling petrol within the seclusion of Bush Club from mid afternoon into the evening, sleeping throughout the morning and not rising until after midday, they become spatially and emotionally withdrawn from unaffected kin who commonly express sorrow for their lonely condition. The incapacity of inveterate petrol users to respond to conscientious attempts by close kin toward their rehabilitation is often misunderstood as a rejection of the very tenets of family around which Ngukurr society is ordered, and families who accept responsibility for the welfare of affected kin experience much emotional stress. "I don't think he wants to be in the family anymore!" were the words of one distraught father (**#12**) after his teenage son with a history of petrol misuse had been admitted to hospital having swallowed a bottle of pain killers. It is evident how personal frustration of this kind engenders broader resentment toward the young.

> *First, they concentrate on drinking and, then, they concentrate on smoking [*ganja*] which doesn't do them any good. They don't work then. They're no good to anybody. They sit down all day in the house. Then the Sun sets and they go out. You never see them like I never see my son* (**#9**)*. That fella's not talking to me. He smokes* ganja *from the morning [onward]…. They should behave properly. If you grow up and behave, that's how you get respect from old people. Get respect from the community and the leaders of the community. There's no need for binge drinking or* ganja *smoking. They're only copying the munanga system. Be a blackfella. They're trying to be a white man. They're not going to be. You can sniff petrol all you like or smoke* ganja *all you like. You're still yourself.… Don't do silly things. You have to respect your sisters, yourself, old people, and the women and men in front of you because that's the law. If you don't do that you're not a human being.* (**#10**)

Concerns surrounding petrol misuse among local youths are a prominent feature of public debate in Ngukurr. Mature residents regard with suspicion the nocturnal movements of youths between homes, food outlets and public venues along the town's poorly-lit streets and pathways. Indeed, one of the most poorly-lit thoroughfares in Ngukurr is the Pool Road along which the town's residential blocks border Bush Club for a considerable distance. However, even though concerns that other youths staying out at nighttime may also be lost to Bush Club are well founded, Brady (1982: 85) suggests that they also belie more general community misgivings about youthful practices and attitudes that bear little relation to petrol misuse. As evidenced thus far in commentary by mature men, fears surrounding petrol misuse do not end with this practice as they too reflect a range of broader concerns for youthful recognition of social order.

> *Although people in authority express concern about the medical consequences of petrol sniffing, much of the literature betrays a concern with order, "disrespect" and discipline, with the smooth running settlements at all costs, and even with the quantity and type of sexual activity in which adolescents may indulge. All this under the heading of fears about petrol. Terms such as "illicit" and phrases such as "children were* apprehended*" abound, and the major "disorders" that are said to result from sniffing behaviour seem to be a defiance of authority and "anti-social"*

> *behaviour.… Such judgements do not greatly help communities or health personnel to determine what is* really *harmful in petrol sniffing or to appreciate the wider social matrix in which it occurs.* (Brady 1982: 85)

With theft its preeminent mode of acquisition, petrol is undoubtedly the most accessible of substances misused by local youths. Nonetheless, although spread more evenly across a wider age range, cannabis misuse in Ngukurr is far more prevalent.[10] Cannabis is an illicit substance in the NT and, according to local police, is thought to be trafficked into Ngukurr by road from South Australia where it is legal to grow small quantities for personal use. The street price of cannabis in Ngukurr was reported to be $50 per dose (**#7**). Cannabis does not share strong associations with crime or violence among Ngukurr's residents. Rolled into cigarette papers or infused through bongs, it is generally smoked discreetly by individuals or groups in the privacy of remotely-parked motor vehicles or behind closed bedroom doors.

Cannabis offers young males distraction from life's pressures yet at the cost of drained personal finances and reduced self-motivation. Its associated harms include anxiety, dysphoria, panic and paranoia especially among immature users (Darke et al. 2000: v–vi), and like tobacco use, contributes to circulatory and respiratory diseases (Saggers and Gray 1991: 114).[11] "Some people just get too addicted and then go stupid. They can't get any so they go mad" was the explanation offered by one young man (**#7**). Another (**#21**) recounted that, through his years of combined alcohol and cannabis misuse, he had failed to meet even personal goals. During that time, the escapism afforded him by these substances seemed far preferable to dealing with often-daunting yet more immediate personal and family needs, and he is still tempted to smoke cannabis when frustrated. His parents regularly attend nightly Christian Fellowship meetings and pray everyday for his life to be changed, and he privately composes songs with gospel, love and blues themes at home as an alternative means of releasing tension.

Also spread across a wider age range in Ngukurr, yet more prevalent among mature men, is alcohol consumption.[12] Reflecting the community's troubled history with this substance, its consumption within Ngukurr and, most recently, Urapunga is subject to local laws intended to minimise associated harms and civil disruption. Although permitted to consume alcohol legally since 1964, a former President of Ngukurr's Township Association (**#10**) reported it was not until the 1970s that the store at nearby Roper Bar became a localised outlet for its sale. During our interview, he continued to explain how social conditions in Ngukurr had destabilised significantly with increased public drunkenness among residents and associated crime, and how, in the early 1980s, local government had responded with action to prohibit these sales.

Although successful in their bid to prohibit alcohol sales at the Roper Bar Store, the Township Association still received complaints from residents who wanted the right to purchase alcohol locally. In an attempt to meet their wishes, local government opened a Workers' Club where the Leisure Centre is now situated. Unlike the Roper Bar Store which had sold tinned and bottled alcohol for consumption elsewhere once purchased, the Workers' Club served beer from kegs for consumption on its premises alone. However, this attempt at fostering responsible alcohol consumption within the community was to last no more than a year. With a spree of break-ins to the Workers' Club resembling crime now associated with petrol misuse, beer was stolen from kegs and, in response, the venue was closed permanently. Since then, the closest outlets for legal alcohol sales have been at Mataranka.

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[10] Darke (et al. 2000: v) report that 39% of Australians have tried cannabis with 18% having used it in the past year. Among Australians aged 14–19 years, 45% have tried cannabis. Cannabis users are typically unemployed males aged younger than 35 years with low educational attainment, and parallel smoking and drinking habits. 10% of cannabis users smoke bongs or joints daily while another 20–30% are weekly users. The associated harms of cannabis use include anxiety, dysphoria, panic and paranoia. When used in conjunction with alcohol, it contributes to vehicular accidents (Darke et al. 2000: v–vi).

[11] Nationally, it is estimated that 53.5% of indigenous males aged 18–24 years smoke tobacco (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999: 37) and, in 1996, it was estimated that this is also prevalent in 37% of those aged 15–19 years (McLennan, stat. 1996: 7).

[12] Saggers and Gray (1991: 112) estimate that more than 250,000 Australians are alcoholics with 1,200,000 Australians affected personally or within their families by alcohol misuse, one in five hospital beds occupied by a person suffering alcohol's ill effects, and two in five divorces or separations resulting from situations complicated by alcohol dependancy. Alcohol is associated with half of the serious crime in Australia with three-quarters of men who commit violent crimes having consumed alcohol in advance (Saggers and Gray 1991: 113).

Today, it is technically legal for any household in Ngukurr to apply for a licence allowing for the consumption of alcohol at home. Anyone holding this licence is permitted to carry alcohol for domestic use into Ngukurr legally. However, although it is common for *munanga* households to be licenced for alcohol consumption, it is most uncommon among indigenous households. The primary reasons for this are threefold. Firstly, no matter how responsible the license holder, there is always the risk of unwanted attention from those with whom they do not wish to share. Secondly, conflicting values of sobriety instilled through teachings of the Mission are still upheld especially through the considerable influence of female elders. Thirdly, families generally hold strong motivations for minimising the incidences of alcohol-related crime including domestic violence. Amidst these other disincentives, it is far preferable to carry alcohol for private consumption into Ngukurr covertly and unlicenced despite the illegality of this practice (**#13**).

More common than covert alcohol consumption at private residences, however, is overt and institutionalised *grog running*. The *grog run* is an entrenched practice among mature males in Ngukurr and, as recently reported by Toohey (2000), it is allegedly to be supported by proprietors in Mataranka who will drop alcohol orders at the ruins of the old police station, known colloquially as the *grog stop*, on the far bank of the Roper River. Toohey (2000) foregrounds the substantial drain of *grog running* upon family incomes citing that patrons commonly pay in excess of $350 for each delivery. This drain on family incomes is rivalled only by gambling which, in its various forms, is pursued in Ngukurr by males and females of all ages. Toohey (2000) also alleges that Mataranka store mangers hold patrons' electronic-banking cards and personal identification numbers to facilitate transactions and/or ensure payment.

Travelling from Ngukurr over some 30 km to consume ordered alcohol at the *grog stop* is a group undertaking orchestrated predominately by older men requiring command over motor vehicles and, often, the time of others. As noted by Brady (1991b: 189–90), drinkers rely on close kin for sustenance and, even though part of alcohol's appeal is that it alleviates tensions and frustrations, the collectivity of drinking precludes moderation and refusal. Furthermore, cases observed during sittings of Bush Court included situations in which male youths who had gone to the *grog stop* with older men had been coerced to risk serious injury by driving back to Ngukurr unlicenced and/or inebriated. This is indicative of how, as Brady (1991a: 24) suggests, alcohol misuse is a practice learnt by young men from those older.[13]

> *Young men become part of such drinking groups naturally. They "learn" to drink from older men: their brothers, uncles [and] fathers. Drinking makes possible the deeds and words not accomplished when sober: sexual liaisons, speaking out, demonstrations of affection or anger. These things are appealing to the young.* (Brady 1991a: 24)

Saggers and Gray (1991: 113) state that alcohol consumption among indigenous communities in Australia parallels that of impoverished dispossessed peoples throughout the world who experience depressed socioeconomic conditions, models for misuse within their own families and life-long discrimination. Moreover, considering the ready availability of alcohol even in communities where it is prohibited, they suggest that attempts to minimise misuse remain largely unsuccessful in the face of protracted poverty, dispossession, unemployment, racism and sociocultural disintegration. To exemplify this point they cite that treatment for alcoholism among indigenous peoples in the NT extends little further than incarceration (Saggers and Gray 1991: 113). Nonetheless, the detrimental affects of alcohol misuse across the NT's population cannot be underestimated. As Pryor (2000) reports, alcohol contributes to 30% of all deaths in Katherine alone.

Although not technically illegal, *grog running* flaunts both the licencing regime through which the YMCGC continues to promote responsible alcohol consumption and the values of sobriety and non-violence to which conscientious residents ascribe. It sends a message to youths from men of social standing that not all principles the community has adopted need be upheld. There can be little expectation that young users of petrol and/or cannabis

[13] Nationally, it is estimated that 36.1% of indigenous males aged 18–24 year are at low risk of alcohol misuse, 7.7% are at medium risk and 5% are at high risk (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999: 38). However, incidences of alcohol misuse and arrest among males from remote indigenous communities are significantly lower than those of their urban and rural counterparts (McLennan, stat. 1996: 8 and 22).

will discontinue these pursuits while *grog running* — a practice that dangerously combines alcohol consumption and driving — remains a model for socialisation among mature males. There is indeed need for frank and open discussion among Ngukurr residents about the realities of alcohol misuse of the type suggested by Brady in *The Grog Book* (1998).

Ultimately, Brady (1991b: 188–200) advises that irrespective of the personal crises, conflicts and dilemmas that indigenous people face routinely, substances such as petrol, cannabis and alcohol hold innate pleasures. Most typically used by groups, they foster sharing and conviviality among users as well as facilitating expressions of autonomy and daring (1991b: 199–200). Just as newfound responsibilities to spouses and children will most commonly divert individuals from regular substance misuse, Brady (1991b: 206) suggests that entrenched substance misuse in others can only be displaced if superceded by new models for group interaction. As discussed at greater length toward the end of this report, it is imperative that localised indigenous individuals and groups working toward this end receive appropriate recognition and support, and are assisted professionally in their development and implementation of dedicated programmes. These opinions were recently shared by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs (2000: 89–90).

> *Alienation, despair, depression, anxiety and psychosis all contribute to the use of substances in an attempt to escape or temporarily relieve [these] symptoms. A social milieu of unemployment and mainstream hostility makes the abuse of substances in a community worse, and there is a powerful feedback loop through which the abuse of substances creates more misery for the abuser, and for local family and friends.*
>
> *Substance abuse is enacted and maintained in people's daily lives through their locally-based interactions with others. It is only when some sort of grassroots movement arises from concerned local people that action will follow. This has been happening with increasing intensity among Aboriginal people in different areas.* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs 2000: 89–90)

Criminal Justice and Bush Court

Although beatings are still often an immediate response on the part of the community to petrol misuse and related crime, the past decade has seen its steady relinquishment of punitive powers to police and the judiciary. In addition to banishing known petrol users to Kangaroo Island, historically in Ngukurr, transgressions such as elopement or theft could be expected to have been met with harsh public beatings, and putatively, mature adults finding youths out at night without cause would be obeyed upon ordering them home. When older residents now cite nocturnal activities among contemporary youths as indicative of failing authoritarian structures, it is such disciplinarian strategies applied in their youth that inform their frames of reference. One man in his 30s (**#12**) with experience working among contemporary youths explains these attitudes.

> *Before, when I was growing up, if an old man talked to you, you did whatever he told you. We just used to go back to our camp. If you were playing outside the house at night, somebody would tell you to go back and we just had to go back. You can get good boys now. Some boys, they understand, but some, they just don't want to listen. They walk right past you.*
>
> *This generation of young kids today, it's a very hard task to control them. They can't be told. They just want to be themselves now that we have police involved with the petrol sniffers. I remember a long time ago, … they got all the petrol sniffers and took them to Kangaroo Island like my father* (**#10**) *mentioned. That has stopped because, now, the police are hassling us — being involved in our system.* (**#12**)

By contrast, the approaches taken to crime at local sittings of Bush Court seem far more lenient. In Ngukurr, Bush Courts are a quarterly occurrence and allow cases involving residents to be heard locally rather than at the Katherine Courthouse. Generally, they improve the appearance rate of defendants, and allow KRALAS staff better opportunities to liaise with families and other parties in building cases on their behalf. Cases heard over two days at Bush Court's final sitting for 2000 spanned drunken driving and other traffic offences, driving unregistered and unlicensed, carrying alcohol into Ngukurr unlicenced; assaults emanating from domestic violence and family feuds,

property offences and cannabis possession. Most defendants had been charged on multiple counts involving misuses of alcohol in most cases or petrol. Over the two days of hearings, some 25 defendants appeared of whom only two were female and roughly half were males aged 15–25 years. As mentioned previously, comprising only one tenth of Ngukurr's population, the representation of young males as defendants at this Bush Court was highly disproportionate.[14]

Most cases heard at Bush Court attracted convictions accompanied by fines in lieu of suspended sentences, disqualifications from licenced driving, community service and/or good behavior bonds. Only three male defendants appearing were remanded in police custody of whom two received terms of imprisonment. The third was a juvenile who had committed a property offence that normally attracts a mandatory sentence in the NT but was instead to be considered for a diversionary programme. However, primarily due to Ngukurr's remoteness, no local youth offenders had yet been accepted into a diversionary programme. In almost all cases where defendants failed to appear, warrants for their arrest were issued summarily. KRALAS solicitors typically advise defendants to plead guilty as a means of minimising convictions. In defence of their clients, they would commonly cite work commitments and personal income as proof of his ability to pay fines, domains of community life (often putative ceremonial practice and "youth work") that would suffer from his absence if gaoled, his long residency in Ngukurr, and his impaired judgement through limited or no education. The leniency of Bush Courts in the communities serviced by the KRALAS and the Katherine Courthouse is well known, and KRALAS solicitors always request that their cases be heard on these occasions. KRALAS staff commented that, had the cases heard in Ngukurr been heard at the Katherine Courthouse instead, over half would most likely have attracted gaol sentences.

As explained to me by the presiding Magistrate, Bush Courts are lenient intentionally. Their primary objective is not to incarcerate but to instil a sense of responsibility in defendants for crimes often committed against their own community, and to foster awareness of the judiciary process among local people. Particularly among young offenders, most seemed apprehensive about the prospect of serving time at Berrimah Gaol in Darwin, and the majority who left Bush Court with a suspended sentence, fine, community service and/or good behaviour bond were visibly relieved. On the first morning before hearings, one man in his early 30s (**#3**) had jocularly attempted to unnerve young, and possibly neophyte, defendants by slapping together his wrists and exclaiming to them, "Straight down, 10 years!"

Indeed, a more relaxed attitude was more prevalent among mature male defendants facing *grog running* and other alcohol related charges of whom many had long court histories. To them, the prospect of future incarceration seemed no deterrent to reoffending, and with incarceration itself attracting little social stigma in Ngukurr, it may be that the reformative affects of fines and community service are more immediate. One KRALAS solicitor cited inequitable local support against young defendants. He suggested that, where mature men would testify for their defendant peers in court by stating their importance in community and ceremonial affairs, youths would be expected to fend for themselves. This trend would parallel institutionalised beatings for young petrol users while the institution of *grog running* among older men remains conspicuously unchallenged. On balance, however, I witnessed only one case in which a mature man testified for a peer facing *grog run* related charges and one other in which a father appeared to testify for his teenage son.

[14] Borland and Hunter (1997: 4-11) suggest that, in remote communities, arrest has little affect on the probability of indigenous youths securing conventional or CDEP employment.

5 Popular Interests

Recreation or Cultural Practice?

With low participation in conventional employment and education among them, many male youths in Ngukurr invest their time and energies in pastimes involving hunting, sports and music. The former of these is a continuation of food-gathering practices that once constituted the only means of sustenance for local peoples in the era predating Mission rations and general stores (Atkinson 1991: 26). As recently as two decades ago, parties of young men would range on foot, often over several days, through the country surrounding Ngukurr to fish and hunt. Since then, the community's growing culture of reliance on motor vehicles, despite their limited accessibility, has contributed to a general decline in this practice. Nevertheless, trips made by families to remote outstations and campsites continue to provide opportunities for young males to fish and hunt upon hereditary estates. A minority of families with private vehicle access and outstations within commuting distance of Ngukurr live between residences, and conduct a substantial component of their child rearing on hereditary estates.

More commonly though, it is activities in sport and/or music including football, basketball, popular bands and discos that, in addition to standing family obligations, describe patterns for daily routine in the lives of young males. With daytime temperatures too hot throughout most of the year, these are generally late-afternoon and evening activities attracting young participants and observers. As outlined previously in Table 1, the Sports Complex serves as the venue for virtually all organised sporting activities whereas musical activities generally take place privately at the outdoor stage attached to the Leisure Centre. Despite their poor acoustics and staging, some concerts and discos also take place at the Sports Complex inside the basketball courts.

Young males comprise the majority and are among the most ardent of participants in these activities. The achievements of local football teams and popular bands are sources of considerable pride for the community, and these two pursuits in particular are now generally accepted by residents as fields in which young males have much to contribute. Indeed, it is a boy aged 16 years (**#17**) who now holds the honour of having kicked the final goal that sealed the Ngukurr Bulldogs' recent KDFL Grand Final victory. Involved in both football teams and popular bands is a small core of young males who generally do not engage in substance misuse and they are mentored by older men who are also active participants. Although great sources of enjoyment for those involved, football teams and popular bands also demand serious commitment from their members. In this regard, they follow the logic presented by Brady (1991b: 199–206) for redressing entrenched patterns of substance misuse by attempting to foster alternative models for group interaction around social frameworks of sharing and conviviality. These benefits are reflected in motives reported by teenage males for their participation in these activities.

> *I was working at that workshop down the bottom but I'm not working there anymore. Too difficult — didn't feel like working there. I like to play music, write songs, perform for the crowds and all that. I'm in the Lonely Boys band — rhythm guitar. I was 17 when I started playing guitar. I just go back home and practise guitar — practise every day. When I feel like it, I come out and play. I go around and see them play music and I practise more. That's what I do in my free time.… I like people. They are kind and all of that. They like me.* (**#14**)

> *I'm playing for the Ngukurr Bulldogs — A grade.… I kicked the last goal in the Grand Final. Yeah, I kicked the last goal to make Ngukurr Bulldogs win.… Yeah, that was last year. I kicked five or six goals and the last one was the seventh. Yeah, we won all the games. We played from the bottom but came up to the top. …We just keep on winning until we ended up in the Grand Final and I kicked the last goal …. When it's boring, I just play footy or keyboard, or go bush and hunt [or] go fishing with my family.… It's been hard [to learn keyboard]. You've got to learn more skills — more education — to play keyboard.…*
>
> *My youngest brother has been — I don't know why they do this — stealing petrol …. I try to talk to my brother, but he can't listen to me …. My brothers do stupid things [and] we just get a flogging for nothing. We're the innocent mob. My brothers steal petrol [so] we get a flogging too from our brother, sister and father. Our drummer* (**#16**)*, he too was a sniffer. We walked to him and we said, "You'd better leave the field. You'd better come with us and play with us for band. He then became the drummer in our band.* (**#17**)

Football matches and band performances likewise facilitate expressions of autonomy and daring through physical prowess in the former, and through showmanship and virtuosic musicianship in the latter. Outlets for such expression are important in maintaining psychological welfare among males born into a society that traditionally venerates expertise in hunting, singing and dancing. Unlike local places of work and education that are managed by *munanga* staff, sporting teams and popular bands are typically organised by locals around endogenous family structures. Local basketball teams often bear names that reflect their members' associations with specific groups and their *Kantri* (countries), and creative practice among local bands has fostered a rich aesthetic of thematic and kinship referencing between their members.

However, football teams and popular bands have not always fulfilled these roles in Ngukurr. Members of the earliest local band, formed in 1969, recount tumultuous episodes of alcohol misuse in their younger years that, in hindsight, they feel complicated their marriages and impaired their ability to meet personal goals. Until recently, football matches away from Ngukurr had also provided ready opportunities for binge alcohol consumption. It is in part through such personal experiences, however, that some mature men now support the idea that football teams and popular bands should strive to mentor youths through building self-esteem and the pursuit of common goals. It is interesting though that the most active leadership of these endeavours comes from two local men in their 30s — the community's Sport and Recreation Officer who coaches the Ngukurr Bulldogs and his predecessor (**#12**), who independently founded the Yugul Power Football Club and manages four local bands,[15]. Both expressed concern for young males affected by substance misuse and, through their endeavours, were active in exposing them to new interests and in providing them with opportunities to socialise with non-using peers. The latter explains how his own youthful experience of substance misuse informs this current approach.

> *My* angkul *[mother's brother] was playing music before me. He was playing music and started up the Yugul Band in the 1960s. In the 1980s when I started playing, he influenced me and said you have to keep on playing music. I had my brother in a football team so when I went away from school, you know, people used to go drinking. I was on drugs. I was a problem but I hadn't realised that. My father* (**#10**) *kept on telling me, "You can't do that. You've got to live." He didn't give up so that's why he turned me into what I am today.*
>
> *…A lot of young people were missing out on the Bulldogs but I always choose them and they want to play. I started Yugul Power to help them. The boys, they wanted to play sport but they were always left out. They were fighting saying that, "I should be playing football!" I decided to make one team to make them satisfied and stop. Not only that, I started up a basketball team too for the ladies and we got Yugul Power registered. [There's been] no support from the community for the bands but my father helped with the Leisure Centre — somewhere for the bands and all the things we do. It's a private thing but it flows back to the community. Everything's for the community. We're trying to keep the kids away from mischief instead of walking around Friday and Saturday. We tell them, finish there and come over here.* (**#12**)

Australian Rules Football

Australian Rules Football enjoys a high profile in Ngukurr. With high rates of participation among male youths, football training regularly takes place on the Sports Complex oval in the late afternoon on week days, and each session may attract as many as 50 players. As stated earlier, at the time of this research, the Ngukurr Bulldogs — with a core membership of men aged under 26 years — were reigning Premiers of the KDFL and, in the same season, Yugul Power B grade semifinalists in their first season. Over the final weekend of September 2000, Under-14 and Under-16 representatives of the Ngukurr Bulldogs defeated players from Barunga and Kalano (Katherine) at Katherine in a charity match to benefit young KDFL footballers wishing to gain experience with the NT Football League (NTFL) in Darwin. Furthermore, over the following weekend, the Bulldogs' A-Grade team consolidated its KDFL Premiership by defeating Tiwi Football League Premiers, the Imulu Tigers, to win the Rio Tinto Community Cup.

[15] In 2001, the local police aide (father of **#22**) was to assume responsibilities for coaching of the Ngukurr Bulldogs.

The Bulldogs' Coach explained that becoming KDFL Premiers had required more than training on the field as, early in their season, the fitness of A-Grade players had been badly compromised by alcohol, cannabis and cigarettes. After suffering a string of losses, the A-Grade team responded by adopting a firm policy to redress poor fitness in its players. Players encouraged each other to stop smoking tobacco and cannabis, and to consume alcohol only in celebration after away matches. This new approach demanded great personal commitment and self-sacrifice from A-Grade players. Those who were not genuine in wanting to improve their fitness were summarily dropped, and the team started to win matches. With the Bulldogs' KDFL Premiership victory now standing as proof of this strategy's effectiveness, the A-Grade Bulldogs have since been successful in sending a clear message to young aspiring footballers of the incompatibility of achievement in sport and substance misuse.

The Yugul Power Football Club was independently founded to promote similar values even though physical prowess does not drive its recruitment policy. This new club is inclusive in that it seeks to involve youths affected by petrol and cannabis misuse and, recently, it has begun playing weekend matches against teams in nearby communities.[16] The first of these took place in Jilkminggan over the first weekend of November 2000. It involved more than 50 young representatives of Yugul Power who travelled from Ngukurr in the community *culture truck*, and won all five of their matches against teams from Jilkminggan and Miniyeri. Some older relatives had driven to Jilkminggan independently to observe the matches, and the sense of pride and camaraderie engendered by these victories among those present, and especially among the young players, was palpable.

Since winning the KDFL Premiership and the Rio Tinto Community Cup, talented Bulldogs players (among them **#17**) have been in demand among NTFL clubs based in Darwin. Invitations by Nightcliff, the Buffalos and the Wanderers to represent their A-Grade and Under-18 teams at weekends have already benefited the 12 Ngukurr footballers who now have experience in this broader field of competition. At the age of 32 years, the Bulldogs' Coach is the eldest of this group while the others are each aged younger than 26 years.

Travelling from Ngukurr to play weekend matches in Darwin is an immense undertaking for these players. The four who now represent the Buffalos have relocated to Darwin. However, their counterparts representing Nightcliff and the Wanderers spend more than 12 hours each week commuting by road, and are fortunate that their respective clubs cover their travel and accommodation costs. Similar opportunities are also open to Ngukurr's Under-16 and Under-14 footballers. As the Bulldogs' Coach recently told the *NT News* (Smith 2000: 6), spare seats on his weekly commute to Darwin are filled by a handful of Under-16 players who are dropped in Katherine to play weekend matches there and then collected on his return. However, with costs of travel and accommodation for these young players too frequently falling to coaches, he maintains that parents must be more responsible for furnishing their sons adequate financial support for this scheme to continue.

Popular Bands and Song Composition

Young males from Ngukurr have participated in popular bands, first in Darwin and soon after locally, since the late 1960s. The first of these was the Yugul Band which, through an extensive series of name changes, membership changes and periods of hiatus over three decades, still performs with some of its early members (among them **#13**) now entering their late 40s. The creative practice of the Yugul Band (1969–75), and its subsequent rearticulations through the Freddie Harrison Band (1976–79), Felix (1979), Lynx (1979–85) and Broken English (1985–) is now an integral part of Ngukurr's cultural fabric, and has since provided an aesthetic model for subsequent generations of young musicians (Corn 1999). Dating from the early 1970s, songs performed by Broken English feature on two compilation albums (Broken English et al. 1991: 6, and 1997: 8 and 16) and has been released by Skinny Fish Music on a debut album named *The Studio Sessions* (2001).

Since 1999, some musicians still performing with Broken English have diverted their creative energies to two other bands. The lead singer and lead guitarist have joined other original members in a reconstituted Yugul Band while the bass guitarist, the aforementioned founder of the Yugul Power Football Club (**#12**), leads a new band named Tribal Vision. In this time, these men have also worked to foster the talents of teenage musicians in the neophyte

[16] Although their findings were inconclusive, Mason and Wilson (1988) suggest that participation in organised sporting and recreation activities holds general benefits for young indigenous offenders.

bands T-Lynx and the Lonely Boys. Just as the leader of Tribal Vision learnt to play bass guitar from his *angkul* (mother's brother), the late Freddie Harrison (1953–95), and eventually assumed his position in Broken English, his own teenage *san* (son) (**#11**) now plays the same instrument in the Lonely Boys. As mentioned before, his two teenage *braja* (brothers) — a keyboardist (**#17**) who scored the final goal of the Bulldogs' Grand Final victory and a drummer (**#16**) recovering from petrol misuse — are also members of the Lonely Boys. Training and mentoring of the young by older close male relatives is typical among local bands, and this is further evident in their common hard rock style and creative approaches.

The lead singer of both Broken English and the reconstituted Yugul Band was responsible for naming both the Lonely Boys and T-Lynx. Unsure of what to call their band, young members of the former (among them **#11** and **14–17**) approached him for ideas. Citing their song about a lonely boy, he suggested that this might yield a name that they could use. Although not the subject of this original song, the name also reflects the commonly perceived experience of at least one of its members with petrol misuse. When asked why the band had decided on the Lonely Boys as a name, one member (**#17**) responded, "Because there are a lot of lonely boys around here."

In contrast, the naming of T-Lynx was influenced by the direct *dalnyin* relationship in which the young leader of this band (**#22**) stands with the lead singer of Broken English. Beyond standing as respective *greni* (sister's daughter's son) and *gagu* (mother's mother's brother) within the same agnatic group, each also began his career in music as a drummer who later moved into singing and composing. It was therefore a significant act of homage, and a great source of pride to the lead singer of Broken English, for T-Lynx to have been named after another band that he had once founded. As T-Lynx's young leader (**#22**) explains, "He's proud of me right now because I'm following in his footsteps. He showed me that I'm a good singer and encouraged me. He'd been a drummer before too. We're all right — me and my band — we're not going off the track. Most of the time we stay home and practice but other kids still have problems."

With lyrics almost exclusively in English, songs by young musicians in the Lonely Boys and T-Lynx are informed by their life experiences as male youths raised in Ngukurr, and demonstrate knowledge and pride in aspects of their local heritage. "Mr Harrison" by the Lonely Boys' bass guitarist (**#11**) celebrates his *abuji* (father's mother's brother), the late Freddie Harrison, who was bass guitarist of the original Yugul Band and is now remembered by the Freddie Harrison Memorial Festival. This annual event, inaugurated in 1996, showcases local bands, and has attracted others from Numbulwar, Milyakburra, Angurugu, Borroloola and Galiwin'ku. Through his own *dedi* (father) (**#12**), Harrison's *nibali* (sister's son), this young bass guitarist is direct recipient of Harrison's teachings and his song cites Harrison as an inspirational figure behind the Lonely Boys.

Aged 17 years, the leader of T-Lynx (**#22**) had recently been educated to Year 11 at Kormilda College in Darwin, and songs of his composition display considerable sophistication. Its lyrics reproduced earlier, the song that most directly reflects the homesickness endured over his years at boarding school is "Ngukurr Crying." After a traditional religious precept that ancestors through estates will recognise and call to people of their descent, the song envisions Ngukurr calling for the return of its diaspora. It characterises *munanga* population centres as "old grog towns" and may be read further as a song that implies the singer's coming of age after solitary travels to such places.

Other songs by the leader of T-Lynx include "Saltwater Hero" which celebrates his *abija* (mother's father), the late Douglas Daniels (1928–76), who is remembered as one of the greatest local leaders in living memory, "Gojok Boy" which recounts an ancestral story told to him by *abuji* (father's mother), and "Rainmaker" which draws upon the cosmology of his *mami* (mother's) semimoiety. "I Will Help You" espouses camaraderie, cooperation and responsibility between peers while "Reggae Music," T-Lynx's signature song, promotes racial unity. T-Lynx's keyboardist is atypical among musicians in Ngukurr as he was raised in Numbulwar and composes songs with lyrics in Nunggubuyu. Those citing estates owned by Nunggubuyu groups from which his descent is traced include "Amayag," a hereditary estate of the Lalara at the base of Cape Barrow, and "Harris Creek" which flows west from Blue Mud Bay through estates owned by the Nundhirribala, the Nunggarragalug and the Mininggirri.

Creative practice among local bands in Ngukurr demonstrates that, in at least one sphere of cultural activity in Ngukurr, knowledge is passed from mature residents to their younger kin. This body of knowledge spans musical style, performance practice, instrumental technique, the use and maintenance of sound equipment, and the aesthetics of song composition. Furthermore, themes projected through the repertoires of the youngest generation of local musicians celebrate significant figures in Ngukurr's recent history and draw upon cosmologies through which the

composer traces his lineage from elder kin. Although partly fostered through early contact with *munanga* musicians in the 1960s and 1970s, creative practice among local bands has developed without interference from government agencies, and remains a domain in Ngukurr in which the young acknowledge the authority of elders from whom, in turn, they receive practical knowledge, guidance and support.

The benefits of this creative practice extend far beyond members of local bands. Their songs, though mixed roughly, are heard resounding from the speakers of home stereos, and are hummed subconsciously by small children, older youths and mature residents alike. Collectively, the original repertoires of local bands constitute a referential discourse on community life and values with which many individuals identify. Indeed, the general benefits that music holds for increasing socialisation, maintaining cohesion and channeling self-expression among groups of people who share common experiences are well documented by professionals in music therapy who apply such principals in treating disparate clienteles including those affected by substance misuse (Murphy 1983 and 1992, Dougherty 1984, Mark 1986, Freed 1987, Treder-Wolff 1990 and Plach 1996).

Rock bands demand serious commitment from local musicians with much time spent practising and developing repertoire at home during the day, attending afternoon rehearsals and evening performances in the Leisure Centre throughout the week, and occasional tours to nearby communities, Katherine or Darwin. Most local musicians, young and old, are highly proficient multi-instrumentalists and, in some cases, are also gifted composers. There is a general desire amongst musicians in Ngukurr to develop their skills and produce commercial recordings for regional distribution. In recent years, these ends have been met with some success by having courses in Entry Level Contemporary Music Skills delivered locally by the NT University (1995) and Kakadu Studios (2000). Collectively, these courses were also attended by musicians from Numbulwar, Milyakburra, Angurugu, Ramangining and Yuendumu.

There are some 20 male youths participating in local bands with their audience spanning peers of both sexes, younger children and older adults. Sponsored by his father's (**#10**) business in the Leisure Centre, the leader of Tribal Vision (**#12**) has worked diligently over recent years to ensure that this venue caters for local musicians needing to rehearse and perform with adequate staging, lighting instruments and sound equipment. Concerts that are hosted there regularly on Friday and Saturday evenings are well patronised by residents of all ages and can attract audiences 200 strong. Although the music is characteristically loud and energetic, conduct at these events is often reserved. Children dance exuberantly although older audiences, including male youths, generally adopt an attentive silence broken by occasional calls to request songs. The influence of alcohol is not always absent from these occasions especially among mature dancers (among them **#4**) of both sexes.

On only one occasion did I witness dancing by young males and this was during the weekend that Yugul Power toured to Jilkminggan. Accompanying them were members of the Lonely Boys, T-Lynx, Tribal Vision and the Yugul Band, and a motor vehicle loaded with instruments and sound equipment. On the evening after our arrival, these bands staged a concert on the local basketball courts and, playing into the early hours of the morning, instilled a casual mood charged with festivity. Jilkminggan residents and visitors from Miniyeri displayed their gratitude for this evening of entertainment by dancing, requesting songs and occasionally voicing their appreciation between songs. Among them, young males from Ngukurr began dancing in rings. Clapping as they swayed, each would take turns at dancing flamboyantly into the centre of his ring before dashing back to rejoin the perimetre.

With the proximity of Jilkminggan to Mataranka, alcohol was a factor in the mood of this evening yet order was maintained. The tour's organisers, themselves reformed or moderate drinkers, had bought two cartons of beer to be shared between some 30 young men from Ngukurr. This was one of several provisions spanning transport, accommodation, entertainment, umpiring and food arranged for youths over this weekend. When a lone scuffle between two Ngukurr teenagers, which may not even have been alcohol related, erupted in the audience during the evening concert, Tribal Vision's leader (**#12**) took to the microphone admonishing, "No more *grog* for you Ngukurr mob tomorrow."

Bases for Youth Programmes

Yugul Power's tour to Jilkminggan presents a framework around which programmes for male youth in Ngukurr could be further developed. That some 50 young males — more than 40% of their local population — were willing

to endure over eight hours of discomfort caged to capacity as passengers in the *culture truck*, demonstrates that activities involving football and music are among those in which males youths are already eager to participate. For the majority of those attending, the weekend offered an opportunity to pursue and enjoy these existing interests alongside their peers but under the responsible direction of older men. Together, popular bands and football teams manned predominately by young males from Ngukurr contributed to the palpable sense of group cohesion and achievement that the tour afforded.

For the minority of youths affected by petrol and cannabis misuse, who had been encouraged to attend, the weekend offered an opportunity to seek esteem and self-expression by sharing in the achievements of their peers. For them, the therapeutic aims of this exercise cannot be underestimated. Temporarily, it removed them from their networks of support among others affected by substance misuse, and reintroduced them to functional model for socialisation among peers and older men — the ultimate goal being that their sustained interest in football or music amidst a growing culture of non-use among other participants might displace their substance dependancies. Where alcohol was concerned, the tour's organisers also attempted to foster responsible consumption behaviours by enforcing moderation.

Built upon activities in which many male youths have chosen to invest themselves already, the reasoning behind this approach is sound. However, there is much that can be done to improve their effectiveness and introduce other elements that will offer further enhancement. With the nearest youth counselling and crisis services in Katherine, local individuals currently engaged in this type of youth work should be offered paraprofessional training in therapeutic principles for confronting youths with low-frustration tolerance, facilitating group cohesion, interaction to combat isolation, validating self-esteem and releasing tension as well as strategies for managing their personal frustrations that, through this work, they currently face. As identified by the SEALCP's report to the NSPM Committee (Senior et al. 2000: 8), almost 50% of the petrol users surveyed stated that they had no-one with whom they could discuss their problems which, alone, suggests a strong need for local people to acquire specialist counselling skills.

The YMCGC's public building programme has produced a Sports Complex which is second to none within Arnhem Land.[17] However, there is now demand for a shift in public spending to facilitating more effective use of such venues with the development and implementation of community-driven programmes designed to enrich local youth experience. Given adequate training, funding, personnel and resources, local youth workers could develop and implement youth programmes locally. At this time, the costs of driving young footballers to Katherine and Darwin to play weekend matches, and of organising combined football and music tours to neighbouring communities have relied on the private financial support of a small number of dedicated individuals.

Beyond offering training in activities that have yielded professional careers in sport and music for indigenous people from other communities in Arnhem Land, developing youth programmes around the existing interests of local youths would offer a range of more immediate benefits for the Ngukurr community. These activities already engender mutual respect and responsibility between young and mature males and, as evidenced in the case of music, involve the transmission of practical knowledge, guidance and support from old to young. They foster social cohesion and self-esteem through group achievement and personal expression, and as such, stand as a functional model for male youth socialisation among peers and older men.

In monitoring the development of indigenous youths in NT, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs (2000: 73) found only sporadic communication between localised schools and clinics. However, as no males aged 15–25 years presently attend the Ngukurr CEC, it might be the role of paraprofessional youth workers to monitor the development of local youths, liaise with police, courts and health workers, and intervene if necessary. Additionally, youth workers could refer youths to professional counsellors in Katherine and assist with pragmatic careers information.

[17] Historical accounts of disadvantages faced by indigenous Australians in sport, including substandard localised facilities, are offered by Tatz (1987 and 1995).

The effectiveness of programmes for enriching local youth experience is ultimately delimited by the community's ability to sustain it financially and adapt it to the changing needs of local youths over time. Government and other bodies that will fund youth programmes, as well as a range of other opportunities for youths, may be sourced through the website of the NT Office of Youth Affairs (2001). Philanthropic organisations interested in providing short-term funding for youth enrichment programmes include the Foundation for Young Australians (2001).

Conclusions

This report has presented an account of the lifestyles of male youths aged 15–25 years domiciled in Ngukurr. It has outlined the engagement of local youths with education and training schemes, the labour force, substance misuse, pastimes, the criminal justice system, local affairs and cultural maintenance, and has demonstrated their attitudes toward these and other aspects of community life in the context of aspirations for themselves and their families. With commentary from both youths and older men, it has explored the social standing of young males within the community, the community's expectations and aspirations for them, and the differences of experience that consecutive generations of local males have encountered over their years of transition from childhood to adulthood.

Amidst community concerns for male youths surrounding their misuses of petrol and cannabis, their declining participation in ceremony, their disrespect for traditional authoritarian structures and their poor performance in schools, it has been shown that there are familial relationships and popular spheres of interest in Ngukurr that offer young males functional models for socialisation within existing family structures, that offer viable alternative to dependancy networks built around substance misuse, and that offer the bases for programmes that could be developed to enrich local youth experience. Although the priorities of young men, their elders and government agencies sometimes seem divergent, they need not be mutually exclusive.

Rather than determining the education and employment needs of youths upon premises grounded in universalist assumptions of their benefits, government agencies should move further in taking direction from remote indigenous communities in offering local programmes pertinent to their situation and aspirations. Communities need to take more steps to enfranchise youths as partners in such processes. As evidenced among male youths in Ngukurr, where localised options for schooling and work yield little satisfaction, activities in sport and music possess no shortage of enthusiastic young adherents. This indicates that the young are amenable to dedicated and sustained work under the direction of mature men when both the benefits for them and the validation they receive in return are apparent.

Eventually, it is from the current generation of young males that Ngukurr's future leaders will be drawn and, for this reason alone, the community has much to gain from investing heavily in their development now. For this to occur, community concerns should develop as a frank discussion of the prevalent models for socialisation among mature males that local youths are most likely to inherit. It is further recommended that they be translated into steps toward dedicated youth programmes that will facilitate paraprofessional training for locals already engaged in youth work, monitoring and intervention protocols for youth at risk, and general enrichment for males no longer at school who nonetheless require pragmatic mentoring and for whom most opportunities taken for granted by fellow Australians are beyond their means.

If the young men of today are to meet the future challenges of redressing broader social disadvantage in Ngukurr, they must feel confident in their abilities to communicate their present needs and concerns, and know that there are rewards for responsible behaviour, self-motivation and innovation. They require not scepticism, but the community's support and willingness to consider how best to foster their potential. As one mature man (**#13**) involved in the organisation of local bands remarked at the culmination of our discussion of these ideas, "The young boys are all right. They'll get there. They're learning."

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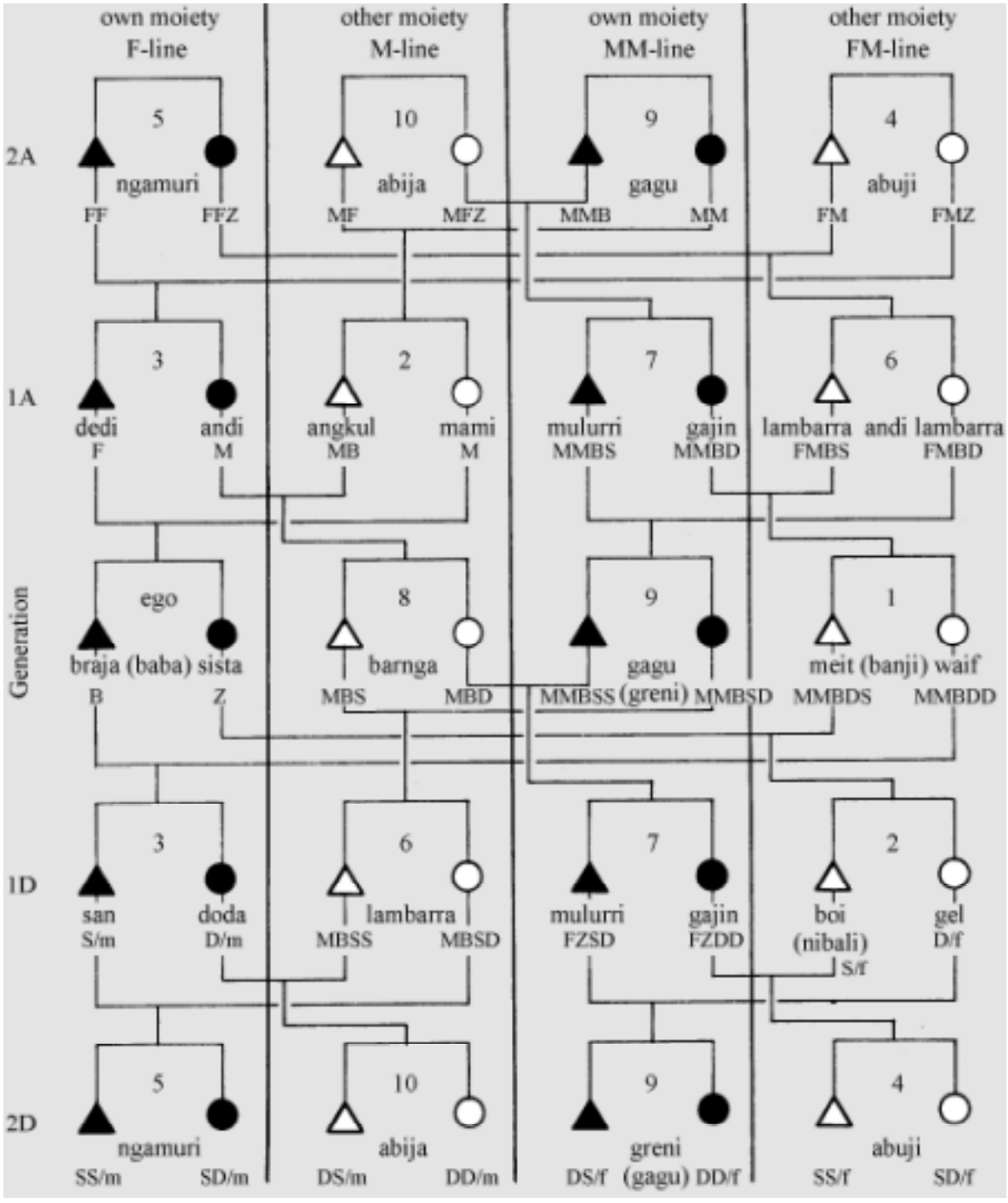
Appendix 1. Demography of Local Males Interviewed, Ngukurr (October–November 2000)

#	Age	Raised in Ngukurr +	School (Leaving Age)	*Attainment*	Work Experience *Further Education*	Employer	Children
1	32		CEC	*Year 9*	BRACS	CDEP	3
2	42		Mission, Darwin	*Year 9*	*land care*	CGC	3
3	30		CEC	*Year 9*	tourism, Rio Tinto	family	3
4	41		Mission, Dhupuma	*Year 12*	Kriol interpreter		3
5	57	outstations	Mission (15)		carpenter, boxer	retired	3
6	46		Mission, Darwin	*Year 12*	*teaching*	retired	3
7	22		CEC	*Year 9*			
8	31		CEC, Darwin	*Year 9*	land care, builder	CDEP	3
9	22	outstations	CEC, Urapunga, Darwin	*Year 10*		CDEP	
10	54		Mission (18)		mechanic, BHP, executive	CGC, family	3
11	16	outstations	CEC, Darwin	*Year 8*	*music*		

#	Age	Raised in Ngukurr +	School (Leaving Age) *Attainment*	Work Experience *Further Education*	Employer	Children
12	36	outstations, Numbulwar	CEC, distance, Dhupuma, Darwin (17)	mechanic, recreation, *music*	family	3
13	46	Darwin	Mission, Darwin (13)	electrician, *music*	CDEP	3
14	19	Tennant Creek	CEC *Year 8*	*music*		
15	18	Katherine	CEC, Darwin *Year 10*	*music, football*	CDEP	3
16	16	outstations	CEC (14) *General Studies*	*music*		3
17	16	outstations	CEC (14) *General Studies*	*music, football*		3
18	17	outstations	CEC (16) *General Studies*			
19	19	Lake Nash WA	CEC, Koolgardie WA (17)*General S*	*football*		3
20	20	Numbulwar	CEC (16) *General Studies*		CEC	3
21	23		CEC, Darwin *Year 11*	*ringer*, stockwork		
22	17		CEC, Darwin *Year 11*	*music*		

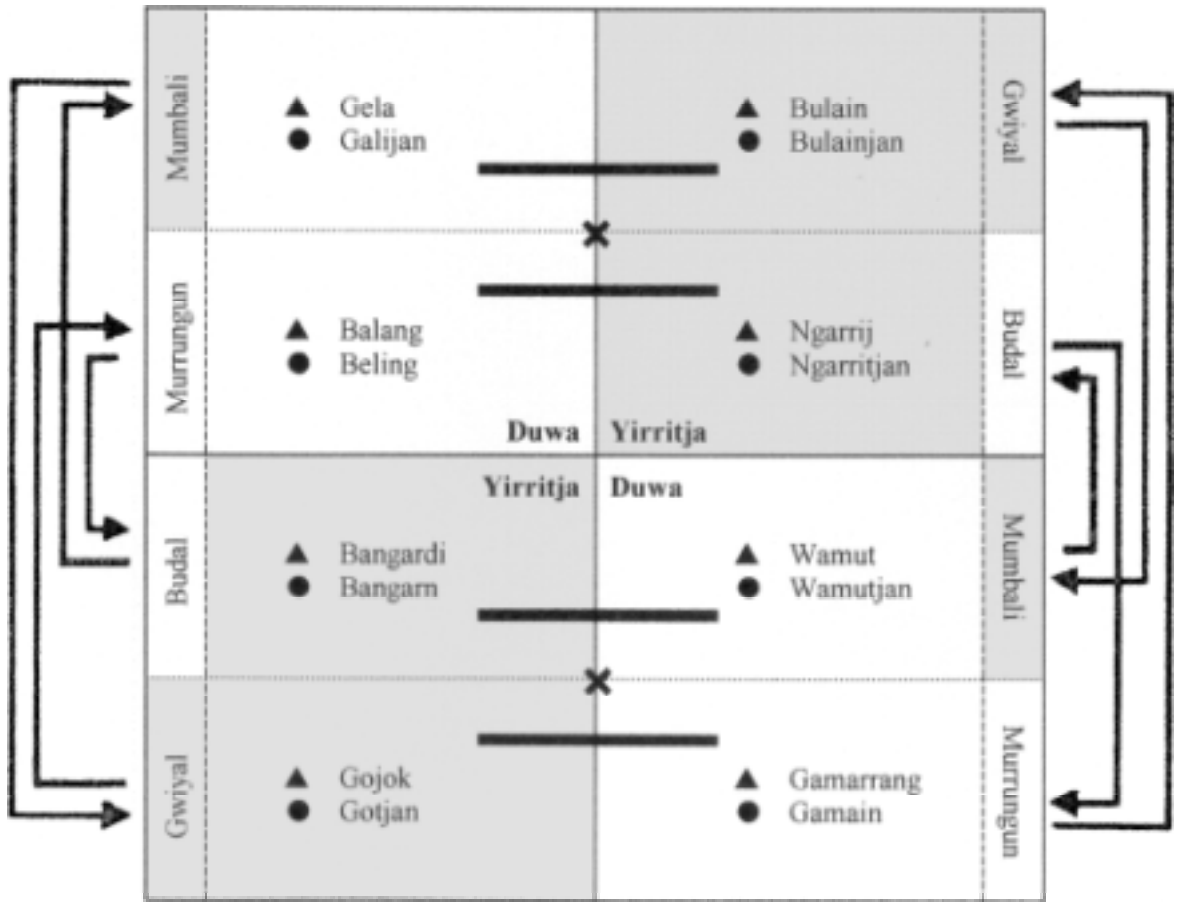
Appendix 2. Localised Systems of Social Organisation

Kinship Schema in Kriol, Egocentric Projection



Appendix 2b. Local Systems of Social Organisation

Moiety Subsection (*Skin*) and sections (Semi-moieties) in Kriol, sociocentric projection



▲ male | ● female | = preferred affines | ✖ alternative affines | mother ➡ child | ╟ ┤ semimoieties

Ngukurr Postcards – Dinah Garadji (1999)
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