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A double-edged spear - the social life of youth, mobile phones and social media in a remote Aboriginal community

Kishan Kariippanon

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UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Faculty of Social Science

School of Health and Society

A DOUBLE-EDGED SPEAR - THE SOCIAL LIFE OF YOUTH, MOBILE
PHONES AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN A REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

Kishan Kariippanon

This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the
award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the
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ABSTRACT

Social media and mobile phones are a global phenomenon and remote communities in North East Arnhem Land have been drawn into the adoption of these emergent technologies. This study of youth and emergent technology is grounded in a traditional Aboriginal context; a remote community with limited access to resources and employment opportunities. It is important to take into account that this community still practised Aboriginal culture, law, discipline, sorcery, traditional medicine and demand sharing as part of their social life.

This ethnography spanned the duration of three years, applied a series of in-depth interviews which were followed up throughout the fieldwork. The informants and interview participant's contributions were triangulated with informal discussions and interactions with youth, socio-historical narratives of technology appropriation and relevant findings from key Indigenous academics. The engagement with young people, generally a hard-to-reach population, was carried out within a respectful relationship dictated by Yolngu kinship laws. All interviews and interactions were undertaken in several locations in the town of Nhulunbuy and the communities of Yirrkala and Birritjimi making the environment and space accessible and relevant to Aboriginal participants and intellectuals especially the young people.

The key study questions were to:

- Understand the role of mobile phones and social media in a remote Aboriginal community and how they were used as a combination between the traditional and contemporary (i.e. The Yirrkala Bark Petition);
- Analyse the attitudes towards mobile phones and social media in the community, particularly amongst young people;
- Describe how these new objects (mobile phones and social media) belong in the Yirritja and Dhuwa moieties, and the kinship system;
- Analyse the use of sorcery or 'accusations and suspicions of sorcery' in the Yolngu online social life.

The ethnography is a story of youth and their struggles, as a result of disproportionate access to economic resources and opportunities. Their partial resistance to the dominant culture, some traditional and cultural norms, including powerful individuals and families in the community, whilst striving to be part of contemporary global youth culture contributed to their expressed feelings of frustration and lack of hope for the future.

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The Traditional Owners, families and individuals in Yirkkala and Birritjimi for their hospitality, their collaboration and the valuable contribution to this body of work;

The late Munyarryun O, waku mirringu, you are deeply missed. #warwu #djapana #tobaccostoryofarnhemland;

My loving partner Katharina and children, Jamilah and Rafael who made the move to Arnhem Land with enthusiasm and encouraged the countless weekends spent in the write-up.

I dedicate this thesis to the Rirratjingu leaders of the past, Mawalan, Milirrpum, Mathaman and Wandjuk Marika, their descendants and the youth who will take Yirkkala into the future.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE DOUBLE-EDGED SPEAR

'Mobile phones: they see it as participating in the current trend. As if any young person wants to be considered a part of the contemporary society'.

(Senior elder and Yolngu entrepreneur)

This thesis explored how people in a remote Australian Aboriginal community use and understand mobile phones and digital technology; as such, it is mostly a study of the social life and cultural embeddedness of mobile phones and social media.

However, it is also a study of the assumptions that outsiders have about the role and purpose of such technology and how they consider it will facilitate their aims.

In this thesis, I attempt to unpack and describe the connections between new technology use, power structures, social inequality and dissent, based on the knowledge contributed by my interview participants and many cultural advisors throughout the three years of my fieldwork. In this setting, tools such as Facebook, acquire new meaning, encompassing novelty and innovation and at the same time provide the convenience for immediate communication in a way that was previously inconceivable.

The title of this thesis captures the complexity of what is a ubiquitous object of modern life. In the remote Indigenous context, the mobile phone at once facilitates kinship connections but encourages individuality. It is often carefully protected as

1 an object that cannot be shared and yet is a conduit for demand sharing among close
2 and extended kin. It becomes a receptacle for cultural knowledge, but also
3 encourages exploration of a globalised world.

4

5 I came to this study, however, with a very different set of assumptions. As a medical
6 professional with interest in public health and the role of technology in public health
7 practice, I was intrigued by how digital technology could be used to engage and
8 promote health in a remote Indigenous community. As with many public health
9 practitioners, captivated by the novelty of this approach (Taylor 2012), I put little
10 thought into the meaning of the tool. I thought that if you could get the message
11 right, the job would be done. When I found that without a study of the meaning of
12 mobile phones, the biography of things (Kopytoff 1986), such as social media or
13 how meaning was made from online information, that such approaches, may result
14 in futility. With that realisation in mind, I began the ethnographic work that
15 underpins this thesis.

16

17 **1.1.1 The setting**

18 My relationship with the Traditional Owner of Yirrkala began with a collaboration
19 to 'de-normalise' scabies through a digital and social media marketing effort. The
20 mutual understanding that my engagement with the life of the community
21 engendered was an essential part of the social marketing program. As a result, I was
22 not only welcomed but supported when my request to rent a dwelling for my family
23 to move in, was granted. I was confident that my relationship in Yirrkala as a
24 volunteer in the Djarrak Football Club would also open up further opportunities to
25 become acquainted with a small part of the life of young men engaged in sports.

1 These early connections and a mutual understanding gave me the confidence that
2 this study would be feasible, supported by the young people and possibly benefit
3 the elders engaged in administrative duties on the Local and Regional Council,
4 including the Aboriginal Medical Services Board.

5

6 **1.1.2 Remote communities, media and communication**

7 Young people in this remote Aboriginal Australian community lived a traditional
8 lifestyle isolated from the general Australian sociality (Burbank 2006) until the
9 arrival of the mining corporation in the 70s, the urbanisation of the mining town in
10 the 90s and when access to the Internet first became available to Aboriginal youth
11 in the Anglicare Youth Centre in Nhulunbuy. Aboriginal people from remote
12 communities engaged with a non-Indigenous world through the lens of the
13 television and radio, but the turbulent history of colonisation always underpinned
14 this interaction.

15

16 The ‘one way’ broadcast from the ‘outside’ was overturned by the ‘Aboriginal
17 invention of television in Central Australia’ (Michaels 1986; Hinkson 1996) where
18 media, film, video and television, became a new form of Indigenous expression that
19 coincided with the acceleration of empowerment for Indigenous people since the
20 1960s (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larking 2002). Opportunities, however, for
21 young people to become engaged in a globalised youth culture remained limited
22 until the emergence of mobile technology and social media (Kral 2010; Taylor
23 2012; Carlson et al. 2015). In 2009, Chenhall and Senior described the frustrations
24 of “glimpsed opportunities” and how this might affect young people’s mental health
25 (p. 29).

1

2 It seemed to me, a former inhabitant of a small rural town in a developing country
3 that newfound freedom was possible through online communication. Technological
4 advances in mobile technology created this availability. The accessibility both from
5 a human centred design and price point perspective had begun its replacement of
6 televisions and radio ownership in remote locations across the country (Kral 2010;
7 2014). The remote communal society appeared to be interrupted by not only
8 disenfranchisement in a post-colonial system, but growing individualisation. This
9 individualisation was a result of the affordability and accessibility of emergent
10 technology and more importantly the effects of globalisation and customer
11 segmentation, explicitly targeting remote locations of Australia. These
12 developments enabled its 'free market' hand to extend into the shallow pockets of
13 women, men and children, even in the remotest parts of the world (Taylor 2012;
14 Owiny, Mehta & Marezki 2014; Carlson et al. 2015).

15

16 **1.1.3 Youth and mobile phones**

17 Yolngu youth growing up in this society appeared to be thrust under a process of
18 re-organisation to produce things which were both culturally and economically
19 sustainable but bound dominant non-Aboriginal culture from the outside. This
20 involved for some, voluntarily completing twelve years of schooling, gaining
21 employment, building professional and social networks, nurturing romantic
22 relationships (Senior & Chenhall 2008), whilst balancing secular laws with tradition
23 and kinship structures (Ingold, Riches & Woodburn 1991; Altman & Petersen 1988;
24 Altman 2011, Senior & Chenhall 2012).

25

1 The personal desktop computer was unable to integrate itself into the lived
2 experiences of youth in this Aboriginal community. They were trapped in a cycle
3 of reduced employment opportunities and overcrowded housing. For them, this
4 technology (personal desktop computers) remained inaccessible, unaffordable and
5 inappropriate due to poverty and high population mobility. The technology
6 contributed to another set of complex problems instead of providing solutions. To
7 intensify this experience, the young people in this study grew up against the
8 backdrop of a wealthy and affluent mining community situated only twenty
9 kilometres away. This vivid difference brought with it severe consequences which
10 will be discussed in this thesis. The appearance of affordable and personal digital
11 tools, such as mobile phones (Kral 2010; Taylor 2012; Carlson et al. 2015; Senior,
12 Helmer & Chenhall 2016) and smartphones, were to a certain degree influence the
13 cultural continuity of this remote Aboriginal community and added to the
14 imagination of an Aboriginal 'globalisation'.

15

16 The strong connection to traditional law, kinship and strict obedience to senior
17 elders and traditional owners were sometimes perceived unfavourable by youth.
18 They appear, according to their elders, to have recently resorted to avoidance of
19 their cultural obligations and engage with another life in cyberspace. This escape
20 was discreetly facilitated and managed by the adoption of mobile technology,
21 particularly smartphones. Through the use of this technology, young people were
22 able to explore their identities and social networks without outwardly questioning
23 their elders' instructions and the demands of kinship laws (Altman & Petersen
24 1988).

25

1 The mobile phone, now within the grasp of the globalised Aboriginal ‘individual’,
2 was reluctant to be shared as a tool with kin and extended family, due to digital
3 features of personalisation. It now embodied and contained personalised, private
4 information. This practice appeared in the discourse and contributions from the
5 study participants, as well as from my analysis in contrast to the appropriated
6 historical foreign artefacts. Items such as the dugout canoe, the metal hooks and
7 prongs for hunting and the Macassan pipe called Lunging, were disembodied from
8 personalities and personal data (Clark & May 2013; Langton & Sloggett 2014) and
9 were always shared communally.

10

11 The use of social media through mobile phones, particularly Facebook, YouTube
12 and Divas Chat, has strategically created avenues for young people to escape the
13 boredom of community life and overcrowded housing, the conflicts and
14 competition for physical space and resources (Senior & Chenhall 2012). From the
15 perception of their elders, it has made young people disinterested in the
16 opportunities for traditional economies and cultural ways of being, such as hunting,
17 making traditional art and participation in ceremonial practice (Kral 2014). The
18 youth in Yirrkala have migrated offline practices of kinship, sharing and
19 maintenance of alliances onto social media by using mobile phones. The cultural
20 practice of caring for kin and country assisted by mobile phones and social media
21 where Yolngu were able to manage their lives both individuals (Berndt & Berndt
22 1985) and as members of a ‘socio’ or alliance (Rowse 2012). The replacement or
23 supplementary to the face to face interactions, of being ‘on country’, was found to
24 coexist with online interactions, a significant disjuncture from traditional practices
25 signified by the globalisation and continuity of traditional Aboriginal culture.

1

2 **1.1.4 Community structure and social capital**

3 According to Schofield (2015), the education and structures of contemporary
4 society were a product of enculturation that created the environment and systems
5 for individualisation and differentiation between community members. The
6 development of individuality was covertly affected by the Yolngu nation's
7 dependence on a power structure, as their day to day living and engagement with
8 the economy and the dominant non-Aboriginal structures demanded an exchange
9 of goods and services (Schofield 2015). As a result, certain families and individuals
10 in the community with administrative responsibilities or owners of capital gained
11 more access to opportunities and resources relative to other members of their
12 communities. This ideology of reciprocity, exchange and dependency, a dual ethic
13 according to Scheper-Hughes (1993), was not new to remote Aboriginal Australians
14 (Berndt & Berndt 1985; Altman & Petersen 1988; Ingold et al. 1991; Petersen 1993;
15 Altman 2011) but a well-crafted social law that kept the clans and individuals in
16 equal power structures. Today this continuing ideology was joined by the rise of
17 globalisation which has emerged as a new challenge to cultural continuity and
18 human flourishing (Appadurai 1996).

19

20 This reciprocal and interdependent Yolngu community, now in a post-colonial
21 globalised world was in tension. The nature of this community had begun to
22 experience individuality and independence, which traditionally contradicted
23 Aboriginal social order and de-stabilise at the grassroots (Schofield 2015). This
24 dual ethic from Scheper-Hughes' perspective (1993) is both egalitarian and
25 collectivist, but could at the same time be hierarchical and dyadic. Acknowledging

1 and understanding the Aboriginal version of Scheper-Hughes's (1993) dual ethic is
2 essential in this study.

3

4 Under this dual ethic, both family and kin were observed to have taken on Avatars
5 of their former colonial bosses, superiors and benefactors within the kinship system
6 (Langton 2008). However, how can we be sure that this new invasion of
7 globalisation and Aboriginal dual ethic in the lives of the Yolngu people, has taken
8 away the power of the individual, forcing them to act in ways contrary to their
9 intentions and desires (Schofield 2015)? Does this then create an economy of 'bad
10 faith', according to Bourdieu (1977 p. 176) where relationships are governed by
11 transactions of forced dependencies, where loyalty and the exploitation of the
12 vulnerable are interpreted as care and nurturance (Scheper-Hughes 1993).

13

14 **1.1.5 Is technology a conduit for solidarity?**

15 Internet technology now accessed through mobile phones and social media earned
16 the reputation for being a conduit for advancing solidarity (Gerbaudo 2012;
17 Eltantawy & Wiest 2011; Lotan et al. 2011; Duarte 2017) since the events of the
18 Arab Spring. The individualisation of the Aboriginal youth culture through Internet
19 and Communication Technology (ICT) however, has the potential, as a result of
20 globalisation, to become an instrument for the division of a communal society
21 (Schofield 2015), mainly traditional Aboriginal communities. The reader will find
22 elements of social inequality as a result of youth consumerism, dramatised in the
23 daily news feeds of the individuals in this study as discussed by the study
24 participants.

25

1 A separation between those with the ability to earn wages for a living (by choice),
2 to those forced to ‘work’ to afford ‘living’, against a backdrop of multiple families
3 and kin living off welfare payments, may have created a new interdependence. This
4 interdependence was unlike the traditional, reciprocal, obligatory sharing in Yolngu
5 culture (Berndt & Berndt 1985, Altman & Petersen 1993; Altman 2011) which
6 yielded unequal returns between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, according to Ingold,
7 Riches & Woodburn (1991). Advances in material benefits by one group of
8 Aboriginal community members, a new middle class of Indigenous managers and
9 leaders (Dodson & Smith 2003; Rowse 2012), obtained at the expense of others
10 (traditional owners and non-traditional owners) according to Davis (2004), had
11 potentially made conflict and competition between family members (Scheper-
12 Hughes 1993) endemic to the relationships of people in this Aboriginal community.

13

14 Donald Thomson, to whose work I refer to across the pages of this thesis, was a
15 cartographer who represented the Commonwealth Government to settle a dispute
16 in the North East Arnhem Land in the mid-1930s. He was an avid photographer and
17 a detailed ethnographer who captured the lived experiences, the philosophy and
18 Yolngu structures of power and communal living that helped foreground my ability
19 to engage with the community during the early days of my arrival in the region.

20 Donald Thomson was also particularly skilful in cross-cultural negotiations and
21 finding resolutions where the government had initially failed and caused much
22 conflict between law enforcement officer and the leader of the Djapu clan, Mr
23 Wonggu Mununggur.

24

25

1 **1.2 WHY THIS STUDY?**

2 Evidence from the literature shows a paucity of studies conducted in Indigenous
3 Australia focussing on emergent communication technology. The critical
4 contribution of this thesis is the exploration of the very assumptions that went
5 untested in previous research efforts on the role of emergent technology and social
6 media. The concept of a 'community' is deconstructed in this thesis, and the
7 homogeneity created by the use of such a colonial term gave way to insights into
8 clans and alliances (Rowse 2012). Evident in Rowse (2012 p.116); 'there are no
9 such things as an autonomous arena of Indigenous values and practices; rather there
10 is a contested intercultural field of transforming and transformed practices and
11 values'. The definition of 'alliance', one that I have incorporated from Rowse's
12 (2012) 'Rethinking Social Justice', is a that of a community subdivided or
13 fictionalised into complex inter-allegiances and groups based on families, clans and
14 ownership of ancestral lands. A similar discussion on the interclan relationship,
15 family ties and social capital also appear and supported in studies conducted by
16 Keen (2003) and Christie & Greatorex (2006).

17

18 The purpose of this study was to apply the knowledge gained through observations,
19 by participation and from in-depth interviews to create a thesis 'where all voices
20 were heard' and that the voices would advocate for 'public policies that were
21 responsive to multiple voices' (Ferguson 2012 p. 141). I agreed with Ferguson
22 (2012 p. 143) that opportunity 'is not just structured by race but by the confluence
23 of race, class, gender, and other dimensions of difference' where interpersonal
24 power refers to 'routinized, day to day practices of how people treat one another'
25 (Ferguson 2012 p. 147). Through an ethnographic approach, this study attempts to

1 provide a holistic and complex picture of the phenomenon and its inter-relationship
2 between human and non-human actors.

3

4 **1.3 THE ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD OF THE STUDY**

5 My entry to North East Arnhem Land and engagement with Yolngu communities
6 was first initiated by a not-for-profit organisation who delivered scabies prevention
7 treatment and care services in the region. I volunteered my time to engage with
8 Yolngu health workers and leaders to facilitate Yolngu-led scabies ‘de-
9 normalisation’ social marketing campaign.

10

11 After two field trips of approximately two and four weeks in length, I asked the
12 Traditional Owners of Rirratjingu country permission to relocate my family closer
13 to the community to conduct my doctoral study. In the meantime, I began a study
14 of basic Yolngu Matha, the traditional language group of the Yolngu nation,
15 through the help of an academic who had worked closely with the Yolngu nation
16 for several decades. I discussed the research proposal with senior elders from the
17 Rirratjingu clan, Aboriginal health workers, directors from the Mulka Project and
18 members of the One Disease (scabies prevention) senior management team and
19 provided several revisions before finalising the document. Once satisfied with the
20 level of consultation and feedback, I prepared a formal document to present to
21 numerous government and Aboriginal organisations.

22

23 I approached The Northern Territory Government Office of Youth Affairs with a
24 copy of my proposal and an executive summary with the main points and
25 procedures for the study. I proceeded to share a draft of my proposal with the

1 director of the Centre for Disease Control, the board members of the Miwatj Health
2 Aboriginal Corporation (the local health service provider in the Miwatj Region of
3 North East Arnhem Land), the Mulka Project, the board of the East Arnhem Shire
4 Council's Youth Project, and the Traditional Owners of the Rirratjingu clan. After
5 scrutinising and making changes to the proposal based on suggestions from the
6 stakeholders, I received a letter of support from the Traditional Owner of
7 Rirratjingu country (Mr Bakamumu Marika), the Mulka Project, the Office of
8 Youth Affairs (Northern Territory Government), and from Miwatj Health
9 Aboriginal Corporation. I did not receive a response from the East Arnhem Shire
10 Council nor the Northern Territory Centre for Disease Control despite several
11 follow-ups.

12

13 All in-depth interview participants were recruited based on the kinship structure
14 that allowed me to communicate in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner. I
15 turned to my Yolngu adopted brothers, maternal uncles and brothers of my adopted
16 father for introductions and recommendations to interview participants and
17 mentorship, including language and cultural training. They also welcomed my
18 discussion with them as I gathered data and analysed them with cultural sensitivity.
19 I also interviewed women who were not my poison cousins¹. Some of the interview
20 participants were not Yolngu, but have been adopted into the community and have
21 spent more than a decade working for Yolngu businesses and Traditional Owners.
22 The names of the interview participants have been changed several times in the
23 thesis to avoid compromising their anonymity. Many of the participants are vocal

¹ People in a particularly highly respectful relationship which the expression of reverence and respect involves complete avoidance (Nicholls 2009)

1 advocates in the community and were happy to talk to me anonymously, and asked
2 that I made sure their tone, language and voice were not identifiable, even their
3 genders. Each of the interview participants has been strong advocates for the
4 appropriate use of mobile technology and social media. Many interviewees are still
5 raising teenage children and have adult children living at home. The formal,
6 informal and follow up interviews, took almost three years to collect.

7

8 The young men were a particularly hard-to-reach population, and many of them
9 were put off by the western institution of consent forms, participant information
10 sheets and voice recorder. They based their participation on Aboriginal law and
11 taught me culture and the use of mobile technology in their community within a
12 reciprocal relationship (Petersen 1993) bounded by kinship ties. I realised within
13 the first year of engagement with men that to go beyond our mutual conversations
14 and formally contribute their knowledge to the study during usual business hours
15 was impossible. I found that the men were more accessible in the evenings often
16 sitting in a pub, on the weekends hunting by the mangroves, taking long bush walks
17 or having a meal at my house. The informal settings were more conducive to in-
18 depth discussions about the research questions while maintaining cultural protocol
19 of respect and reciprocity.

20

21 As I began to understand that a diverse group of Yolngu individuals were
22 empowered differently, either by their standing in their community, their mastery
23 of the English language or access to employment opportunities, I began to seek out
24 young people who were not necessarily emerging leaders among their peers or who
25 held a loud voice in the community. This process was made more accessible by

1 complying with requests from men for lifts from Birritjimi to town or from Yirrkala
2 to town as they often belonged to families' without a vehicle. My relationship with
3 Wayne and Brice (not their real names), two senior men from Yirrkala, was the
4 bedrock upon which all my relationships with younger men were established.
5 Towards the final year of my study, I became close to Daniel from 'house number
6 one'. We engaged in long discussions of power, structure and agency. We bonded
7 over the making of the 'Ngarali-tobacco story of Arnhem Land' documentary, and
8 during the weekends that were spent talking about tobacco, hunting and the
9 similarities between my Indigenous Tamil heritage, the Yolngu cultures and our
10 respective languages.

11

12 My Yolngu mentors, interview participants and extended community members saw
13 me as a man stuck between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. I was not
14 the oppressor or coloniser, nor was I disadvantaged by a lack of education and
15 employment opportunities. Within this nexus, we engaged. Having grown up in a
16 family of seven that shared a two-bedroom government public housing dwelling
17 with a fence instead of a front yard, and grandparents who were illiterate labourers
18 from the south of India, parents who suffered discrimination, whether in school or
19 at work, the Yolngu narrative and history was somewhat familiar to me. However,
20 as a doctoral student and homeowner, my life had begun to take a capitalist turn
21 when compared to a Yolngu of the same gender and age. It would only be fair that
22 I accepted my arrival in Yirrkala and Birritjimi with some relative privilege.

23

24

25

1 **1.4 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS**

2 In Chapter two, I set the scene for the study through a deconstruction of the socio-
3 political life of Yirrkala between 2012 and 2015. I described this assemblage of
4 identities and alliances, as no longer a singular or homogenous egalitarian society.
5 I discuss the contribution of leaders who had experienced one of the most
6 significant struggles for land rights in Australian history. The band of leaders were
7 from a variety of age groups, some as young as 17 years old. Together, in solidarity,
8 they took on the Commonwealth Government and the multinational mining
9 company, Nabalco Pty Ltd, in a legal battle entitled *Milirrpum vs Nabalco and the*
10 *Commonwealth Government 1971* (Williams 1986). This phenomenon appeared to
11 me as the first glimmering of an Aboriginal Spring.

12

13 This uniquely documented event (*Milirrpum vs Nabalco and the Commonwealth*
14 *Government 1971*) resulted in the well-known Land Rights struggle and the
15 Northern Territory Land Rights Act 1976 being passed (Williams 1986). The
16 chapter relates to the reader a contemporary story of conflict and agreement that
17 played out between clans, between Yolngu and non-Yolngu actors, which may have
18 also occurred during the era of trade with Macassans from across the sea, and
19 continued until the events of the Gove (Nhulunbuy) Dispute of 2012 (Taylor 2014).
20 I describe the interdependence that was gradually formed between the mining
21 industry, the Commonwealth Government and the remote Aboriginal community
22 in the last 40 years contrary to the emancipation of the Yolngu nation through
23 *Milirrpum vs Nabalco 1971* (Williams 1986). I use the evolution of relationships,
24 both current and historical, to draw a macro example of the struggle between clans

1 and families to adapt to contemporary political life, to acquire resources for the
2 survival and advancement of their families and alliances (Rowse 2012).

3

4 Also in the second chapter, the theory of cultural continuity (Burbank 1994) is
5 explored. In a post-colonial community, traditional law, dissent, conflict, agreement
6 and history with foreign trade predating European colonisation, had created a need
7 for clans to acquire and appropriate resources through Indigenous corporatisation
8 (Rowse 2012). In today's globalised culture and the free market, the community
9 members were armed with a clan-centric ideology in which alliances were
10 maintained for economic gains and geared towards progress and political
11 sustainability (Rowse 2012). In this chapter, these factors are discussed in the
12 events of a dispute between two influential clans. Their struggles were analysed as
13 symptoms of a society that reflect the colonial oppression it had internalised (Freire
14 2000; Langton 2008). Durkheim's 'Theory of Anomie', Lewis's 'Culture of
15 Poverty' and Murray's underclass or 'Dependency Culture Theory' in are all
16 considered in a discussion where each posit that poor communities tend to develop
17 unusual cultural patterns that may have destructive and adverse effects for social
18 and health outcomes (Mackenbach 2012).

19

20 It would be culturally inappropriate and methodologically flawed to discuss the
21 emergence of new technology without the examination of traditional Yolngu
22 theory, previously referred to as 'mythology' that emerged at the beginning of time
23 and was modified during the era of engagement and trade with Macassan seafarers
24 in North East Arnhem Land (Macknight 1986; McIntosh 2000; 2006; 2011). The
25 combination of current political events and interactions between clans is compared

1 and understood through the interactions of Yolngu with Macassans, with a
2 particular focus on the ancient dingo and ‘Bayini’ theory (McIntosh 2006). Theories
3 that were used to prophesize the struggle of change, improvisation and cultural
4 continuity. Acknowledging this connection is necessary to understand the
5 complexity of Yolngu interactions between kinship, culture and the adoption of new
6 technology.

7

8 The discussion on the ‘Bayini’ theory is particularly one of power and agency in
9 the face of an ever-changing world, where Yolngu were afraid of remaining ‘black’
10 (impoverished and marginalised) if they did not adapt to new technology, and chose
11 to practice their culture unaltered and authentic (McIntosh 2011; 2013). This
12 chapter is essential in establishing the prophetic conflict according to Burrumarra
13 M.B.E. (McIntosh 2011; 2013; Clark & May 2013). The struggle between cultural
14 continuity and the advancement of Yolngu society through the adoption of new
15 practices or new technology, while finding the balance between cultural identity
16 and the inevitable forces of change becomes a theoretical discourse, trope or
17 metaphor for this thesis.

18

19 This thesis attempts to discuss the adoption of new technology brought by
20 Macassan seafarers for trade with Yolngu (which lasted over 200 years). In order
21 to discuss the traditional metaphors that were used in the control, interpretation and
22 incorporation of new technology into Yolngu traditional life and kinship structures
23 (McIntosh 2011; 2013; Robertson et al. 2013; Clark & May 2013) it is necessary to
24 use a historical lens that enables the study to analyse patterns and draw parallels for
25 comparison. This approach made the discussion and interviews with Yolngu

1 participants more feasible and transferable to the English language for analysis and
2 writing this thesis.

3

4 The purpose of this chapter was not to turn a mere sequence of events into a
5 discussion of causality or to simplify the great history and struggle towards the
6 ‘peoplehood’ (Rowse 2012) of remote Aboriginal Australians. On the contrary, my
7 intention was to problematize the lack of opportunity that remote Aboriginal people
8 have had and to critique and theorise cultural continuity in their current post-
9 colonial context (Burbank 2006; Senior & Chenhall 2012). Those who survived
10 colonisation and the Christian Mission administration under the Commonwealth
11 Government (Morphy 2009), must be given the space to reorganise and restructure
12 for the future, through ‘Intergenerational dialogue’² as described by Rowse (2012
13 p. 60) drew on the example of a community reorganisation in Goulburn Island. It is
14 important that this study evaluates how and why new decisions have to be made in
15 order to understand ‘[how] the results of the former affect the social action of other
16 people in a rippling movement which may go far before it is spent’ (Moberg 2012
17 p. 208).

18

19 The third chapter discusses a current trend in Indigenous public health practice
20 focusing on the use of mobile phones and social media by public health
21 professionals to engage young people. The chapter explores how the methods of
22 post-colonial public health, which sought to improve health outcomes without
23 acknowledging the beliefs and traditions of Indigenous people, albeit utilising

² The changes to marriage customs in September 1969 in Goulburn Island

1 cultural relativism (Kowal & Paradies 2005), was indirectly challenging the cultural
2 practices and beliefs of the Yolngu. Cultural relativism that is referred to in this
3 thesis particularly in Chapter 3 is a perspective where the ‘traits, beliefs, practices
4 and the like must be understood within their particular cultural contexts’ (Feinberg
5 & Ottenheimer 2001, p. 16) but does not preclude any cross-cultural comparison.
6 Ottenheimer in Feinberg & Ottenheimer (2001) stated that cultural relativism was
7 ‘self –defeating’ as the results of such perspectives (grounded in relativism), merely
8 substitutes one form of ethnocentrism for another, a point which is agreed upon by
9 Kowal & Paradies (2005).

10

11 Without a basis in social theory, public health methods that varied between
12 structuralist and agentic programs (Lea 2005) unintentionally undermined
13 traditional authority (Burbank 1994; 2006) and decision-making on the subject of
14 health, disease, and the causality of life and death (Reid 1983; Lea 2005; Senior &
15 Chenhall 2008). The public health agenda, even when implemented by a local
16 Aboriginal Community Controlled primary health care provider, who identified and
17 employed culturally appropriate Aboriginal health workers, had required them to
18 separate themselves from traditional culture and belief in sorcery and traditional
19 healers. The health workers were asked to hold the discussion about health and
20 illness with the community of traditional people on behalf of the scientific
21 community or between the communal body politic of their society and the health
22 service provider.

23

24 The use of transactionalism in public health (Lea 2005) was where behavioural
25 change was manufactured. The assumption that Aboriginal community members

1 would make better-informed lifestyle choices based on a simplistic story on disease
2 causation did not take into account the possibility individuals may pursue and
3 prioritise self-interest over health information. Another focus of this chapter is the
4 belief in the value of digital engagement via social media in the public health space
5 and the assumptions made on the part of public health practitioners in their
6 perceptions of Aboriginal people's thinking of social media marketing and health
7 communications.

8

9 In Chapter 4, I theorise on the research methods that were applied in this Indigenous
10 context and the purposive sampling methods (Agar 1996; 2004, DeWalt & DeWalt
11 2010) that were incorporated based on traditional kinship laws and Yolngu culture,
12 as advised by my cultural mentors. The non-reductionist method of sampling (Agar
13 1996; 2004) used in this study was supported and guided by several Aboriginal
14 senior elders and my supervisor (Senior 2003). I refer to myself in this chapter as
15 the 'Macassan returned' as a researcher, in order to emphasise that my role in the
16 community involved maintaining reciprocal relationships as dictated by kinship,
17 but also acknowledging that Yolngu and I have both examined and evaluated each
18 other over a three-year period in the making of this analysis. The metaphor also
19 refers to the historical connection and experiences of colonialism that we share. The
20 added value of my fluency in Malay and the ability to understand Malay words that
21 were incorporated into Yolngu Matha were an added strength to the level of
22 engagement, trust and rapport I was able to nurture during the study.

23

24 Using the example of Macassans and the recruitment of Yolngu in the harvesting
25 of trepang, a traditionally gendered activity (Berndt & Berndt 1988), I proposed

1 that culture and practice, to Yolngu, have always been a reflexive activity lacking
2 in the cultural conservatism witnessed today by a generation raised within the walls
3 of the Church (Morphy 2009), and the Mission era. 'By satisfying wants without
4 compelling sacrifice and subordination to elders, the colonising power has
5 effectively addressed the insurgent energies of youth' according to Rowse (2012 p.
6 57), through the provision of 'food, clothing, freedom from hunger and want, the
7 breaking of age-old shackles and above all natural curiosity and the spirit of
8 youthful adventure'. Therefore, the method of ethnography and semi-structured
9 interviews in an immersive experience of collaboration and a posture of learning
10 was intended to create an interaction that encouraged reflexivity (Agar 1996; 2004;
11 DeWalt & DeWalt 2010).

12

13 In Chapter 5, I explain how I finalised my research question after a period of
14 stakeholder consultation and deliberation. During the period of my engagement as
15 a volunteer and an adopted member of the Rirratjingu clan, community members,
16 especially elders and health workers had led the process of consultation with key
17 influencers in the community. The observations and community consultations
18 helped the formulation of the research question. The series of consultation took me
19 on a path that challenged my hypothesis; where social media, mobile phones in
20 public health and social marketing were robust solutions to behavioural challenges
21 or as tools for public health interventions as argued by Syme (1998) especially for
22 a cohort of men with low health seeking behaviour (Senior 2003; Senior & Chenhall
23 2012). This process eventually led me to formulate a more appropriate and suitable
24 research question, one that attempted to bridge anthropological theory with public
25 health practice.

1
2 Chapter 6 is the results and discussion section written as an ethnography of young
3 people and mobile phones in the community. This chapter is further strengthened
4 by Chapter 7, an ethnography of social media use, in the community. In both
5 chapters, an in-depth analysis of the effects of the prolonged or intense use of social
6 media via mobile phones by young people is provided. I also deliberated on the
7 nature of compulsive communication (Carlson et al. 2015; Senior, Helmer &
8 Chenhall 2016), online self-disclosure (Suler 2004) and reassurance seeking (Van
9 Orden et al. 2010; Clerkin 2013) by youth as a symptom of chronic stress from
10 interpersonal conflict, prolonged social and emotional isolation (Kral 2014) and
11 possible inter-clan tension (Rowse 2012). The social drama of young people's lives
12 viewed through their use of social media and mobile phones was examined as 'an
13 optimal unit of analysis because it has a beginning, a middle and an end' (Moberg
14 2012 p. 284). The use of an inanimate object like social media and mobile phones
15 allowed for more in-depth discussion on what affected the lived experiences of
16 young people in the community because of its finite nature, therefore making my
17 research, a feasible study.

18
19 In the final chapter, I used the work of Nikolai Gogol's short story entitled "The
20 Overcoat", to deconstruct the assembly of class, power and social inequality
21 (Foucault 1982; Bevir 1999) in a remote Aboriginal context. Gogol's depiction is
22 analogous to the social drama created from the ownership and use of mobile phones
23 and social media as described in this study. The use of these tools has drawn lines
24 in the community connecting those who have power and possessions and
25 disconnecting those who do not. By using the example of 'The Overcoat' I was able

1 to tell the story of the rise of Aboriginal young people in the online world and their
2 need to become noticed, respected and liked within the Yolngu network and
3 beyond. The need for reassurance and acceptance locally and globally is a typical
4 behaviour observed in youth culture, and its appearance in the egalitarian
5 communal structure of an Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land signified the
6 potency of globalisation as a threat and at the same time, an enabler to Aboriginal
7 cultural continuity.

8

9 In the concluding chapter, my discussion continues to bring the learnings and
10 arguments into a framework of social inequality in a community exacerbated by
11 young people's perception of social and emotional repression and isolation. These
12 perceptions, based on contributions of my valued and respected interview
13 participants, was conceived to be due to a lack of opportunity and resources for
14 healthy adolescent development, social and economic advancement (Senior &
15 Chenhall 2012).

16 Before allowing the reader to turn to the next chapter and engage with a historical
17 analysis of technology transfer, power and corporate Australia, I would like the
18 reader to be patient with my style of writing. I use the passive voice with the
19 intention to convey the emphasis on objects but de-emphasise the unknown subject
20 or actor. The de-emphasis on the subject or actor is a deliberate embrace of
21 complexity and ambiguity in this qualitative study and provides the reader with the
22 ability to think about what is being discussed rather than be told what to think even
23 though facts support it.

24

25

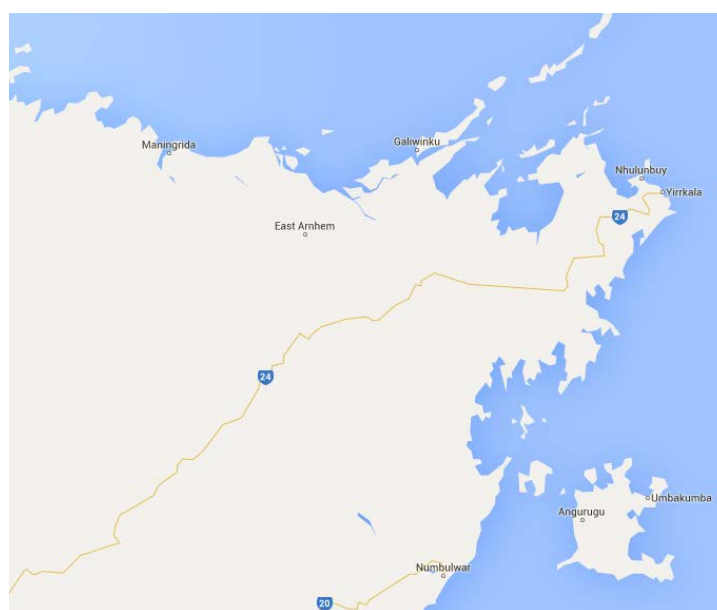
1 **CHAPTER 2 - THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE OF YIRRKALA**

2

3 *'... The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to*
 4 *try to liberate the individual from the state and from the state's institutions*
 5 *but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualisation*
 6 *which is linked to the state'. (Foucault 1982 p. 785).*

7

8 Yirrkala, the “Land of the Seagull Dreaming” is approximately 600 kilometres east
 9 of Darwin, in the Northern Territory. It was a community established by the
 10 Reverend Wilbur Chaseling in 1935 (Marika & Isaacs 1995). In the 2011 census,
 11 Yirrkala consisted of 843 people from thirteen clans, and more than three-quarters
 12 of this population was of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background³.



13

14 **Figure 2.1: Map of North East Arnhem Land**

15

3

http://www.dlgcs.nt.gov.au/about_us/remote_service_delivery/major_remote_towns/yirrkala/profile

1 Since the 1970s, several clans set out to re-establish themselves away from Yirrkala
 2 on their lands, and by the 1980s there were about ten outstations with a population
 3 of about 200³. Many Yolngu have a home in both Yirrkala and their homeland
 4 centre. The population in Yirrkala was projected to grow from 1,472 in 2006 to
 5 2,005 in 2026³. The number of people of Indigenous descent aged 15 to 64 was
 6 expected to grow from 953 in 2006 to 1,301 in 2026³. The number of people living
 7 in Yirrkala above the age of 65 was expected to more than triple from 33 in 2006
 8 to 112 in 2026².

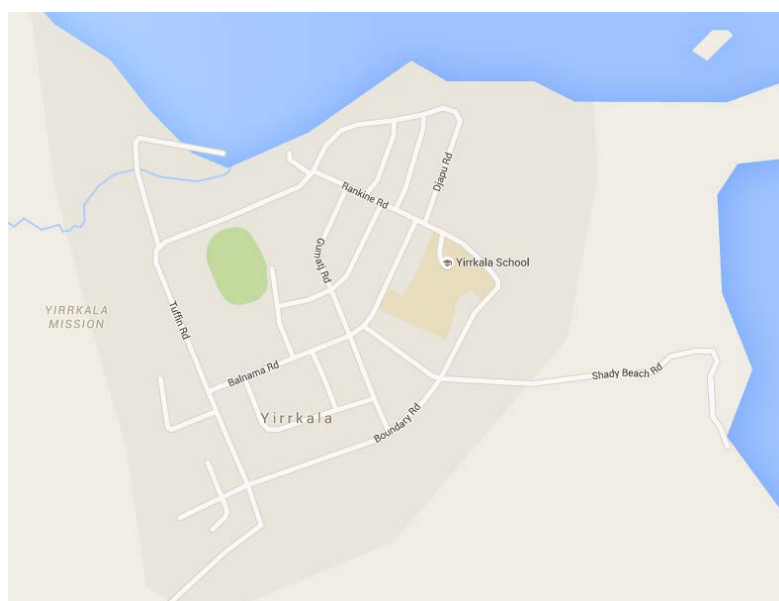
9



10

11 **Figure 2.2: Map of Gove Peninsula**

12



13

1 **Figure 2.3: Map of Yirrkala**

2 Yirrkala is located on the Rirratjingu clan's⁴ red earth country, rich in bauxite. I
 3 saw the mined bauxite transported on kilometres of conveyor belts from Yirrkala
 4 into the Gumatj clan's territory called Gunyangara. The conveyor belts that cut
 5 through Yolngu country passed the community of Birritjimi (known
 6 interchangeably as Wallaby Beach) before reaching its destination at the Rio Tinto
 7 Alcan refinery. Before the bauxite was processed, it was stored in a heap opposite
 8 a row of Yolngu houses by the beach, in a community called Galupa. The bauxite
 9 was refined into alumina, in a factory with two large smokestacks visible from
 10 Birritjimi. The processed bauxite was exported to China before returning, albeit
 11 partially, to its 'home' in the form of monies for royalty payments.

12

13 Nhulunbuy, the town centre, was approximately twenty kilometres away on a sealed
 14 road from Yirrkala and 10 kilometres away from Birritjimi. Yolngu came into town
 15 to shop, to access health and commercial services and also engaged in social events
 16 or to sell works of art. Some Yolngu avoided the crowd and preferred to pay a
 17 premium for food products and take away meals from the supermarket at the
 18 Captain Cook Shopping Centre as opposed to Woolworths in town. The Captain
 19 Cook Shopping Centre supermarket was accessed by Yolngu who owned a vehicle,
 20 and this allowed them to avoid the 'humbug' (Petersen 1993; Altman 2011).
 21 'Humbug' is a term used to describe 'demand sharing' (Petersen 1993; Altman
 22 2011) and could be generally observed in mutual or aggressive expressions in front
 23 of Woolworths, in the town square next to the bank where police officers were

4

1 known to be called to settle aggressive disputes (Burbank 1994). I was often
 2 reminded of Donald Thomson’s push for the Australian Government to discontinue
 3 their colonialist relationship with the Yolngu and to abolish the anomalous system
 4 of police constables acting as “Protectors of Aborigines”⁵ (Thomson & Petersen
 5 1983)

6



7

8 **Figure 2.5: Woolworths in Nhulunbuy town centre**

9

10 Conflict and disagreement in the Yolngu community were not unusual and almost
 11 as predictable as the ebb and flow of tides (Burbank 1994). Conflict commonly led
 12 to a transitory period of the agreement and then, to another dispute (Burbank 1994;
 13 Lloyd et al. 2010). The power structures of the two most influential clans in the
 14 region, the Rirratjingu and Gumatj had experienced their fair share of collaboration
 15 and conflict especially in the recent court proceedings between the Northern Land

⁵ “The Commonwealth created the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines following the practice adopted by the States. The Chief Protector was empowered to assume the care, custody or control of any Aboriginal or half-caste if, in his opinion, it was necessary or desirable in the interests of that person for this to be done. The powers derived from the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1911*, the Commonwealth’s first legislation dealing with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, which remained in place until 1957.” (<http://guides.naa.gov.au/records-about-northern-territory/part2/chapter8/8.1.aspx> accessed 10/01/2016).

1 Council and the leaders of Gunyangara and Yirrkala (Taylor 2014). An examination
 2 of the historical engagement of Yolngu with foreign structures (Lloyd et al. 2010),
 3 according to Yunupingu and Muller (2009), argued that conflict and agreement
 4 were unavoidable but negotiable.



5
 6 **Figure 2.4: Map of Yirrkala, Nhulunbuy, Birritjimi (Wallaby Beach) and**
 7 **Gunyangara**
 8

9 Bauxite was not the only resource exported to China from Yirrkala. For about two
 10 centuries (circa 1700) several tonnes of sea cucumber were harvested, gutted,
 11 cooked, cured and smoked by Macassan seafarers with the labour of Yolngu men
 12 on the shores of North East Arnhem Land. The finished product was packed and
 13 transported on Malay 'praus' (boats) towards South East Asia for trading with
 14 China (Clark & May 2013). Three hundred years ago, well before European
 15 colonisation, the Macassans arrived in the Gove peninsula on their 'praus'
 16 (Thomson & Petersen 1983; Clark & May 2013; Langton & Sloggett 2014), a much
 17 safer and efficient boat than Yolngu's bark canoes (Lloyd et al. 2010). According
 18 to Yolngu oral history, the Macassan seafarers established a working relationship

1 with men from the Yirritja clans in order to harvest trepang and to a lesser degree,
2 native pearl shells, pearls, tortoiseshell and sandalwood (Warner 1958; Thomson &
3 Petersen 1983; Lloyd et al. 2010; Clark & May 2013; Langton & Sloggett 2014).
4 The economic significance of North East Arnhem Land to international trade (Clark
5 & May 2013) was self-evident and continued to this day with its export of bauxite
6 and alumina.

7

8 **2.1 SIGNIFICANT TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF YIRRKALA**

9 I was adopted into the Rirratjingu clan by Waninya Marika OAM, the son of
10 Milirrpum Marika and the grandson of Mawalan Marika I. When I got to know my
11 Yolngu family; my respect grew into awe and admiration. To illustrate the
12 importance of being adopted into the Marika family I will provide a brief biography
13 of these philosophers and visionary leaders who have inspired both the method that
14 I applied in this study and how I experienced Yolngu history as a researcher. These
15 leaders, though no longer alive, continue to extend their influence into the future
16 through their philosophy and became the foundation of my understanding of
17 Yolngu values, which I was able to substantiate and confirm with my cultural
18 mentors.

19

20 **2.1.1 Mawalan I Marika (c. 1908-1967)**

21 Mawalan was a prolific artist, ceremonial leader and Rirratjingu clan leader. He
22 was the Traditional Owner of the Yirrkala when the Mission was established on
23 Rirratjingu land in 1936 (Marika & Isaacs 1995). He became the central figure of
24 cross-cultural exchange between the Yolngu and non-Yolngu nation. His approach
25 to cross-cultural communication was through the use of art as a tool to advocate for

1 a better understanding and appreciation of the Yolngu world. As an early example
2 of Yolngu entrepreneurship, he helped shape the commercial bark painting
3 movement. He was the first to establish the Marika artistic dynasty and challenged
4 cultural practice and tradition by teaching his oldest daughters to paint, along with
5 his sons. This encouraged Yolngu women to establish themselves as artists and
6 subsequently created a feminist economy that made them self-sufficient.
7 Mawalan's daughter, Banduk Marika, was not only a renowned artist but also
8 recognised and revered as an eloquent champion of her community. I was
9 acquainted with one of her grandsons in the Djarrak Football Club and engaged in
10 listening to his stories of his grandmother.

11

12 **2.1.2 Milirrpum Marika (c. 1923-1983)**

13 Milirrpum was the father of Waninya Marika. He played a significant role in the
14 land rights movement (Williams 1986) and saw the Marika elders took to the court
15 as Milirrpum and Others versus Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth of
16 Australia in 1971. The level of cross-cultural communication that made this
17 enterprise possible, and succeeded in the land rights struggle was a testimony of the
18 resilience and reflexivity (Gordon & Gurierra 2014) of Yolngu in matters
19 concerning their land, culture and the source of spiritual nourishment.

20

21 **2.1.3 Roy Dadaynga Marika**

22 Roy succeeded his older brother Milirrpum after his death as the Rirratjingu, clan
23 leader. He was awarded the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, for his
24 advocacy on Indigenous rights and community work. His son, Bakamumu Marika
25 is the current leader of the Rirratjingu clan and traditional owner of Yirrkala. It was

1 to Bakamumu that I turned with my research proposal for his permission to enter
2 Yirrkala, to conduct the study. He permitted me to conduct my research through an
3 email from his personal, iPhone 4. He expressed hope that my effort would
4 contribute positively to the youth. I saw Bakamumu as a father figure although I
5 was adopted as his brother. He gave me a valuable opportunity and recognised that
6 I needed his support, as my post-colonial past was not too different from his. I also
7 acknowledged the Yolngu academics that promulgated participatory research as a
8 method for the development of Yolngu education (Marika, Ngurruwuthun & White
9 1992). The academic leadership provided by Marika and White as members of my
10 adopted family, tremendously influenced the analysis in this thesis.

11

12 **2.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF YOLNGU TRADE AND POLITICS**

13 The Macassans created a mutual relationship with Yolngu (McIntosh 2013; Clark
14 & May 2013; Langton & Sloggett 2014), from both the Yirritja and Dhuwa moiety⁶.
15 Both reciprocity and dependency (Thomson & Petersen 1983; Scheper-Hughes
16 1993) flourished during the two centuries of engagement with the Macassan traders
17 (Clark & May 2013). In exchange for Yolngu labour, the Macassans brought with
18 them metal hooks, spears, dugout canoes, rice, pots, clothes and the incorporation
19 of Malay vocabulary into Yolngu Matha (Thomson & Petersen 1983; Clark & May
20 2013). The relationship between Yolngu and Macassan was categorised as one of

⁶ According to Reid (1983): “everyone in Yolngu society was born into the clan of his or her father. The clan is a named group, the members of which are related through patrilineation, speak a common dialect of ‘matha’. Each clan and each person belongs to either Dhuwa or Yirritja moieties. Moieties are exogamous”. Yunupingu & Muller (2009) explain that “every person, animal, plant, place, name, ancestor, everything living and nonliving is either Yirritja or Dhuwa. The cooperation and interdependence of the holders of Dhuwa and Yirritja laws words as a fundamental legal principle in Yolngu society. There is a significant philosophical body of Yolngu knowledge associated with the interaction between the two moieties”.

1 exchange and is theorised by Yolngu to be a guiding principle in all intra- and inter-
2 Yolngu collaborations (Muller 2012). This principle of exchange or “Ganma”
3 according to Muller (2012 p. 62) “has been used as a mechanism to ensure that
4 Yolngu have an equal and active part in the thinking, planning and management of
5 their community institution”. Yolngu academic and Gumatj leader, Djawa
6 Yunupingu explained that this Yolngu system of knowledge and economic
7 exchange permeated all Yolngu information and management systems (Yunupingu
8 & Muller 2009).

9

10 All Macassan artefacts belonged to Yirritja clans. The Dhuwa clans acted as
11 “Djungaya” or clan executives, similar to the Malay word ‘penjaga’ or
12 caretaker/manager, of Macassan artefacts. Consequently, all introduced foreign
13 artefacts had become classified as belonging to the Yirritja moiety (see Appendix
14 1). Before the arrival of Macassans, Yolngu collective ownership was held in a
15 balance between the Yirritja and Dhuwa clans (Warner 1964; Thomson & Petersen
16 1983). Ownership of material was mutual, driven and sustained by ‘Gurrutu’⁷
17 (Kinship) until ‘rupiah’⁸ (money) (Yunupingu & Muller 2009) and other artefacts
18 from Macassans possibly played a role in creating a noticeable power imbalance
19 which took several centuries for its ripple effects to become apparent to researchers
20 today.

21

⁷ Gurrutu or kinship according to Yunupingu & Muller (2009) 'is the way that we [Yolngu] are related to one another and everything'.

⁸ Macassan word meaning money adopted into Yolngu Matha.

1 The Yirrkala that I observed was a mix of clans from both moieties, though
2 predominantly made up of Rirratjingu and Djapu clans from the Dhuwa moiety.
3 Further, the administrative body of Yirrkala was made up of Rirratjingu traditional
4 landowners who formed two Indigenous corporations known as Bunuwal Industrial
5 and Bunuwal Investments. Eventually, they were both consolidated under a new
6 administration called the Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation.

7

8 **2.2.1 The Kinship system**

9 According to Nicholls (2009, pp.304-305), a Yolngu leader explained in their terms
10 the essence of the kinship system. He said:

11 Firstly, there are two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja. Everyone and everything is either
12 Dhuwa or Yirritja. Yirritja people sing about Yirritja things, for examples, Yirritja
13 rocks, winds, fauna, ancestors, flora, clouds and creators, and many other things. A
14 Yirritja person must always marry a Dhuwa person, and Dhuwa must marry Yirritja.
15 You cannot marry the same moiety. That is how the world works. It has been there for
16 thousands of years. We live by that.

17

18 If a man or woman is Dhuwa, their mother will be Yirritja. Dhuwa land can be located
19 nearby his mother's Yirritja land. For example, the Bawaka, which belongs to the
20 Yirritja clan, Gumatj is situated next to the Rirratjingu land called Yalangbara, a
21 Dhuwa land. The mother and child relationship beyond its human symbol is found in
22 the land and other animate and inanimate objects. This relationship is referred to by
23 Yolngu as Yothu-Yindi. In a Yothu Yindi partnership, one person is always Dhuwa,
24 and the other is always Yirritja. The Yothu is always considered the child of the Yindi
25 or mother regardless of gender, even in inanimate objects like land. Sometimes Yirritja
26 is the mother of Dhuwa, sometimes Dhuwa is the mother for Yirritja.

1

1 **Table 2.1: The People of Arnhem Land by Nicholls (2009 p. 305)**
 2

Dhuwa Mälk		Yirritja Mälk	
Female	Male	Female	Male
Galiyan, Galikali	Burralang	Bulanydjan	Bulany
Wämutjan	Wämut	Gutjan	Gayak, Guyuk, Gudjuk
Bilinydjan	Balang	Ngarritjan	Ngarritj
Gamanydjan	Gamarrang	Banaditjan	Banadi

3

4

5 **2.2.2 A discussion on trade relations between Macassan seafarers and Yolngu**

6 According to Yolngu, their historic trade arrangements with Macassans were
 7 usually presented as a story of collaboration and agreement. Lloyd et al. (2010)
 8 argued that this is highly unlikely. Petty disagreements, dishonourable behaviour
 9 by Macassan men, including sexual exploitation of Yolngu women have been
 10 forgotten since the curtailment of Macassan trade at the turn of the 20th century by
 11 the South Australian Government (Thomson & Petersen; Clark & May 2013).
 12 Nostalgia according to Morphy and Morphy (1984) and Senior (2003) tended to
 13 portray the Macassan and Yolngu relationships as existing in an era of peace and
 14 prosperity. However, Epp (2015) argued that this was an example of 'cultural
 15 amnesia', a condition caused by external damage or trauma (Nakata 2007)
 16 experienced by Yolngu as a result of colonisation and the Christian Mission
 17 administration. Professor Martin Nakata is a Pro Vice-Chancellor and head of the
 18 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre based at James Cook
 19 University. He has focused his research in the area of Australian Indigenous

1 education and the higher education sector for the last twenty years. The centuries
2 of interaction with Macassan men was probably considered more beneficial than
3 harmful when compared with European colonisation (Berndt & Berndt 1985; 1996)
4 being especially significant for Yolngu Yirritja clans who were owners of Macassan
5 artefacts and trade. The voices and stories of disadvantaged or exploited women
6 had been possibly forgotten and replaced with different memories that enabled the
7 continued collaboration (Epp 2015) between Yolngu and Macassan men.

8

9 **2.3 THE INFLUENCE OF MACASSAN TRADE ON YOLNGU CULTURE**

10 The period of trade between the Macassans and Yolngu produced a co-dependent
11 relationship, which altered hunting practices. The relationship stimulated new
12 productivity through the introduction of metal hooks, spears and dugout canoes,
13 and resulted in the increased consumption of turtle and dugong as part of the
14 traditional diet (Thomson & Petersen 1983; Clark & May 2013; Langton & Sloggett
15 2014). The prolonged interaction also introduced valuable artefacts for ceremonial
16 exchange known as “Kumur Muadak” (Thomson & Petersen 1983).

17

18 In 1988, Yolngu celebrated the anniversary of the landing of the ‘Hati Marege’
19 (Heart of Arnhem Land) in Arnhem Land also known to the Macassan voyagers as
20 ‘Marege’ (Macknight 1986; Stephenson 2007). This celebration marked a deep
21 connection that Yolngu shared with Macassan traders, a relationship that was
22 mutual, reciprocal and inter-dependent. Each year in December, with the western
23 winds called Barra (from Malay word ‘Barat’ meaning west), a fleet of up to fifty
24 or more ‘praus’ arrived on the shores of North East Arnhem Land (Stephenson
25 2007; Clark & May 2013). For approximately 300 years, the Yolngu traded and

1 formed familial relationships with the Macassans (Thomson & Petersen 1983;
2 Clark & May 2013).

3

4 The Macassan trepang industry declined from 1880 due to taxes and charges
5 imposed on the ‘trepangers’ and was curtailed in 1906-07 (Stephenson 2007), when
6 ‘the South Australian Government effectively refused to grant fishing licenses to
7 non-Australian operators’ (Macknight 1986 in Clark & May 2013 p. 2). This action
8 on the part of the government caused the Yolngu to suffer severe economic
9 depression (Morphy 2009).

10

11 **2.3.1 The Macassan influence on Yolngu technology, religion and ceremonial** 12 **practice**

13 Barefoot and wading through the mangroves near East Woody with Jonny, Simon
14 and Danny, I mentioned the metal heads of their spears for hunting and the men
15 talked a lot about the Macassans and their influence on Yolngu. These three young
16 men between twenty and twenty-three, were married with children and enjoyed
17 telling me stories of historical significance and compared them with mine, as a
18 Malaysian Tamil. These Yolngu hunters in the mangroves were masters of their
19 environment and were relaxed enough to teach me about Macassan influence on
20 their culture.

21

22 I asked Simon if Macassans and Yolngu exchanged a lot of knowledge or Dhawu⁹.
23 ‘I do not think the Macassans took much from us,’ he said while pointing to the

9 Meaning knowledge, story or narrative in Yolngu Matha according to Yunupingu and Muller (2009)

1 metal spikes on his spear; ‘Yolngu got a lot from Mangathara (Macassan) mob, they
2 gave us technology and changed us’. He was a reformer at heart and had ideas of
3 moving away from the cultural conservatism in the community. Even though he
4 cared for his family and relatives, he still wanted his independence and the much-
5 desired change that Macassans had previously brought to Arnhem Land centuries
6 ago in the form of efficiency and increased productivity.

7

8 Some studies have shown that there were tens if not hundreds of Yolngu travellers
9 who made their way on a return journey to Makassar (Thomson & Petersen 1983;
10 Clark & May 2013). A few Yolngu men and women even settled there with local
11 inhabitants. These relationships continued into recent history. A friend of mine, a
12 professional Yolngu dancer, recalled that his great-grandfather, who had spent
13 many years in Makassar, returned in the later part of his life to Arnhem Land when
14 his grandsons went to Makassar to ask for his return to the homeland. The
15 Macassan-Aboriginal encounter was also linked to ‘Yalangbara’ which, according
16 to Marika (2008, p. 8) is 'the place of the first people, the first people who were
17 born or created there'. The Yalangbara artworks depicting the events associated
18 with the creative period when the Djangkawu¹⁰ undertook their journeys (Clark &
19 May 2013) were notable for “depicting the legendary ‘Bayini’ widely believed to
20 be a mythical group of white or golden-coloured Asian seafarers who voyaged to
21 Arnhem Land, before the arrival of the Macassan fishing fleet (McIntosh 2013 p.
22 4).

23

¹⁰. The Djang'kawu is believed to be the ‘first ancestors’ of northeast Arnhem Land according to Marika (2008) and Morphy (2008).

1 I thought about my status in Malaysia as a fourth generation Tamil migrant and the
2 politics of the current Prime Minister Najib Razak, a descendant from Sulawesi
3 (Makassar). I reflected on my research with the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land,
4 and their connection to the Malays or Macassans from Sulawesi, and how these
5 mighty seafarers influenced both our cultures (Willford 2007). The Kingdom of
6 Gowa with Makassar as its capital formally accepted Islam in 1603-05 (Clark &
7 May 2013), and it was assumed that the fishermen who arrived in Arnhem Land
8 were therefore predominantly Muslim (Tjandrasasmita 1978 in Ganter 2013). It is
9 possible that the outward signs of conversion, the use of circumcision as a cultural
10 practice and the incorporation of names from the Arabic language such as Hussein
11 (Ganter 2013) were a sign of the profound cultural and social influences between
12 the two nations.

13

14 When I attended my first Yolngu funeral ceremony, it was for the reknowned leader
15 and musician, Dr Yunupingu¹¹¹², founder of Yothu Yindi. I noticed that the Yolngu
16 ceremonial songs reminded me of Malay traditional music, or more accurately
17 'traces of classical Arabic religious music' according to Toner (2000) in Ganter
18 (2013, p. 59). Ganter (2013) explained that the singers whom I heard and the dances

¹¹ was an advocate for the Two Way Education development in Yirrkala. It is a system of education built by the Gurindji people of Daguragu in the Northern Territory in the 1970s. According to Dr Yunupingu, it is a system in which 'both European and Indigenous cultures are to be taught' (Yunupingu 1999, p. 5) as a form of reversing the historical impact of the one-way imposition of non-Indigenous culture upon Indigenous people. Dr Yunupingu explained that the Missionaries were responsible for stopping the use of Yolngu languages in the community and therefore the community cannot engage holistically in an education system that didn't make room for Yolngu language to flourish. The ultimate aim of the Two Way Education philosophy is to provide Indigenous children with education in both their own Aboriginal Culture as well as Western culture.

¹² It is usually a mark of respect to discontinuing the use of deceased person's first name for a period as decided by close family members but in some cases, this may not be observed (Carlson 2014; Glaskin 2017).

1 with swords and flags that I observed were adopted from the old traditional tools
2 and practices of the Macassan seafarers. These were, according to Ganter (2013),
3 an improvised performance with religious texts, and symbols of Macassan artefacts
4 like ships, anchors, swords and flags including the tobacco and alcohol dances.
5 McIntosh (2006) in Ganter (2013 p. 60) argued that Yolngu “never embraced Islam
6 as a faith; rather they incorporated elements of what they observed from their
7 Indonesian visitors into their cosmology”. The Indigenisation of foreign practices
8 and tools were evident from the discussions in Ganter (2013). Without the threat of
9 altering established Yolngu cultural practices, Yolngu were always receptive to
10 innovation and change, according to researchers who have worked for decades in
11 Indigenous communities in the North East Arnhem Land (Reid 1983; Berndt &
12 Berndt 1985; McIntosh 2013). This openness to innovation and change sustained
13 itself until their submission to the Christian Mission administration, which may
14 have coerced them into a cultural conservatism (Money et al. 1970) based on
15 Christian beliefs and practices.

16

17 By the turn of the 20th century, Yolngu ‘were circumcised, polygamous, well-
18 travelled, enmeshed in transnational trade and family relationships, spoke using
19 Macassan vocabulary and carried Macassan names’ (Ganter 2013 p. 60). Despite a
20 high level of influence and conflict with the Macassan seafarers (Thomson &
21 Petersen 1983; McIntosh 2013), Yolngu saw the relationship as beneficial and
22 progressive (Clark & May 2013).

23

24 **2.4 CAPITALISM, LAND RIGHTS AND INTER-CLAN DISPUTE**

1 In the 1960s, Yolngu leaders were the first Aboriginal people to fight for
2 recognition of their traditional ownership of land through litigation in an Australian
3 court (Williams 1986). Subsequently, the enactment of legislation in the Aboriginal
4 Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 enabled Yolngu to claim vacant crown
5 land (Williams 1986). Yirrkala which was 'home' to both Rirratjingu and Gumatj
6 in the seventies (as a result of the Christian Mission administration), saw a united
7 Roy Marika and Galarrwuy Yunupingu fight against a common Oppressor in
8 *Milirrpum vs Nabalco Pty. Ltd. 1971* (Williams 1986). The late Mr Marika M.B.E.
9 was the leader of the Rirratjingu clan, and Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu represented
10 his father, the leader of the Gumatj clan in court proceedings and negotiations with
11 the Commonwealth Government of Australia.



12

13 **Figure 2.6: Galarrwuy Yunupingu (Left), Roy Marika (middle) and**
14 **Daymbalipu Mununggur (Right), outside the High Court of Australia,**
15 **Canberra, ACT.**

16

17 The negotiations for the mining lease in Yirrkala were initially held between the
18 Federal Government, the Christian Mission and the mining company (Williams
19 1986). Yolngu leaders persevered for many years to uphold the principle of

1 “Ganma” in negotiating with the Australian government and the mining company
2 for what was rightfully their land and that an exchange between the two parties
3 should be mutually advantageous, putting Yolngu in control of their land and
4 maritime borders (Yunupingu & Muller 2009; Muller 2012). The people of
5 Yirrkala, especially the Rirratjingu and Gumatj Traditional Owners, were not
6 consulted according to Williams (1986), and the Commonwealth acted under a
7 conflict of interest; on the one hand enabling the mining of bauxite reserves near
8 Yirrkala, while on the other hand remaining charged with protecting the interests
9 of the local Aborigines. For many years, the traditional owners of Yirrkala and
10 Gunyangara, under the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund, were paid a sum that was
11 far lower than that payable under the Mining Ordinance as royalties (Williams
12 1986). As a result, the people of Yirrkala involuntarily subsidised the national
13 economy and a multinational mining company, despite being opposed to the mining
14 operations (Williams 1986). Williams (1986) also clarified that royalty payments
15 were predominantly viewed as money for traditional owners who were solely
16 responsible for bringing royalty payments back to Yirrkala to be shared within their
17 familial networks.

18

19 Following the analysis from Rowse (2012), I observed that Yirrkala was a society
20 that shared power between alliances and clans, and had gradually become
21 influenced by capitalist values through Indigenous corporatisation. My analysis was
22 based on the words of the late signatory of the Yirrkala Bark Petition in Gosford
23 (2013), who passed away in 2015:

24 In 1963, I signed the historic bark petition which opposed the Gove refinery and
25 bauxite mine and started the land rights movement, and which is now displayed in

1 Parliament House, Canberra. In 2011, I signed the historic mining agreement with
2 Rio Tinto Alcan, which guarantees the refinery and bauxite mine for another 42
3 years. How the wheel turns – what was conflict is now agreement, what was dispute
4 is now Yolngu and Balanda people working together. This was a great
5 achievement.

6

7 **2.4.1 The Gove Dispute of 2013**

8 In the mid-2000s, united in their effort to bring “Gas to Gove” both of the leading
9 clans in the region (Rirratjingu and Gumatj) were challenged by a new type of land
10 rights struggle – an inter-clan struggle for royalty payments. Under the heading
11 “When rights go wrong¹³”, Toohey (2014) from News Corp Australia, Editorial
12 Network introduced a nine-page thesis about the division that occurred between the
13 two leading clans of the Gove Peninsula due to royalty disputes. The two Yolngu
14 clans had taken their disagreement over land rights to the Balanda (European) court
15 to seek resolution in what essentially was a matter for Yolngu jurisprudence. Is it
16 possible that because of the gradual adoption of capitalist values within the structure
17 of Indigenous Land Councils in a post-colonial system, a matter that would
18 seemingly be resolved by traditional knowledge was now being disputed and a
19 resolution sought from the Australian justice system?

20

21 Betty’s father was Gumatj and her mother, a Rirratjingu senior elder. She was
22 married to a traditional owner and one of the sons of the late Roy Marika M.B.E.
23 She jumped into my car and asked me to take her back to her community. I asked

¹³ <http://media.news.com.au/nnd/captivate/north-east-arnhem-land/#> Accessed 11/01/2016

1 her about the recent dispute between the Gumatj and Rirratjingu clans and her reply
2 to me was that 'I am sad, but I do not get involved'. Rio Tinto Alcan had agreed to
3 pay both Yirrkala and Gunyangara administration a sum of 15 million dollars each,
4 tax-free, every year for 40 years. Bakamumu, the leader of the Rirratjingu clan was
5 certain, that only through this agreement; his people would become independent of
6 welfare, self-sufficient and able to reap the economic benefits of land rights. At the
7 2013 Garma Festival, I recorded the Gumatj leader, Galarrwuy's keynote speech
8 that 'land rights did not make Yolngu happy'. Seated at the back row typing his
9 words away as fast as possible on my iPhone 4, I noticed the silence and the
10 restrained and hesitant hands of the audience clapping to the new Aboriginal
11 standpoint.

12



13

14 **Figure 2.7: Garma Festival 2013**

15

16 Galarrwuy explained that land rights left Yolngu cash-poor and that they needed
17 hard cash to live and thrive, which I would agree, is an important point. He pointed
18 to the Australians sitting in the crowd and remarked that everyone else could earn
19 money and this money sat in the bank and grew, while Yolngu, till today, were left

1 with nothing. ‘This Land Rights is empty’ were his words to Kevin Rudd at the 50th
2 anniversary of the signing of the Bark Petition held in Yirrkala only approximately
3 one month later. Galarrwuy tore land rights apart and questioned the very principle
4 of the struggle for land rights when he said that land rights were “full of everything,
5 but full of nothing. When you look at it, closely, there’s nothing that gives to
6 individuals” he said (Toohey 2014).

7

8 By a twist of fate, even after Bakamumu was reassured by lawyers acting for the
9 Northern Land Council (NLC) that a fifty-fifty split of the royalty was imminent,
10 the NLC had decided that Gumatj should get 72.61 per cent of the royalty payments,
11 a decision that was based on anthropological assessment of the affected lease area.
12 When the last signature was etched on paper at the ceremonial signing of the Gove
13 Agreement in 2011, Galarrwuy sat quietly, his eyes concealed by a pair of dark
14 aviator sunglasses. The former Prime Minister Gillard, seated to his right, applauded
15 with a smile and behind her stood directors of the Gumatj board with bilma
16 (clapping sticks) and yidaki (didgeridoo). Both Bakamumu and his brother Sam
17 raised their hands like Black Panthers from the civil rights movement in the United
18 States of America. Bakamumu said, ‘I was excited. I was thinking; “This is it. I
19 would take my family to their destinations”’ (Toohey 2014). Within a short space
20 of time, the alumina refinery was shut down due to unprofitable operations as a
21 result of the global impact on the price of alumina (Toohey 2014) and discussed in
22 further detail in the following sections.

23

24 **2.4.2 The challenge of managing business and kinship**

1 In 2013, the dispute over the 2011 Gove Agreement was not the only problem
2 Rirratjingu traditional owners faced in Yirrkala. One of the traditional owners had
3 formed a breakaway group throwing Rirratjingu into a downward spiral that gave
4 the NLC an excuse to label Rirratjingu a divided clan, going so far as to withhold
5 the first royalty payments from Rio Tinto. One Saturday morning, I noticed an AIG
6 (East Arnhem Trading Pty Ltd) food truck parked outside my neighbour's house
7 and some elders who lived in Birritjimi and a couple of others from Yirrkala were
8 seated in a circle under a carport (Field notes 2013). The NLC according to Toohey
9 (2014) had taken an interest in the Rirratjingu clan dissenters, who operated as
10 Gamarrwa Aboriginal Corporation. Registered in March of 2013, the board of
11 directors and some community members supplied fuel and food products under a
12 charity operated by the NLC's investment arm, the AIG (Toohey 2014).

13

14 My family and I returned to Birritjimi after a short holiday overseas to find an act
15 of violence had been perpetrated by a male member of the Gamarrwa group, and
16 the police were putting a case together for prosecution. This unfortunate turn of
17 events for the new breakaway group, Gamarrwa, was a blow to its future
18 sustainability. While Gamarrwa was forced to seek help, one of the board members
19 returned to the Rirratjingu clan and was provided legal support by a barrister from
20 Queensland. He was released under a good behaviour bond, and I never heard of
21 the activities of the breakaway clan until the news hit the media in 2014 (Toohey
22 2014).

23

24 Along with the Gove dispute over mining, royalties was the funeral of the late Dr
25 M Yunupingu. According to Yolngu custom, the names of those who have passed

1 on are not mentioned as a cultural obligation and mark of reverence (Petchkovsky
2 & Cawte 1986). The Australian reported on the 26th of August 2013¹⁴That,
3 "entwined with that dispute over mining royalties (The Gove Agreement 2011
4 dispute) within one divided Yolngu group" were the rights to bury the remains of
5 that great frontman of Yothu Yindi which became another unexpected feud between
6 the Rirratjingu and Gumatj clan and their non-Aboriginal advisers. The widow of
7 Dr Yunupingu wanted her husband buried in Yirrkala where he had lived for many
8 years. She had asked a mutual friend to contact me and inquire about the use of
9 Twitter to communicate online about her burial plans for her late husband.
10 However, Yirrkala was thrown into a spiral of embarrassment according to Toohey
11 (2014) when Ms Banduk Marika, a member of the breakaway group, Gamarrwa
12 Aboriginal Corporation, contacted The Australian "with an extraordinary plea for
13 financial help" on behalf of Dr Yunupingu's widow to cover the expenses of the
14 funeral.

15

16 During these challenging times, the prominent brother of the late Dr Yunupingu
17 came forward with Yolngu law and authority over funeral arrangements and the
18 money to disburse on the ceremony. In a press statement for the Australian, Dr
19 Galarrwuy Yunupingu's brother, Djawa Yunupingu, said that an ultimatum had
20 been reached after much deliberation between the heads of the clans according to
21 the Yolngu parliament. He said, 'The Gumatj clan and other clans have met under
22 Yolngu law, and decided that the burial place for our brother will be Gunyangara'.
23 The decision was respected, and the burial took place as planned. This incident was,

¹⁴ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/clans-row-over-yunupingu-burial-site/story-e6frg6nf-1226703781359> Accessed 12.01/2016

1 in my opinion, an example of the struggle to be united despite the imbalance of
2 power and authority within the Yolngu community, which may have been slowly
3 eroded through their participation in the capitalist economic and power structures
4 (Nakata 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2015).

5
6

7 **2.5 THE YOLNGU DILEMMA & THE CURTAILMENT OF THE RIO** 8 **TINTO ALCAN REFINERY OPERATIONS**

9 By 2013, the price of alumina had dropped significantly due to the dynamics of
10 Chinese trade, forcing Rio Tinto Alcan to announce the curtailment of its refinery
11 operations, which became financially unsustainable. Soon after the 50th
12 anniversary of the Yirrkala Bark Petition, 2,000 non-Indigenous residents, some
13 born and raised in Nhulunbuy since the late sixties, were forced to leave the town.
14 The uncertainty and redundancies forced people to look for more secure options in
15 other mining towns, and many moved to other mining operations across Australia.
16 Yolngu leaders and youth employed under local businesses were seen amongst the
17 miners with “Gas to Gove” cardboard posters at the local town square in the centre
18 of Nhulunbuy. They organised a peaceful yet futile protest, in an attempt to
19 convince the government to build a multibillion-dollar gas pipeline to absorb the
20 financial costs caused by diesel-fuelled machinery and the low market value of
21 alumina.

22

23 The town hall in November 2013 was a sea of men in orange fluorescent uniforms
24 and steel-capped boots. There were miners in uniform, executives in high heels and
25 men and women in tears. There were schoolteachers, investors and local business

1 owners. The people of Nhulunbuy had been confident that the new gas pipeline
2 subsidising their lifestyle promised by the Giles Liberal Government, would come
3 through to fruition. The thought of a 'forced removal' of non-Indigenous families
4 from Nhulunbuy, the land in which they have formed a close bond with, caused
5 everyone to shudder on that humid November afternoon.

6



7

8 **Figure 2.8: Community meeting with the Chief Minister of the Northern**
9 **Territory.**

10

11 Over forty years ago, contrary to what I witnessed on that day, was a multitude of
12 Yolngu men with spears on top of Mount Nhulun, who protested against Nabalco
13 Pty. Ltd. and the arrival of the White mining community. Despite Yolngu protests,
14 the mining company established the sites known today as the Walkabout Hotel and
15 The Arnhem Club. Today there were no spears in the hall, but sitting behind me
16 was Djuwalpi Marika, the son of Mathaman Marika (who continued the fight for
17 land rights after the sudden passing of his older brother, Milirrpum). He sat next to
18 his wife from the homeland of GanGan, on the edge of his seat when I greeted him.
19 He carried his smartphone in a dilly bag clenched in one hand, a neatly trimmed
20 French beard and a piece of paper which he kept looking at, was held in the other

1 hand. He was not distracted by my greeting and was focused and ready to seize the
2 attention of the hall and the first Indigenous Chief Minister of the Northern
3 Territory.

4

5 On stage with the Chief Minister was a panel of experts including one from Rio
6 Tinto Alcan who wore a business shirt tucked neatly under a pair of black jeans and
7 a pair of polished R.M. Williams's boots. The right-hand man of Dr Galarrwuy
8 Yunupingu, a German migrant to the Gove Peninsula in the early sixties, sat
9 between the government and the company representatives. He opened the meeting
10 with 'polli speak', according to the boilermaker sitting next to me who whispered
11 in my ear like a simultaneous interpreter.

12

13 The hall was packed, and all passages were blocked by men poised for action and
14 for that moment reminiscent of Geertz's description of the Balinese cockfight
15 (Geertz 1994). The media engaged and preyed on the conflict with cameras and
16 microphones aimed at the stage and the crowd. The members of the Northern
17 Territory 'politburo' now serving the public through the Minister, kept the engine
18 of the car running, ready for an efficient and comfortable trip to the airport just as
19 soon as the bad news was given to the people of Nhulunbuy. The man who worked
20 for Galarrwuy was Klaus Helms, now in his sixties; he arrived as a teenager in the
21 region and was accustomed to standing between people of power and the modern
22 proletariats. He ordered the journalist who was filming the proceedings to stop.
23 Enraged at Klaus' demands, the men and women whose lives were turned around
24 by what they concluded was a tragedy of plain corporate greed, raised their arms
25 and voices in protest. Some stood up and started booing.

1
2 A Rirratjingu traditional owner stood up from amongst the miners with a
3 microphone in hand. He faced a non-Indigenous panel seated on the stage although
4 a non-Indigenous man, Mr Helms represented the Gumatj clan instead of a member
5 of the Yunupingu or a Burrarwanga family as the rightful members of the clan. Why
6 Klaus and not the other directors of Gumatj? 'Why was there not one Yolngu on the
7 panel?' I briefly distracted myself before refocusing my attention to the respected
8 Yolngu leader who was about to speak. The Rirratjingu traditional owner told the
9 Chief Minister seated on stage, that the Yolngu people will be severely impacted
10 by the curtailment of the refinery and cause the exodus of businesses, services and
11 Yolngu jobs. He asked the government to intervene and reverse the decision of Rio
12 Tinto to shut down refinery operations for the long-term progress of the Yolngu
13 community.

14
15 I was intrigued by his speech, his plea for the survival of the Yolngu nation. I
16 wanted to turn the interview around to this Yolngu leader to understand how
17 ordinary Yolngu, the women and children, have directly benefitted from the
18 refinery other than through the receipt of royalty payments to traditional owners.
19 Earlier in 2013, when the non-Indigenous and Yolngu community were petitioning
20 for a gas pipeline to Nhulunbuy, Balupalu Yunupingu, a member of the Gumatj
21 Aboriginal Corporation, spoke to the Arafura Times and said, that “the children of
22 the region would lose their prospects should gas not arrive, and cause the refinery
23 to shut down” (Arafura Times, February 2013)¹⁵. I wondered how a refinery in the

¹⁵ http://issuu.com/regionalandremote/docs/arafura_times_2013-07-31_eef535984bcd2d Accessed 10.01.2016

1 region, once almost blocked by a platoon of men with spears and war cries, had
2 today become the foundation of Yolngu enterprise and prospects.

3

4 Since the Yirrkala Bark Petitions, Yolngu have embraced the mining operations in
5 their land and formed a unique and co-dependent relationship with the western
6 world, (similar to that of the historic Macassan-Yolngu enterprise), with private
7 businesses, government departments and programs, according to the Chief
8 Executive Officer of Yolngu Business Enterprises, Glenn Atchison (Arafura Times
9 2013). Christmas of 2013 was wrapped in uncertainty and impending change. There
10 were frantic and desperate garage sales seven days a week. Everything went on sale
11 from favourite toys to boats, tinnies, and four-wheel drives sold at a loss. Only a
12 small proportion of the community members in Yirrkala and Birritjimi who owned
13 functioning personal vehicles were able to pick up from where their non-Indigenous
14 peers left off in the quest for material possessions at an affordable price. Those
15 without mutikar (motorcars) were not as fortunate.

16

17 Davis (2004 p. 26) called this phenomenon a 'paradoxical circumstance' when he
18 observed that the Aboriginal traditional owners now 'want to be part of what
19 formerly oppressed them'. He explained that relationships between culture and
20 economy have the potential to give new meaning to the symbiotic interactions
21 between Aboriginal and in this case the mining industry (Davis 2004). This does
22 not entail the erosion of Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness, but speaks of a
23 transformation of individuals and groups as they reposition themselves in 'terms of
24 their status, control of resources and exercise of power' including 'redefining the
25 norms of interaction that define relatedness among Aboriginal people and creating

1 conditions for the establishment of a landowning elite within regional Aboriginal
2 society' (Davis 2004 p. 26). The following sections will attempt to draw examples
3 and the literature to further this point.

4

5 **2.6 YIRRKALA FROM 2012-2015**

6 My father grew up in post-colonial Malaya, in a British tea plantation with mud
7 floors and kerosene lamps. I invited him for a visit to North East Arnhem Land
8 where he enabled me to grasp and understand certain aspects of his post-colonial
9 childhood. I wanted to explore how he would relate to the current standards of living
10 endured by the Yolngu since the establishment of the Christian Mission in Yirrkala.
11 I wanted a fresh set of eyes to observe if there were differences in the general
12 standard of living amongst the inhabitants of Yirrkala, or whether there were signs
13 of social inequality slowly appearing as a result of globalisation. As someone who
14 had himself endured political and societal change, his observations of social
15 inequality were insightful.

16

17 We drove towards Rirratjingu country one morning when he found himself at
18 'home' as we drove past dwellings in Yirrkala, having left behind the privilege of
19 Nhulunbuy. We drove past symbols of modernity where the Laynhapuy Homelands
20 Clinic and the Shire offices were located and had parked their impressive four-
21 wheel-drives. He noticed the contrast between the town of Nhulunbuy with non-
22 Indigenous and Indigenous houses in Yirrkala. He shook his head at the state of
23 some of the houses in Yirrkala but remained silent even as I tried to solicit a more
24 specific reaction. He could not understand how a minority in a wealthy nation was
25 still entrapped in relative poverty, in the same way, some needy Tamil families from

1 the plantations he had seen growing up in Malaysia had been unable to break from
2 the cycle. He did also point out a visible difference between the homes of the
3 traditional owners and other Yolngu dwellings.

4

5 Yirrkala, with its 'colonial plantation'-like distribution of houses along sealed and
6 graded roads, sporadic refurbishments of houses by the Department of Housing,
7 satellite dishes on some roofs and a grocery store with takeaway food stood grand
8 and proud compared to the Tamil communities from the Boh tea plantation estate
9 where my father came from. We both agreed that a strong and resilient nation was
10 alive and thriving, but struggling to keep the old and the new under one roof. There
11 were different designs of houses, some made from timber and stood on stilts with
12 spacious verandas, while other houses were new, made of concrete blocks but had
13 no verandas. Houses that were allocated to government employees came with air-
14 conditioning and a carport. There were subtle differences in Yirrkala, unlike the
15 uniformity of a middle-class suburb in Nhulunbuy. In Yirrkala, there were signs of
16 both relative wealth and poverty. We even drove past a silver Hummer with
17 personalised number plates parked in front of a dwelling. There seemed to be some
18 amount of heterogeneity in the economic capability of some family members when
19 compared to other from purely visual observation.

20

21 A blue house on stilts and two red houses of a similar design stood on a hill and
22 faced the ocean with the Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation office located on the
23 same row with its back towards the Arts Centre and the local supermarket. These
24 houses belonged to both past and present leaders. The Yirrkala Church, where the
25 former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee Chairman, Mr Djerrkura

1 held church fellowship meetings, was painted a similar colour to his blue house.
2 The houses that sat along the cliffs with an abundant view of the sea and to the
3 south of the store were large houses which Reid (1983) described as appropriately
4 designed two-to-three-bedroom dwellings which were allocated to non-Aboriginal
5 staff until the mid-seventies. The houses were allocated to ‘teachers, a mechanic,
6 an electrician, an accountant, horticulturalists, pilots, community development
7 officers, a plumber, a builder, the store manager, the art and craft advisor’ which by
8 1981, had slowly begun to be occupied by Yolngu, ‘either prominent community
9 leaders or individuals employed by the government and their families’ (Reid 1983
10 p. 18).

11

12 Nothing much had changed (except for a series of minimal repairs) since Reid
13 (1983) described the Yolngu dwellings, including the weathered corrugated iron
14 houses at Beach Camp where my Yolngu adopted brother, Brice, lived with his
15 family. The ‘two and three bedroom’ houses were built with asbestos sheets for
16 walls on a cement base with an iron roof, just as Reid had described in 1983 (p. 18).
17 These houses still lacked ‘flywire, glass louvres, and parts of walls’ as noted by
18 Reid (1983 p. 18). The sound of music from both stereos and television in Yirrkala,
19 described by Reid (1983) were still heard in 2013 albeit by an older generation. The
20 ‘highly visible face of change’ and ‘innovations which people had welcomed and
21 incorporated’ (Reid 1983 p. 18) since the time of Reid study were now intertwined
22 with young people’s silent sounds of change. With their earphones in, the young
23 people watched and listened to the media on their mobile phones, as they walked to
24 the shops, played footy or even during a chat with mates. The earphones played
25 music in one ear while the other ear heard and engaged in conversation. There

1 seemed to be a deep connection between Yolngu youth and the individualised
2 emergent technological capabilities of the mobile phone and social media.

3

4 Not all dwellings, however, looked the same. There was no uniformity of structure
5 and physical appearance, but those who were able to secure the essential
6 requirements and resources had created a more comfortable dwelling, often behind
7 gates and fences. Not all celebrities, leaders, and people in business were able to
8 secure and maintain a comfortable dwelling in Yirrkala. The Housing Reference
9 Group in Yirrkala was made up of clan elders who met with a representative from
10 the Department of Housing in a purpose-built hall, 300 metres away from the clinic
11 where they discussed the public housing waiting list and future housing allocations.
12 The Reference Group decided who should be next in line to receive a new house or
13 a refurbishment. This multipurpose hall was a favourite venue of ministers of
14 Indigenous affairs, prime ministers, community-housing officers, bureaucrats from
15 the education department and especially influential personalities from within the
16 community.

17

18 Four-wheel-drive vehicles and Aboriginal Corporation-owned cars that ferried the
19 ‘Big Men’ from Hughes (2007) in Rowse (2012) and Langton (2008) were parked
20 outside Yolngu offices. The ‘Big Men’ (Langton 2008) allocated their time to sit
21 on several boards such as the East Arnhem Shire Council¹⁶, Miwatj Health
22 Aboriginal Corporation, Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, Gumatj and Rirratjingu

¹⁶ The East Arnhem Shire Council is a local government area in the Northern Territory with an area of 33,359 square kilometres and a population of 10,730.

1 Aboriginal Corporations, East Journey Aboriginal Corporation and last but not
2 least, the Yothu Yindi Foundation.

3

4 Past Djapu Road and towards the Yirrkala School were the ceremonial grounds
5 where funerals were held. Dr M Yunupingu's funeral was held on these grounds,
6 opposite the house where he spent many years with his wife and daughters. The
7 cemetery where the former Rirratjingu leader and land rights activist, Roy
8 Dadaynga Marika was laid to rest was also close to the funeral grounds.

9



10

11 **Figure 2.9: Resting place of Mr Marika**

12

13 Amongst the sites of cultural and historical significance, was the school, which
14 according to Marika & Isaacs (1995) operated as a European institution. He said it
15 ignored the Yolngu knowledge and culture and contributed to the degradation of
16 traditional values and culture and failed to impart to the children, wholesome
17 Yolngu education (Marika & Isaacs 1995). Marika went on to say that this was the
18 school where Yolngu children's minds were used, quite openly, to be acculturated
19 into mainstream Anglo or European culture (Marika & Isaacs 1995) and to be

1 assimilated into a non-Indigenous society. Here again, Yolngu methods of
2 education through the application of ‘Ganma’ or exchange (Yunupingu 1990;
3 Yunupingu & Muller 2009; Muller 2012; Kelly 2013) were rejected for colonial
4 methods of education. The school building itself was well looked after and was
5 managed by a Yolngu principal. The conviction that Yirrkala was a ‘failure’ of
6 Aboriginal development, where Aboriginal lives were a product of trauma, illness
7 and premature death (Pearson 2000; 2001; Burbank 2006) was linked with the
8 engagement of Aboriginal culture and the dominant social and economic structures
9 of the country (Burbank 2006). This standpoint was also held by non-Indigenous
10 people living in Yirrkala, who worked in health, education and non-governmental
11 agencies.

12

13 Nevertheless, between the new and old public houses during the day and several
14 hours after sunset, in the welcoming darkness invisible to the gaze of elders, were
15 children and teenagers who did what they ‘like doing’ (Burbank 2006 p. 6). They
16 were undaunted by the struggles of their elders, even on their journey to becoming
17 an ‘autonomous person’ (Merlan 2015). With 0.6 per cent more women than men
18 in Yirrkala (49.7% men & 50.3% women) and a median age of 27, a third of the
19 community was made up of adolescents and young adults¹⁷.

20

21 **2.6.1. Contemporary Yirrkala Youth culture**

22 Many young people were engaged in choreographing contemporary dance moves
23 that often combined traditional moves with Hip-Hop. In the absence of male

¹⁷ http://www.dlgcs.nt.gov.au/about_us/remote_service_delivery/major_remote_towns/yirrkala

1 supervision as traditional ceremonial dancing would have required, an enthusiastic
2 non-Indigenous woman who worked for the Shire Council sat behind the controls
3 of a loud amplifier. Through her facilitation, teenagers took turns to plug in their
4 phones and rehearsed their dance for the annual Gove's Got Talent competition
5 organised by Anglicare. Young men, passed around bottles of coke and lemonade
6 while some took turns to play on the basketball court, and others waited for their
7 turn to rehearse their dance sequence for a chance at the grand prize of 500 dollars.
8 In this case, there was no 'plan' or project officer in charge of 'dance'. The young
9 people solely drove this preparation. If there were no space and amplifier to access,
10 they would have choreographed and practised their performance somewhere else,
11 because they 'liked' doing it as discussed by Burbank (2006) but in the context of
12 the Western institution of 'bedtime'.

13

14 Interspersed between sleep and wakefulness, the people of Yirrkala, avoided the
15 heat by day and were alive at night. Those who were able to balance family, culture
16 and work, escaped the boredom of community life with employment and enjoyed
17 the company of family and friends in town after sunset. They were not lazy like
18 others, said Jesse, a young man who was proud of his work ethic, when he shared
19 his thoughts with his Facebook friends, that he now had two jobs. Since 2014,
20 Yirrkala had been enmeshed in a re-construction of not only houses but what
21 seemed to be, an unintentional re-construction of 'Aboriginal commonality' with
22 western influences of the 'nuclear family' (Eickelkamp 2011). Living nearby,
23 Yolngu families in Yirrkala created an artificial environment in which many family
24 members had to manage the redistribution of resources and wages from the
25 employed to the unemployed which resulted in bringing more mutikar (motorcar),

1 rrupiah (money) and miyalk or dhirammu (woman or man) into closer proximity to
2 those who didn't have such resources. This artificial proximity of the 'Aboriginal
3 commonality' according to Eickelkamp (2011) created conflict as Warner (1958)
4 as cited in Reid (1983 p. 7) confirmed, how even though the 'clan was the basic
5 unit of solidarity, the ties of kinship, with their attendant obligations, duties, rights
6 and privileges, tended to enlarge disputes'.

7

8 The disputes noted by Reid (1983), in Yirrkala, spilt over into other neighbouring
9 clans so that loyalties and alliances were put to the test for collaboration, support
10 and reciprocal obligation. Some leaders and their families, therefore, chose to move
11 away from Yirrkala to their homelands to avoid trouble (Hughes 2007). Even
12 community leaders were not spared from this predicament, and an inspirational
13 elder from GanGan moved to his homelands to avoid disputes of this nature.
14 Yirrkala was a semi-urban centre for Yolngu who lived in the homelands and
15 travelled back to use the services and facilities of the regional centre, Nhulunbuy.
16 They had moved to the homelands so that some families could escape social issues
17 as a result of drugs and alcohol abuse in town (Hughes 2007). Yirrkala also created
18 its chambers that enabled some to roam freely within while others had to keep to
19 strict quarters as dictated by Ringgitj or alliances¹⁸ (Williams 1986; Rowse 2012).
20 Different camps in Yirrkala were accessible to individuals based on their kinship
21 status, but also on the status of relationships between families and alliances.

22

¹⁸ Ringitj: Alliance or the Nation States

1 Between funerals and ceremonies, Woolworths and the Walkabout Hotel, Yirrkala
2 residents regularly hosted a stream of visitors from their homelands, including non-
3 Indigenous people from the Shire, government departments and other Indigenous
4 people from interstate. Yolngu came from as far as Galiwin'ku and Millingimbi by
5 chartered plane. Some drove on unsealed roads, while others hopped on to vacant
6 seats on chartered planes managed by Yolngu organisations or Christian
7 Missionaries. The fear and rejection of becoming 'one alone' in Eickelkamp (2011,
8 p. 139) included becoming a modern, self-focused and an individualistic moral
9 domestic economy, was the burden of being a young person and teenager (Senior
10 & Chenhall 2008), in Yirrkala.

11

12 The youth and their elders were influenced by the global forces that nurtured
13 individualistic consumer behaviour through their access to mobile phones and the
14 Internet (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Brigg & Maddison 2011). From my
15 discussions with young people, it became evident that they also wanted to feel less
16 marginalised, included in the regional economy and respected by their non-
17 Indigenous peers. The question at this point that begs to be asked is what the forces
18 that keep Aboriginal youth in this position are?

19

20

21 **2.7 WHY ARE WE A MINORITY IN OUR LAND?**

22 In this section, I will discuss the cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1958) and the
23 Yolngu link between the emotion and morality of being inferior within the
24 community and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (McIntosh 2013).
25 I refer to this topic here because Yolngu themselves struggled with identity

1 formation as a result of their interaction in the past with Macassans through trade
2 (Thomson and Petersen 1983; Clark & May 2013), in the recent decades of
3 engagement with the church (Morphy 2009) and last but not least, with the broader
4 society which had possibly affected their feelings of inferiority (McIntosh 2013).
5 My analysis was based on the interviews with study participants and analysing the
6 research conducted by McIntosh (2013) and Blakeman (2015).

7

8 The coexistence between Yolngu clans, especially between Yolngu and the pre-
9 Macassan seafarers, referred to as the 'Bayini', marked the golden age when the
10 two moieties of the Yolngu nation, the Yirritja and Dhuwa became a harmonious
11 and intricate fabric of social relationships (McIntosh 2013). To the utter dismay of
12 Yolngu, the same cannot be said of the relationships between Indigenous and non-
13 Indigenous people (McIntosh 2013). The 'sense of connectedness', spoken by the
14 Warramiri leader, the late David Burrumarra M.B.E., in McIntosh (2013) was not
15 only absent in black and white Australian relationships but also between two
16 Dhuwa and Yirritja clans today, specifically since the political tumult between the
17 traditional owners of the Rirratjingu and Gumatj clans, as discussed in the 2011
18 Gove Agreement Dispute (Taylor 2014) in section 2.5.

19

20 According to McIntosh (2013), the 'Bayini' was the golden-skinned baby that did
21 not appear 'in the image of the father', the Yolngu word for this being 'Gayi',
22 representing the image or face of the land and the close connections that tied the
23 people as a singular nation along with their totemic spirits.. The 'Bayini' had to
24 become 'black', transformed into a Yolngu 'person' of appropriate skin colouring
25 (black). This is important to Yolngu as even I was categorised as Yolngu, not

1 because I was fluent in Yolngu Rom (Law) or Raypirri Dhukar (discipline), or even
 2 Yolngu Matha, but according to my adopted Yolngu brother, for the only reason
 3 that I was black, and my facial features were similar to the Yolngu of Arnhem Land.

4

5 When the bark of the ‘gutu’ tree, was rubbed on the baby’s skin (Bayini), it did not
 6 change the colour of her skin as intended, As a result of this her paternal
 7 grandmother was stricken with grief, and ‘a world in which there was an eternal
 8 balance between temporal and the non-temporal, the physical and the spiritual had
 9 been thrown into doubt’ and chaos (McIntosh 2013 p. 97). Yolngu believed that
 10 individuals were created to be interdependent rather than autonomous and
 11 individualistic (Blakeman 2015). The appearance of the Bayini child had a ripple
 12 effect on the commonality of Yolngu society. Similar to my own Tamil culture
 13 (which coincidentally uses the same word for ‘string’), the Yolngu considered the
 14 ideal relationship between groups or clans is when their ‘raki’¹⁹ are joined and
 15 connected (manapan-mirri²⁰), and the groups are united as one (wangany-nura)
 16 according to (Blakeman 2015).

17

18 From the dawn of time, when the equilibrium of the Yolngu world was upset by the
 19 birth of the light-brown-skinned and golden-haired child (Bayini), McIntosh (2013)
 20 argued that the normative ideal of ‘ngayanu wanggany’²¹ was put to the test. The
 21 Yolngu elders, according to McIntosh became aware of a ‘new order in the
 22 universe, a new law in the land and a new principle guiding human interaction’

¹⁹ strings of relatedness

²⁰ joined, connected, linked [together to each other]

²¹ one state or sense of feeling

1 (2013, p. 97) and there was nothing they could do to control it. Bayini was not a
2 black person but a 'product of the new world entering Yolngu lives' (McIntosh
3 2013, p.97).

4

5 According to Burrumarra's analysis, he delineates a world of 'Yolngu for Yolngu
6 and Macassar for Macassan (McIntosh 2013, p. 97). In the context of 2012-2015,
7 the two worlds of the Australian and the Yolngu must never intersect for Yolngu
8 cultural continuity, even as Yolngu considered their interactions with Macassans as
9 part of an era of human flourishing. This contradiction confused me. The emerging
10 consensus by the 1980s, according to the discussions Yolngu elders held with
11 McIntosh (2013) on the significance of the 'Bayini' became contextualised in the
12 possibility of reconciliation in Australia (McIntosh 2013). The verdict, was that the
13 'Yolngu would not be overrun by the new, losing control of their lands and bodies
14 as the influence of newcomers steadily grew' and even as the Bayini herself
15 represented all things new, technology, transport and philosophy (McIntosh 2013
16 p. 99).

17

18 This aversion to impending change and the glorification of all things new was
19 interpreted by Yolngu elders and documented by McIntosh (2013) in what seemed
20 to be an example of cultural relativity, in the same way, Newtonian physics and
21 Einstein's Theory of Relativity coexist in contemporary physics (Feinberg &
22 Ottenheimer 2001).

23

24 Cultural relativity is not alien to Yolngu philosophy. In the past, they had situated
25 the teachings of Christianity relative to their own Creation stories and ceremonial

1 practice too much success (Morphy 2009). To Yolngu, there was no contradiction
2 between the two beliefs. McIntosh turned to Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive
3 dissonance (Festinger 1958) to analyse the conflict or tension between traditional
4 beliefs and new knowledge which resulted in chaos, and motivated people to
5 interpret, and apply reductionism to explain away the contradictions which were
6 not the case in Yirrkala. According to Festinger (1958) and McIntosh (2013) what
7 they called 'adaptive preference formation' was not pronounced in this community.
8 There were no rejections made towards Christianity nor to traditional and cultural
9 beliefs.

10

11 It is also possible that instead of 'cultural relativity' (Feinberg & Ottenheimer
12 2001), the Yolngu were defeated in their power struggle with the Christian Missions
13 and were forced to establish a new doctrine that is visible to this day. As an example,
14 Attwood (1989 p. 29) in his historical analysis of Aboriginal people in the Mission
15 Station of Ramahyuck in Victoria argued that 'the missionaries determined the
16 boundaries or parameters within which Aborigines had to live, and they did so
17 mostly by establishing a system whereby their ideas and values actually came to be
18 imbricated in the very fabric of Aborigines' consciousness and way of being'.

19

20 The man who was credited by Burrumarra on the philosophy of the Bayini (and the
21 cognitive dissonance between resisting change but embracing new technology) was
22 his ancestor from the Warramiri clan, who chose the surname Bukulatjpi in the
23 sixties, when Yolngu were being bound and subjected to conform to the
24 administrative procedures of the Commonwealth Government of Australia
25 (McIntosh 2013). With the appearance of a 'golden-haired' and 'light brown

1 skinned' Bayini child, the colour of one's skin began to take on a new dimension
2 for Yolngu, who no longer viewed black as the only colour of humanity. Cognitive
3 dissonance reached great levels at Unbirri (where the Bayini child appeared)
4 according to McIntosh (2013), as once there were only black Yolngu and maybe
5 long before the dawn of time, pre Bayini, pre Macassan, a cataclysm had changed
6 Yolngu from the same colour as the Bayini child to a black nation. This mirrored
7 the discussion from (Robb 1999 p. 97) that even in my Tamil history a similar event
8 had impacted on my people; 'Originally Brahma created Brahmans, but some
9 Brahmans who in their delusion took to injury and untruth, turned black and became
10 Sudras', members of a lower caste, inferior to the Brahman class.

11

12 In addition to this discourse of white and black colour of skin, of identity and the
13 acceptance of new technology from the Macassans is the dingo myth, documented
14 by Warner (1958) from a conversation with Makarrwola (Wanguri Leader) in the
15 1920s. In this discussion, the dingo was concerned that if it accepted gifts from a
16 foreign culture, then it would suffer imminently from loss of its own culture
17 (Warner 1958). The story depicted the tragic fate of the dingo upon accepting the
18 new technology and items from the Macassans and therefore abandoned its own
19 culture to become Macassan (Warner 1958; McIntosh 2013) and can be read as a
20 story of the acceptance of new technologies and at the same time, the rejection of
21 cultural change for the maintenance of identity and continuity (McIntosh 2013).

22

23 What I struggled to understand was another particular dingo myth variation cited
24 by McIntosh (2013); a classic tale from the Gupapuyngu and Warramiri territories
25 where, Yolngu were white, (like the Bayini child), but become black as a result of

1 their rejection of the tides of change and a co-dependency with a foreign entity i.e.
2 Macassans. Until now McIntosh (2013) had guided me to think in the words of
3 Burrumarra that, the Bayini was a pre-Macassan entity, unless ‘becoming black’
4 meant remaining authentic to their culture, laws, technology and ways of life. This
5 appropriation of new technology, gave the Yirritja clans more influence and power
6 over trade and exchange, impacting the interdependence of clans and individuals
7 along the raki (string) of manapan-mirri (joined, connected, linked [together to each
8 other]), and the groups, wangany-nura ([at] one) (Blakeman 2015).

9

10 According to McIntosh (2013), the Dingo refused the material wealth offered by
11 the Macassans. The refusal of material wealth at the cost of cultural continuity
12 became a symbol of the Yolngu value for their technology and ways of life
13 (McIntosh 2006 in McIntosh 2013). The connection between the rejection of the
14 Macassan technology by certain clans and the proceedings reflected in the Gumatj
15 (Yirritja moiety) triumph over Rirratjingu (Dhuwa moiety) in the 2011 Gove
16 Agreement (Taylor 2014), its overpowering influence over the affairs of many other
17 clans in North East Arnhem Land may be interpreted and understood as a ripple
18 effect of the internalisation performative elements of the Bayini and Dingo
19 philosophies.

20

21 What remained consistent was, the unwillingness to adapt to change, had brought a
22 potential for both downfall and prosperity. When change was rejected in ‘similar
23 stories from all the Bayini peoples (Yirritja Clans along the coast) it caused the
24 irreversible downgrading in both status and skin colour (to black) along with
25 ‘poverty, powerlessness and immobility in relation to the Macassans and

1 subsequently Japanese and Europeans' (McIntosh 2013, p. 103). It is possible that
2 Yolngu today were compelled to adopt new technology and began to improvise
3 from Europeans to avoid remaining impoverished and inferior.

4

5 When Gumatj consulted their lawyer from a non-Indigenous law firm in Darwin,
6 they stepped outside of the traditional Yolngu bounds of honouring the law. The
7 Rirratjingu leaders, on the other hand, relied on a lawyer (non-Indigenous) from the
8 Northern Land Council (NLC) and accepted the lawyer's 'word' of a fifty-fifty
9 split. It appeared to be that the superior clan was the one that had changed with the
10 times, and become more 'White' (European), for they triumphed over the lesser
11 Yolngu clan who did not adapt and instead chose cultural ways of strengthening the
12 strings of manapan-mirri (joined, connected, linked [together to each other]), and
13 of the groups or want any-nura ([at] one) (Blakeman 2015).

14

15 In June 2015, I was invited by a senior elder to Galiwin'ku for a discussion on
16 young men's camps. I was accompanied by a linguist from the region that assisted
17 me with grasping difficult Yolngu spiritual and theological concepts, including
18 Yolngu words from Macassans. My Bukulatjpi neighbours had moved to
19 Galiwin'ku from Birritjimi in the previous year and lived in a house built on stilts
20 with other family members. I saw the flags of the Lion of Judah and the state of
21 Israel flying from 20-metre poles, high above the roofs of the houses in the front
22 yard. I thought about this phenomenon and learnt from the head of the family that
23 the Christian theology of the 'chosen clan' or 'the chosen people' was a
24 continuation of the 'sacredness of Unbirri', where the Bayini child was born.

1 Although this clan may now appear to be in disorder, it would one day be remedied,
2 and a future of a paradise (Dhariny) will one day be realised (McIntosh 2013).

3

4 According to Burrumarra, the Yolngu however, didn't want to become 'White'
5 (European) once again (McIntosh 2013). Building on Burrumarra's theoretical
6 discourse, I reconciled what I saw in Galiwin'ku, the hoisted flags of the state of
7 Israel and the Lion of Judah, as a symbol of the self-anointed 'chosen clan' and a
8 reflection of this unattainable goal of becoming less impoverished and less inferior.
9 The discussion on the 'Yindi Dhawu' and 'Yindi Rom' (Big Stories and Big Law)
10 (McIntosh 2013) was not an attempt to reduce Yolngu knowledge into a western
11 logic. Instead, the purpose of this discussion was to demonstrate cultural relativity
12 in human relationships (Feinberg & Ottenheimer 2001). Whether in amassing
13 wealth, in procuring new technology, acquiring status and power without
14 compromising the strings of interconnectedness (Blakeman 2015), Yolngu were
15 conscious at the same time, of the necessary sacrifice of other strings of
16 connectedness, to progress socially and economically. The other strings of
17 connectedness may be specific cultural practices and gender roles that were slowly
18 changing. The example of a young girl being sent to boarding school interstate is
19 just one way of describing this sacrifice of other strings of connectedness for the
20 sake of social and economic progress.

21

22 In this socio-economic and political climate, evolving traditional structures
23 although influenced by decades of Christian Missionary (Morphy 2009) doctrine
24 were seen by the people who worked with Morphy to rapidly evolve along with
25 changes on the broader society. The new technology was no longer intimidating

1 and the loss of culture into other symbols of culture, for continuity was well
2 received by young people. Changes were enacted discreetly and opportunistically
3 through the use of mobile phones and social media, despite protests from elders.
4 These tools soon became embedded in the life of Yolngu adolescents, giving them
5 a personalised tool to engage the globalised world. Some young people in Yirrkala
6 could now explore their identity and relationships without feeling marginalised by
7 their non-Indigenous peers in Nhulunbuy or other urban centres in Australia.
8 However, these tools were not available to all young people, and the lack of access
9 to these tools was felt acutely by those who did not have the resources to procure
10 them.

11

12 In this chapter, I have drawn on historical, current and Yolngu theoretical discourse
13 to paint an approximation of the cultural and political life in Yirrkala to provide the
14 reader with the adequate context to situate the new and emergent technology in
15 remote Aboriginal society. I introduced eminent Yolngu philosophers and leaders;
16 I discussed the engagement between Yolngu and Macassans, and their exchange of
17 new technology and how it influenced Yolngu culture. I brought into this chapter
18 the Land Rights struggle that saw the application of both old and new ways of
19 communication. I juxtaposed the Land Rights struggle against the current plea of
20 Yolngu leaders for a continuation of mining investment in their region despite the
21 palpable social and economic marginalisation between the non-Indigenous and
22 Indigenous people of North East Arnhem Land.

23

24 The social marginalisation and being 'black' was used as a Yolngu theory to discuss
25 the social marginalisation now impeding the advancement of Yolngu society. I

1 bring to the reader's attention an approximation of Yolngu heterogeneity and clan
2 alliances in a globalised, capitalist world, to draw a parallel between the process of
3 Aboriginal de-communalisation and a consumerisation of Aboriginal lifestyles. The
4 next chapter will showcase the confusion between public health practice that still
5 holds the perception of Yolngu as consumers that may be enraptured by emergent
6 technology and allow for the health messages to be adopted and put in practice.

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1 **CHAPTER 3 - THE LURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND MOBILE**
2 **TECHNOLOGY IN HEALTH PROMOTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH**

3

4 *'The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between*
5 *cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization.'*

6

(Appadurai 1996 p. 32)

7

8 **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

9 In recent years, the adoption of social media and mobile phones has become a
10 coveted tool by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, non-governmental and
11 governmental health services (Senior, Helmer & Chenhall 2016; Carlson et al.
12 2015; Owiny et al. 2014; Brusse et al. 2014; Kral 2014). Several assumptions by
13 service providers were made on the use of mobile technology and social media by
14 young people, with little evidence to show for its effectiveness, especially in remote
15 Aboriginal communities (Kral 2014). For example, Brusse et al. (2014), argue that
16 mobile phones and social media enabled young people's utilisation of new
17 technology to access health information and advocate for their health needs. It has
18 also been assumed that there would be an online movement amongst peers (Kral
19 2010; 2011), which would amplify a stand against bullying and sexting, as lateral
20 violence in Aboriginal communities (Langton 2008; Wingard 2010; Carlson et al.
21 2015).

22



1

2 **Figure 3.1: Young man consuming media on the Internet via iPad 3**

3

4 Kral (2011 p. 4) argued that ‘the rapid development of new information and
5 communications technologies, an increase in affordable, small mobile technologies
6 and the penetration of the Internet and mobile telephony over the past decade
7 account for an explosion in new modes and channels for communication and
8 multimedia production’. This explosion of new modes and channels was discussed
9 earlier by Appadurai (1996, p. 32) when he argued that ‘the new global cultural
10 economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot
11 any longer be understood regarding existing centre-periphery models’. Building on
12 Kral’s findings (2011) and supported by Appadurai’s (1996), this chapter aims to
13 situate social media and mobile technology in public health practice with findings
14 from Brusse et al. (2014) in the Aboriginal context, a complex and geographically
15 distant from urban centres, now a complex heterogeneous community. The
16 discussion is born in mind that some scholars may hold to the standpoint that ‘one
17 man’s imagined community, is another man’s political prison’ (Appadurai 1996, p.
18 32). Perceiving Aboriginal communities as a heterogeneous entity provided my
19 interview participants with the opportunity to expand beyond the confines of a

1 predetermined context of remoteness and Aboriginality, allowing a plurality of
2 lifestyle and opinions to be documented in this study. I ask the reader to look beyond
3 the anthropological tradition in that this thesis was written by one who was ‘studied’
4 for generations, now attempting to provide a subaltern perspective. Repeatability is
5 not guaranteed unless you are also a product of colonisation, like the author.

6

7 In Brusse et al. (2014) mobile technology and social media were found to be highly
8 useful in health promotion in remote communities, particularly for engagement and
9 health education. Therefore, I will begin by exploring and critiquing the practices
10 mentioned above within a remote Aboriginal context, with an attempt to explore
11 the relationships between new technology and the public health agenda. I will also
12 argue in this study, that the values encompassed within health promotion may be at
13 odds with the traditional beliefs and practices of Indigenous people (Reid 1983;
14 Senior & Chenhall 2008; Yunupingu & Muller 2009; Coburn et al. 2013; Moreton-
15 Robinson 2015). Through this ethnographic study, and collaboration with
16 community members, key informants and in-depth interviewees, I will draw on
17 their contributions to produce a series of arguments ranging from cross-cultural
18 communication inconsistencies and intellectual exploitation (Horst 2015).

19

20 In the international context, developments in ethnographic inquiries into youth and
21 their new social practices surrounding social media and mobile phones have led to
22 changes in public or policy discourse (Kral 2011). I, however, argue that there are
23 insufficient understanding and acknowledgment of the difference between
24 Indigenous engagement of and processing of health information and non-
25 Indigenous health education (Coburn et al. 2013; Martin 2014; Moreton-Robinson

1 2015) strategies. This has been an issue, because of a lack of ethnographic studies
2 being accessible to Aboriginal participants, due to a lack of time or fly-in fly-out
3 researchers, contrary to my being in fieldwork through the course of my study, to
4 allow for the community to affect the study results, its arguments and conclusions
5 (Horst 2015).

6

7 These changes in public or policy discourse have been slow to take place in the
8 remote Indigenous youth context because of the fly-in fly-out practice of health
9 professionals. Young people had resorted to episodic events that gave the
10 impression of agentive participation and new pathways of learning and the
11 production of knowledge and practice that had assured health services to be
12 conducive to engaging Aboriginal youth on healthy lifestyle and behaviour change
13 programs (Kral 2011). I also argue that these episodic events disappear as soon as
14 the last sausage was eaten and the last health professional had flown back to
15 Nhulunbuy or Darwin.

16

17 I will then explore the use of innovation in the engagement of Indigenous
18 communities and critique the notion of common health promotion strategies. The
19 strategies' general focus was to develop the right hooks (novelty effect) to draw
20 people in so that the health-promoting messages can be heard and 'hopefully' or
21 'theoretically' adopted (depending on whether any behavioural theory was used on
22 the design). Relatively little ethnography, according to Kral (2011) and Horst
23 (2015) is available on how Indigenous youth are shaping the creative process of
24 health communication in their contexts and whether or not these efforts are taking
25 effect (Brusse et al. 2014).

1 **3.2 THE CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE** 2 **COMMUNITY – CASE STUDY**

3 Indigenous health and research institutions have created and deployed health
4 programs, and now digital applications (apps) and tools without having an in-depth
5 understanding (Dillon 1992; Petersen 2014; Carlson et al. 2015; Dingwall et al.
6 2015) of social media and mobile technology use in the community. The design of
7 digital content for social media and apps for mobile technology by health
8 professionals (Petersen 2014; Dingwall et al. 2015) has possibly supported and
9 authorised what appears to be a growing trend, according to Fessler (1980), a
10 practice familiar to public health since the 1980s. The design of digital content by
11 health professionals who aligned themselves with anti-racists (Kowal 2015), and
12 focused on the attributes of specific minority groups without realizing their indirect
13 reinforcement of essentialist racial identities (Kowal, Franklin & Paradies 2013)
14 had resulted in an accentuation of Aboriginal ‘otherness’ as discussed by Petmann
15 (1988) in Kowal, Franklin & Paradies (2013, p. 5).

16

17 The history of lateral violence and the internalisation of European power structures
18 by Indigenous leaders (Langton 2008; Gonzales et al. 2013) was seen today as the
19 influence of ‘dominant men and women’ in the Northern Territory communities
20 within the context of public health efforts and health promotion programs. These
21 key personalities use their influence to channel the delivery of services and access,
22 while government officers and researchers become dependent on them for the
23 provision of information both at the program design and evaluation stages, thereby,
24 possibly creating an environment of nepotism and inequity as discussed in Bennet
25 (1982). The influence of dominant people in the community was a strategy driven

1 by ruling elites rather than grounded by research as per an earlier discussion in
2 **Chapter 2** from Coburn et al. (2013) on Indigenous-led research. The study of
3 digital apps in the Indigenous context of health care delivery by Dingwall et al.
4 (2015) for example, supported a study of a mental health app that evaluated features
5 such as acceptability, visual appeal, ease of use and perceived cultural relevance.
6 Petersen (2014) on the other hand argue that a Hi-Tech Mental Health Intervention
7 may cause even more harm than good because of the ability of Internet-based
8 communication to exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression (Clerkin, Smith &
9 Hames 2013; Van Orden et al. 2010).

10

11 Between 2010 and 2012, I observed two events unfold with Yolngu in Arnhem
12 Land that involved social media and mobile technology. The case studies were
13 chosen not only because of the media coverage they both received in the Northern
14 Territory and nationally but also the comparison is provided between structuralist
15 approaches versus a grounded grassroots approach (Horst 2015) to engaging youth.
16 Case 1 is a grassroots movement that began independent of a program or
17 organisational agenda, whereas Case 2 was a fully funded Federal program with an
18 aim to improve health outcomes in remote communities through citizen journalism.
19 Case study 3 is a deployment of pre-recorded health messages on posters and in
20 books that would play in a loop when activated, from an inbuilt speaker located on
21 the body of the poster. These events are presented as case studies in the following:

22

23 **3.2.1 Case 1 – Djuki Mala**

24 Yolngu youth in Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island, a remote community in North East
25 Arnhem Land used a mobile phone to record a performance by young men who

1 combined an improvised traditional Yolngu dance with a traditional Greek song
2 (Healy 2013). The young men organised a dance group without any program and
3 agency support. According to Healy (2013), the Yolngu have in the past few years
4 started using mobile phones and camcorders to share and broadcast images on
5 YouTube of everyday activities, cultural and community events and even music
6 clips that used artistic compositions that made political statements. The men from
7 Djuki Mala practised their dance on the community basketball court by connecting
8 their mobile phones to a loudspeaker. The recording of the final dance during a
9 community gathering was filmed and subsequently uploaded to YouTube.
10 According to Ginsburg (2008 p. 141) in Healy (2013), “Indigenous self-authored
11 media representation” are “an engaged form of ‘cultural activism’ [that] appears as
12 a mode of cultural creativity and social action and does justice in explaining the
13 phenomenon above.

14

15 Two million YouTube views later, this group is known today as Djuki Mala had
16 become a global sensation. According to widespread Yolngu perception from my
17 discussion with young people and elders, the young men in the Djuki Mala dance
18 troupe had achieved social recognition and economic success through the Internet
19 and hard work (Healy 2013). The power of social media and mobile technology to
20 create an agency in Aboriginal men was presumed to be a recipe for their
21 achievement (Ginsburg 2008). This perception may be compounded by a simple
22 conclusion made by many government and non-government agencies, that
23 Indigenous agency can be generated artificially (Paradies & Cunningham 2009;
24 Kowal, Franklin & Paradies 2013) through the use of emergent technology.

25

1 3.2.2 Case 2 – NT Mojo

2 A well-devised, multi-stakeholder effort through the use of mobile phones and
3 YouTube was deployed in 2011 to 10 youth through training programs in a remote
4 Northern Territory region (Healy 2013). During the training of several young
5 people in citizen journalism or mobile journalism, an anticipation of a rise in the
6 number of Aboriginal youth using mobile phones and social media to access health
7 information was anticipated. The outcome of the training was that the young people
8 enabled to use iPhones and to conduct simple video edits to be then uploaded onto
9 YouTube. The purpose of the material was to showcase and discuss Aboriginal
10 cultural heritage, traditional bush medicines and health issues in the community for
11 a specific local audience.

12

13 Approximately six months since its launch, the project curated by the Batchelor
14 Institute, a tertiary institution of learning that targeted Indigenous people in the
15 Northern Territory, ceased to produce any material that was available for viewing
16 on YouTube. During an online search in May 2012, the dedicated website to this
17 project (<https://ntmojo.com.au>) was no longer available, and its YouTube channel
18 along with its collection of Aboriginal youth media productions was removed in its
19 entirety, leaving no traces or explanation of what happened and what lessons were
20 learnt. The absence of program continuity in the Aboriginal context may have also
21 reinforced the stereotype amongst the Indigenous youth of the futility of self-
22 determination efforts where programs struggled to be sustainable. The youths'
23 embrace of media according to Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin (2002) was
24 perceived as an example of Indigenous expression and symbolised an increasing
25 sense of empowerment for Aboriginal people. Both case studies alluded, to the

1 objectification of ‘empowerment’ and Indigenous agency that resulted from the use
2 of social media and mobile technology. Health promotion messages and social
3 marketing campaigns soon began utilising social media and mobile technology with
4 a simplistic objective of creating Indigenous agency and to change individual
5 behaviour and encourage healthy lifestyles without acknowledging the community
6 and kinship structures (Marika, Ngurruwuthun & White 1992; Marika & Isaacs
7 1995; Yunupingu & Muller 2009) that dictated micro, meso and macro level
8 behaviours, naturally intertwined and cross-cutting influence.

9

10 **3.2.3 Case 3 – Talking posters**

11 The assumption that a successful public health effort from a non-Aboriginal youth
12 context may work with some Indigenous modifications was often considered as
13 innovation, in Indigenous public health practice. In the community, the use of
14 posters, pamphlets and flyers, both in Yolngu Matha and in English were, according
15 to my informants, noticed but generally ignored. Printed health materials that were
16 hung on walls became litter on the streets a week later and eventually thrown into
17 bins, and forgotten. According to Sean from Yirrkala, ‘posters, flyers and pamphlets
18 usually end up as toilet paper or fire lighters’. Sean is a mentor and community
19 youth worker for many of his younger Yolngu peers. He has engaged and managed
20 several programs with young men, and his opinion was shared with a tone of
21 disappointment. Many of his programs had struggled for funding when thousands
22 of dollars had been allocated to printed materials in other government agencies from
23 Darwin that attained no cultural relevance to the Yolngu project.

24

1 The idea to transform the generic printed material generally used in public health
2 efforts was ‘revolutionised’ through the incorporation of the Territory’s own
3 ‘Talking Poster’ by One Talk Technology²². Sean and his friend James recalled
4 how interested everyone was when the Talking Posters first showed up in the
5 community, pinned on a wall near the store. The posters spoke in Yolngu Matha
6 when initiated by a touch of a button. James said: ‘The best I saw was the talking
7 posters and talking books about drug use and smoking. It’s quirky, new and it’s a
8 novelty’. But as I probed a little further about the life of the talking poster and book,
9 about whether they were instrumental in changing behaviour, a basic goal of public
10 health programs (Petersen and Lupton 1996; Lea 2005), Sean explained that

11 Aas soon as it wears off they’re not interested in it again. The posters just get holes
12 punched in and torn down. Talking posters lasted a few weeks before getting torn
13 down. The buttons had an average of a thousand presses before the batteries wore
14 off. They had replacement batteries, but the posters were already getting torn down.

15

16 I understood the frustration of community members, especially youth workers like
17 Sean and James, who were always forced to hear the voice of the new Missionaries
18 instructing Yolngu to ‘be healthy’ and ‘wash your hands’ and ‘eat healthily’.
19 Patronising posters from government agencies contradicted the image of the
20 Aboriginal person as injured within but morally pure and knowledgeable about
21 culture (Warren & Sue 2011). The top-down communication strategies from
22 campaigns was a constant invasion of their ways of being, as argued by Senior and

²² One Talk is a commercial organisation dedicated to improving communication and social wellbeing for Indigenous Australians in rural and remote Australia. One Talk talking posters are IP protected. <http://www.onetalktechnology.com.au/#about> accessed 18th May 2016

1 Chenhall (2012) and Kowal, Franklin and Paradies (2013). It reminded me of the
2 projected hologram of Comrade Stalin above the Kremlin during his reign. Sean
3 recalled:

4 People walked through the door and heard the same message, a repetitive voice
5 telling them a story. They all have a minimal lifespan and value to people in the
6 community and about what they [the posters] are there for.

7

8 **3.3 CONSIDERING THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH IN** 9 **HEALTH PROMOTION**

10 In the 1960s Moodie (1973) argued that health interventions were focused on a
11 biomedical approach and emphasised a clinical perspective to health and illness.
12 When the limited impact of this approach became apparent, researchers like Moodie
13 (1973) began to question and study the effect of “environmental and social
14 conditions, colonial history and dispossession”. The doubts that led researchers in
15 Moodie (1973) to study the effects of factors outside the biomedical model were
16 due to its overwhelming failure to suggest sustainable solutions (Senior 2003;
17 Senior and Chenhall 2008; 2012).

18

19 These social determinants of health were particularly scrutinised for their effect on
20 the health of young people living in remote locations in the Northern Territory by
21 Senior (2003), Burbank (2012), Senior and Chenhall (2008) including Senior,
22 Chenhall & Daniels (2006). The health of young people was particularly crucial not
23 only because of the high rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases
24 affecting the transition of adolescents into adulthood (Senior 2003; Senior &
25 Chenhall 2012) but more importantly, the high rates of youth suicide in the region

1 (Parker & Ben-Tovim 2002; Hanssens 2007) and across Indigenous Australia
2 (Carlson et al. 2015). The suicide rates of Indigenous people (36.7) were
3 significantly higher ($p<0.001$) than that of their non-Indigenous peers in the
4 Northern Territory (Pridmore & Fujiyama 2009).

5

6 In their landmark contribution to the understanding of the social determinants of
7 health, Marmot and Wilkinson (1999) stated that the health of populations is related
8 to features of society and its social and economic organisation. They explained that
9 the financing and management of preventative health programs have continued to
10 focus on the provision of evidence based on medical services and the dissemination
11 of information through health-promoting messages and social marketing
12 campaigns. These programs, although acknowledged the difficulty in changing
13 behaviours, still required the agency of Indigenous clients (Deveson 2011) and their
14 empowered self to overcome their current predicament of poor health outcomes and
15 to strive to make better choices (Lea 2005; Kowal & Paradies 2005). In their efforts
16 to separate public health from clinical services, Marmot and Wilkinson (1999)
17 raised the awareness that social and economic factors are elements that affect the
18 health of all people regardless of age, gender and socio-economic status.

19

20 The discussion of the correlation between the impact of social and environmental
21 conditions on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians included a
22 reflection on colonisation, when the historic 'dispossession and exclusion from land
23 and its economic and sacred gifts, from family and culture, and from full
24 participation in the social, political and economic life' as argued by Saggars and

1 Gray (2007 pp.16-17) is still a lived reality for many remote Aboriginal
2 communities (Langton 2008; 2011). Turrell and Mathers (2000a and 2000b) in
3 support of Marmot and Wilkinson (1999) proposed that the vital role of government
4 agencies at the macro level was to create enabling environments and conditions for
5 healthy lifestyles by addressing the socio-economic status of its marginalised
6 population. Remote communities in North East Arnhem Land were further
7 disadvantaged, according to Carson et al. (2007), due to their reliance on the welfare
8 economy and public sector funded services. The combination of these factors
9 created a systemic problem that required systems thinking approach to problem-
10 solving.

11

12 Anderson (2001) in Carson et al. (2007) specifically argued that government
13 agencies should play a relatively more significant role in the improvement of health
14 outcomes. Instead of improving the relationship between the state and Yolngu as
15 individuals or as a community, health education and self-determination policies
16 became the typical answer to the complex challenge for Closing the Gap in
17 Indigenous health (Anderson 2001). The utilisation of acute and chronic health
18 services rather than the utilisation of health education and preventive care were a
19 form of dependency with deep roots in Aboriginal culture, according to Sutton
20 (2009). A dependency that Sutton (2009) argued had disabled Aboriginal people of
21 their ability to care for themselves or each other and created a culture of passivity.
22 This culture of passivity had resulted not only from a condition of dependency but
23 also from chronic disempowerment since colonisation (Langton 2008; 2011).

24

1 As the links between chronic disease and individual behaviours became
2 increasingly important, 20th Century public health in Western countries relied on
3 individual motivation to adopt healthy lifestyles and changed individual behaviours
4 (Bandura 1977; 2001). The increased uptake of healthy lifestyles, nutritious food
5 and physical activity amidst the reduction of smoking, has been more successful in
6 the non-Indigenous population (Kowal & Paradies, 2005), where personal
7 motivation is a cultural norm (Bandura 2001). In the context of my research and
8 Indigenous knowledge systems (Christie 2005; Coburn et al. 2013; Moreton-
9 Robinson 2015) gained from interview participants have led me to believe that
10 personal motivation was usually directed by kinship; law, discipline, demand
11 sharing, obligation and moving as a communal whole instead of living an
12 individual-centric lifestyle. Without acknowledging other ways of being (Senior &
13 Chenhall 2012), and by addressing the lack of adoption of health information and
14 preventative care, public health through the Ottawa Charter (WHO 1986) had
15 developed goals and strategies to motivate individuals to take control of their health.
16 I argue in this chapter that the efforts of public health professionals had become
17 entangled in a confusion of cultural relativism, structuralist theory and Indigenous
18 agency.

19

20 This entanglement was observed within the emergence of the ‘culturally
21 appropriate’ and ‘culturally sensitive’ approaches to Indigenous health. In the
22 application of culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive public health on the
23 premise of cultural relativism (Feinberg & Ottenheimer 2001) and being anti-racist
24 (Kowal 2015), public health ideology had ignored the differences and
25 contradictions between the Indigenous health model and the Western biomedical

1 model (Senior & Chenhall 2012). The Indigenous people, on the other hand,
2 negotiated the ideology of the Western biomedical model in a relativism that
3 (Feinberg & Ottenheimer 2001) enabled Indigenous people to decide on what the
4 prevailing discourse on illness and death (Reid 1978; Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay
5 2011) was, relative to their subjectivity. The discourse, like a black market of
6 Indigenous knowledges, lay hidden as it was considered unscientific by the Western
7 biomedical model (Christie 2005).

8

9 Aboriginal Medical Services were established as an Indigenous-led version of the
10 Western biomedical model and as a culturally appropriate health service provider
11 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. The Indigenous primary health
12 care provider in North East Arnhem Land utilised health-promoting messages and
13 social marketing campaigns that targeted individual behaviour premised upon a
14 notion of Indigenous agency. The health promotion strategies were ‘Indigenised’ to
15 achieve a superficial form of ‘cultural appropriateness’ without an
16 acknowledgement of the complexity and richness of Indigenous medicine (Reid
17 1978; Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011). There was yet to be a clear understanding
18 of public health and Indigenous agency. What belonged within public health
19 programs and when do Indigenous Australians become accountable for their health
20 (Kowal 2015)? Kowal and Paradies (2005) proposed Indigenous-led public health
21 practice was often seen as structuralist without an adequate balance and emphasis
22 of the Indigenous agency. Often colonisation had become causal explanations
23 where cross-cultural interpretations of health and illness (Reid 1978; Vass, Mitchell
24 & Dhurrkay 2011) were categorised as problems and consequently thrown into the
25 ‘too hard’ basket and ignored during the design phase of public health interventions.

1
2 Sutton (2009) argued that causal accounts and the widespread agreement that many
3 Indigenous health and social problems have resulted from the after-effects of
4 colonisation (Matthews 1986) were simplistic and fatalistic (Kowal 2015; Chenhall
5 & Senior 2017). The architectural edifice of cultural relativism and the biomedical
6 approach to public health and its offspring, health promotion, aspired to bring
7 meaningful and positive outcomes for Indigenous people by a supposedly
8 Indigenous-driven agenda. It ignored the contextual complexity of Indigenous
9 health and self-determination and also fluid and ever-changing (Senior and
10 Chenhall 2017). In my opinion, this was already a point of discussion more than a
11 decade ago according to Christie (2005) and Yunupingu and Muller (2009), in that
12 this western biomedical approach lacked consideration and empathy towards
13 Indigenous values of medicine, health and illness, as observed in North East
14 Arnhem Land by a wide array of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers (Reid
15 1978; 1983; Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011).

16

17 **3.4 A CRITIQUE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR HEALTH PROMOTION** 18 **IN THE REMOTE ABORIGINAL CONTEXT**

19 The notion of empowerment was reinforced by its biomedical roots of the 1970s
20 through the aid of social media and mobile technology and considered a fashionable
21 and trendy channel for broadcasting and engagement with Indigenous communities
22 (Brusse et al. 2014). According to Lock and Nguyen (2010), by changing the shape
23 of material things, we inevitably change ourselves. The fabrication of the Ottawa
24 Charter for Health Promotion to utilise ‘empowerment’ as a tool to promote health
25 was aimed at encouraging people to ‘take control’ (WHO 1986) of their lives and

1 foster communities. The use of material things in public health to change
2 Indigenous individuals and their family was to enhance self-help and social support
3 systems (WHO 1986). I agreed with the works of researchers in Indigenous health
4 that the enabling technological features (Christie 2005; Petersen 2014) of social
5 media and mobile technology potentially lacking in sensitivity to Aboriginal ways
6 of communication (Reid 1978; 1983; Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011).

7

8 Empowerment and self-help came into coexistence in contemporary public health
9 practice with the assumption that new technology could break through and
10 intervene directly with individuals and groups in the name of health promotion
11 (Lock & Nguyen 2010; Petersen 2014; Dingwall et al. 2015). This framework was
12 also an extension of community development, which according to Marris (1985, p.
13 158) was where the colonial discourse ‘of empowerment is employed for utilising
14 the agency of citizens in fulfilment of particular governmental objectives’. The
15 following section of this chapter will draw from the expertise of Associate Professor
16 Tess Lea, who spent considerable time as a researcher in the Northern Territory
17 brings to the fore a discourse on representation and media in public health efforts.
18 Lea’s fundamental research interest is with issues of (dys)function in policy
19 enactment and how Aboriginal families share their narratives and commandeer
20 policy opening and closings that satisfy their needs.

21

22 According to Lea (2005), the enormous task of implementing health interventions
23 with intentions to reduce the high rates of Indigenous morbidity and mortality had
24 resulted in the application of cultural relativism (Feinberg & Ottenheimer 2001) by
25 public health professionals to be culturally appropriate. Cultural relativism

1 appeared then to include the involvement of White anti-racist agendas, who were
2 reluctant to claim any Indigenous agency in improving Indigenous suffering
3 (Kowal 2015).

4

5 The public health professional was placed in a position that required them to
6 ‘empower’ Aboriginal people to assume control over their ‘health and wellbeing’
7 instead of merely directing or marketing behaviour change. This imagined practice
8 of empowerment took shape through sharing scientific knowledge in accessible
9 ways that utilised different forms of media broadcasted on social media sites, for
10 example, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, including mental health apps (Dingwall
11 et al. 2015).

12

13 The people who promoted this process, however, refused to acknowledge the
14 complexity of public health’s biomedical viewpoints and the assumed knowledge
15 standpoints on health and disease of the Aboriginal people they wanted to help (Lea
16 2005). Lea (2005) argued that the absence of healthy behaviours had often been
17 deduced as a sign of lack of knowledge or information to produce the former, an
18 opinion that suspiciously frustrated the agency of Yolngu and ignored their
19 sophisticated knowledge of medicine, health and sorcery (Reid 1978; 1983; Vass,
20 Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011).

21

22 According to Lea (2005), new technology was utilised as the ‘new microscope’,
23 and the premise was that if people could see the germs, they would begin to believe
24 in the western biomedical model. Similarities could be drawn into the idea that if
25 Yolngu watched their brother rap or talk about healthy lifestyles on social media

1 and mobile phones, the health-promoting messages would be easily accepted and
2 adopted. Variables such as ease of use, perceived relevance and visual appeal were
3 commonly (and conveniently) perceived as a proxy for Aboriginal people's
4 acceptance of Western interventions as evidenced in Dingwall et al. (2015).

5

6 The study by Lea (2005) suggests mobile technology and social media have been
7 adopted as carrier pigeons by public health professionals. Unable to train and recruit
8 sufficient youth workers and implement specific youth health policy; music and
9 health messages were used as proxy tools for health education. The solution, in the
10 eyes of public health professionals, according to Lea (2005), was in the empowering
11 effects of motivational and aesthetically designed content. Those tasked with using
12 cross-cultural communication theories to migrate health messages were taught to
13 assume their recipients to be someone without expert knowledge in the biomedical
14 sciences or even about germ theory but came with a wealth of knowledge in
15 traditional culture and ancient mythology (Lea 2005).

16

17 Public health professionals took great care in using the right texts and colours and
18 used colours of the Aboriginal flag to engage their young Indigenous clients (Lea,
19 2005 p. 1315) as being sensitive to the 'feelings' of Indigenous people with poor
20 literacy skills. The simplification of health information and the distillation of
21 intentions of well-meaning assimilation to Westernised behaviours, i.e. personal
22 hygiene, in the name of improving health and well-being became the end goal and
23 at the same time, the means to its attainment. Evident in the work of Lea (2005, p.
24 1316) was that cultural relativism was modified into a 'tutelary processes [that]
25 cannot depend upon politically and informatically naïve recipients'. This excerpt

1 from Lea explains that the oversimplification of health promotion or public health
2 messages is underpinned by the assumption that the Indigenous recipients of this
3 message have traditional knowledges and systems inherent in their culture that
4 enable good health and wellbeing, but these do not fit well with the Western
5 biomedical model. Some reasons for this may include a lack of a measurable
6 evidence base and the inability of Western practices to place credence on
7 Aboriginal knowledge in health and healing (Christie 2005).

8

9 Video material and flip charts, in the form of cartoons and sterile, generic images
10 of brown and black people, have now migrated into the online world and could be
11 accessed through mobile phones and tablets. Health promoting messages that
12 implored Indigenous people to quit smoking, to use condoms for safe sex and
13 ‘avoiding fatty, salty or high sugar foods, with sensitive and accessible explanatory
14 narratives’ (Lea, 2005 p. 1317) had become a cookie cutter approach to Indigenous
15 youth health policy. Only the process of content creation and descriptive agency
16 were matters of focus in this process of health education (Lea 2005), but the tools
17 (mobile phones and social media) that acted as carriers for the content were
18 considered by public health professionals according to Lea (2005) to be culturally
19 blank.

20

21 Sean was an advocate for the old-fashioned, less technology is best, approach to
22 engaging Yolngu (Petersen 2014). He acknowledged Yolngu theories of
23 communication (Marika, Ngurruwuthun & White 1992; Marika & Isaacs 1995;
24 Yunupingu & Muller 2009) and suggested that the best way for the community was
25 the:

1 Door to door, sit down, sit in a group, have a cup of tea, talk to people, that's always
2 been the most effective, because it comes back to that relationship building and
3 that trust and you don't get that one through a phone or computer or some
4 automated voice telling a story.

5

6 The design blueprint of these messages was based on the assumption that our
7 Western views and interpretations were not identical, possibly contradictory (Reid
8 1983; Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011) but had the ability to become culturally
9 appropriate when embellished with emergent technology (Dingwall et al. 2015),
10 Indigenous vocals and tone (Petersen 2014) This, and a procedure, elegantly
11 described by Lea (2005, p. 1317) as: 'an aesthetic of exaggerated signs morphed
12 with the racialised effects of visualising the optics of Others'. The culturally blank
13 tools (Lea 2005), i.e. social media and a mobile phone, were a modern version of
14 the Message Stick (khayu). Instead of a piece of wood with etchings, it is now a
15 composite of metal, plastic and silica that rings, plays music, takes photos, sends
16 text messages, does video calls and streams the latest Hollywood blockbuster. The
17 messenger and the message were no longer separate, and both were stored as
18 narratives in a tiny piece of plastic called the memory card. Amidst these
19 complexities, public health messages stood in contrast as 'simplistic media and
20 exaggerated signs' in the social context of engaging Indigenous people for 'sharing
21 information in appropriate ways' (Lea 2005, p. 1317). The perceived
22 appropriateness of sharing simplistic public health information was unlikely to be
23 meaningful when positioned against the depth and complexity of Yolngu health
24 knowledge (Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011).

25

1 Lea continued to call these health-promoting or public health efforts a ‘pantomime
2 where exaggerated characters overwhelmed the interpreting spectator toward
3 unmistakable cause-effect messages’ (2005, p. 1317) and confirmed the findings
4 from previous Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers such as Reid (1978) and
5 Vass, Mitchell and Dhurrkay (2011). The Indigenous view and knowledge of
6 Indigenous medicine, pathology and physiology as discussed by Reid (1983),
7 Senior (2003) and Vass, Mitchell and Dhurrkay (2011) were not taken into
8 consideration at the planning stages of health promotion programs or during the
9 community consultation phase. The major programs of health promotion in the
10 Yolngu context had been a cause of tension and conflict especially within
11 community circles (Senior & Chenhall 2012).

12

13 Visual pedagogy as a dominant force of behaviour change was assumed by health
14 promoters to act as an instrument of change especially when the individual Other
15 now held within their grasp the (mobile) technology and an Indigenous (and now
16 rarely a non-Indigenous) voice and image for interpersonal engagement. It is not
17 unfair to say that very little research had been conducted to “explore the cultural
18 assumption being brought to bear in the creation of public health artefacts (Lea
19 2005, p.1317). Generally, the Indigenous images, voices and participation (in
20 partnership) sufficed as criteria of effectiveness and acceptability which was then
21 deployed to all Indigenous populations assumed to be ‘homogenous’ entities
22 (Appadurai 1996).

23

24 ‘This double absence’ according to Lea (2005, p. 1317) is the premature assumption
25 of Indigenous people's ignorance of western science coupled with the lack of

1 'empirically grounded critique of the representational tactics being deployed'. In
2 this misunderstood intersection, public health professionals were convinced in the
3 process of creating behaviour change content, that the very little of what Aboriginal
4 people may understand and accepts as bio 'medicine', was a 'flawed imitation of
5 the mature western complex'. Is it possible that this culture within the public health
6 profession according to Kowal and Paradies (2005) and more recently from Kowal
7 (2015) was related to the limited training provided in conceptual tools needed to
8 unpack the postcolonial nexus of fourth world health?

9

10 During the reflexive process and discussion with interview participants on the
11 inferred ignorance of Indigenous people on the western factual and 'real' science, I
12 understood that the crux of this project lay within this question: real for whom, as
13 argued by Leach and Davis (2012). As a health professional myself, I had never
14 considered 'for whom certain understandings, or observations, or practices are
15 knowledge, and what translation have to occur for them to be formally or officially
16 recognised as such' (Leach & Davis 2012 p. 211). The authors clarified where I had
17 misunderstood. They argued that 'taking up effect rather than veracity and
18 certainty' when instead what 'we need to be focusing on' are not a discourse 'over
19 truth value as such, but over transformations from one kind of effect, for certain
20 actors, to others' and to 'look at the transformation that occur when a social process
21 is called knowledge' (Leach & Davis 2012 p. 212).

22

23

24 **3.4.1 The social context of public health professionals as a contributing factor**

1 Lea (2005) and Kowal (2015) draw our attention to the often overlooked social
2 context, in which guilt drives public health professionals, whom they argue, have
3 come up with answers encouraged by a moral imperative to assist Aboriginal
4 people. At the same time, they also strived to minimise their ‘inherited structural
5 dominance’ over the Indigenous populations (Lea 2005, p.1310). In this context,
6 post-colonial governmentality turns a blind eye to negative projects, but thrives
7 with the idea of effective ‘facilitation and partnership with health, longevity, well-
8 being, independence’ and safeguarding some aspects of ‘community control’ in the
9 project (Lea, 2005 p. 1310). This implicitly straightforward consideration of
10 cultural appropriateness is at ‘the heart of a series of compounding reifications that
11 works to hold the problems of intervention in a permanent state of irresolution’ (Lea
12 2005 p. 1315).

13

14 Moberg (2012) recalled the work of Bourdieu and brought my attention to the
15 creative role of social actors and agents in the process of reproducing and
16 transforming society while rejecting the assumptions that individuals acted based
17 on rational economic decisions or optimal decisions. Bourdieu and the binary of
18 rationality and irrationality were perhaps too reductionist to explore Yolngu theory
19 in this thesis effectively. However, Bourdieu’s description of the human motivation
20 of decision-making became more interesting within an Indigenous cultural and
21 economic context as Reid (1983) and Senior (2003) argue; different culture and
22 knowledge created tension where unexplained or irrational behaviours were
23 rejected instead of being deconstructed for meaning and categorised as trans-
24 rational to allow for in-depth reflection. Indigenous research in the social science
25 alone can contribute to a much richer understanding of how culture, values and

1 knowledge creation can attempt to place and deconstruct behaviours and meaning
2 (Coburn et al. 2013; Moreton-Robinson 2015).

3

4 The use of “Prospect Theory” by Kahnemann and Tversky (1979) described
5 decision-making process based on their evaluation of losses and gains without the
6 limiting ‘all or nothing’ perspective discussed in Moberg (2012), initially built on a
7 subjective notion of ‘rationality’. I agree with Moberg (2012) that rationality is
8 generally a westernised imagination and may be entirely different to the Indigenous
9 subject of rationality as discussed by Reid (1983) and Vass, Mitchell and Dhurrkay
10 (2011). The need to label behaviours as irrational when they don’t fit the Western
11 public health imagination was often overlooked in the Indigenous context. Modern
12 science has done little to decide birth, death, illness and health for Yolngu (Reid
13 1983; Senior 2003; Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011).

14

15 In the climate of competition with Big Media for attention from young people,
16 public health professionals attempted to insert their ideologies in often lack-lustre
17 messages. At the same time, Indigenous children were being affected by
18 globalisation where public health professionals have to compete in a world that they
19 can’t win. The force of mainstream youth culture, the African American influence
20 through ‘Gangsta’ Rap and Hip Hop had created hip-hop inspired Indigenous youth
21 culture. Yolngu youth strived to be just like the other foreign ‘Yolngu’ (African
22 American Hip Hop artists) they watched on television whose music was admired
23 but distrusted by the older generation. Joe said:

24

1 And there is all that rap, Tupac influence. Families never wanted that. I remember
2 when that started rolling out here when the kids didn't really listen to rap music.
3 They [Senior Elders] all hated it; they [senior elders] said it's all gonna give em'
4 [youth] bad influence. They [youth] are going to start associating with the African
5 American attitude.

6

7 Joe was a male community worker engaged with temporary work with the Shire.
8 He recalled how Yothu Yindi and country music were the only influence, in youth
9 culture in Yirrkala before the emergence of 'Gangsta Rap' and Hip Hop in the
10 region. He said, 'Before all that the kids would listen to Yothu Yindi and country
11 music. Reggae little, but not popular and there wasn't the attitude and the violence'.

12

13 Adding to the complexity of the public health professional, entangled in the
14 judgement of what is rational and irrational in the Indigenous context, Harding,
15 Lamont and Small (2010 p. 208), defined the community as a place for 'social roles,
16 statuses and rules for behaviour'. Behaviours that involved 'transactionalism'
17 (Harding, Lamont & Small. 2010) was noted in the literature to appear where the
18 public health professional engaged with Indigenous people in made up of a series
19 of exchanges between individuals, each pursuing their outcomes and desires
20 (Harding, Lamont & Small 2010). Although the concept of exchange or "Ganma"
21 (Yunupingu & Muller 2009) as discussed in **Chapter 1** was referred to in the early
22 stages, it appeared, unfortunately, to be a didactic process, void of Yolngu
23 intellectual content (Lea 2005).

24

1 Cindy, a mother and community development worker, explained that young people
2 incorporated the mobile phone as personal property, and had deviated from the
3 Yolngu norm of property ownership to become part of a broader community of
4 contemporary Indigenous people. She said: 'Mobile phones: they see it as
5 participating in the current trend as if any young person wants to be considered a
6 part of the contemporary society'. When I discussed an Indigenous anti-tobacco
7 social marketing campaign that was designed as a contemporary Yolngu message
8 with a young Indigenous health worker, I asked about the use of technology in
9 creating trendy messages that supposedly promoted behavioural change. Thinking
10 carefully and recalling the project that only ended less than a year ago, she said:

11

12 I think the people heard the message but didn't really take it in. So yeah, if there
13 was another health promotion, I would want [it] to be catchy like that with excellent
14 choreography and dancing, a lot of young kids involved and they usually have the
15 best ideas, and it attracts attention in the communities.

16

17 The adoption of a 'tobacco'-free lifestyle, to quit smoking in exchange for a
18 healthier Yolngu community and culture was interpreted as a success because of its
19 wide acceptance. The use of Yolngu rappers and Hip Hop situated in the Yolngu
20 community was crucial in engaging Yolngu youth who considered themselves as
21 contemporary agents engaged in a globalised world. The evaluation of the anti-
22 tobacco message in the eyes of Indigenous community members was in stark
23 difference to the intended effect initially planned by the public health practitioners
24 who produced the video material, to inform Yolngu on the harms of smoking and
25 encourage quitting. I asked if she had heard comments about the video from her

1 family and networks. Cindy commented while shifting her gaze to the left and
2 upwards, and said, *'I've heard comments like "oh that's a good funny clip,*
3 *are they gonna be doing any more?" But I haven't heard much*
4 *comment about people wanting to stop smoking'.*

5

6 This Aboriginal mother and senior elder acknowledged the community's input into
7 the video and commented that it had a limited impact amongst individuals. She said:

8 To be honest, we just released a report in [...] its rising [the rates of smoking] and
9 just have a video like that it's not gonna send [the] message, its gonna take a lot
10 more things to change. More innovative stuff". Maybe it's effective, but it's an
11 issue that not gonna be solved by sending one video around. More consistent, more
12 innovative, more targeted to young people". And it's got to be realistic [relevant].
13 Very tough. So Yolngu see a white person on the side of the cigarette packet, and
14 it just means nothing to them, you know. It's the white person sickness.

15

16 Returning to the social context in which the public health professional must operate,
17 we bear in mind the nature of the game that social actors and agents have agreed to
18 play with public health professionals. The interactions between social actors and
19 public health professionals does negate the possibility that in their discourse of
20 losses and gains, Indigenous people see public health practice and 'research in
21 Indigenous communities as neo-colonialism and advocate for a minimal role of
22 non-Indigenous people in Indigenous health research' as argued in Kowal &
23 Paradies (2005 p. 1348) and again in Kowal (2015). The perception of public health
24 practice as neo-colonialism had created an 'ambivalent and contradictory subject
25 position vis-a-vis the postcolonial context of Indigenous public health' (Kowal &

1 Paradies, 2005 p. 1348). Kowal and Paradies (2005) argue that public health
2 professionals who were dedicated to critiquing in the Indigenous public health
3 context do not generally take on academic discourses to analyse post and neo-
4 colonialism. Their limited exposure to critical disciplines and the scholarly works
5 of Lattas (1993), Cowlshaw (2004), Povinelli (2002), and Rowse (2002; 2013)
6 were substituted by widespread approval of Trudgen's (2000) 'Why Warriors Lie
7 Down and Die'.

8

9 I agree with the general sentiments towards public health professionals described
10 in Kowal and Paradies (2005) and have reflected on my own professional
11 experience as a public health practitioner prior this study. This transactional
12 practice (Harding, Lamont & Small 2010) in public health, albeit presented in the
13 rhetoric of consultation and empowerment (Lea 2005), was according to with the
14 findings from Lea (2005), a path of repression. It was, according to Petersen and
15 Lupton (1996), where it became evident to me that public health was a professional
16 practice enabled the creation of expert knowledge on people and society to control
17 their way of acting in the name of health and the avoidance of illness and premature
18 death. This constraining of thinking and action is exacerbated by the exclusion of
19 Indigenous knowledge of health and medicine in public health practice (Vass,
20 Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011). A somewhat unfair approach considering the history
21 of Indigenous people here in Australia and internationally, of which I, am a
22 member.

23

24 There is an invisible force deployed by public health in Indigenous communities
25 with a goal to persuade Indigenous people to adopt a particular course of action in

1 the process of addressing systemic problems affecting health and wellbeing
2 (Petersen & Lupton 1996). The authors Petersen and Lupton (1996) confirmed my
3 observations that health experts have engaged in a didactic mission in the promotion
4 of health messages that aim to change societal behaviour. At the same time,
5 Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land have come to see the ‘community-
6 government’ consultations as a burden, although the process claimed to be found in
7 the process of empowerment and the eradication of inequalities.

8

9 Community consultations led by government bureaucrats required individuals and
10 their networks to adopt a western point of view of what it is to be ‘healthy’. The
11 consultation was wrapped in an intangible reciprocal relationship that entailed
12 fulfilling obligations or expectations that required large amounts of effort and
13 willpower to bear any results. Such efforts in reality only enable a forced re-creation
14 of the Indigenous agency as responsible citizens with aspects of the Protestant work
15 ethics; self-control, discipline and diligence (Petersen & Lupton 1996). Indigenous
16 knowledge systems need to be adopted into our ways of engagement with the
17 community and argued that ‘Aboriginal knowledge was a way of life derived from
18 an ontology that has sustained Aboriginal people for eons’, where Aboriginal ways
19 of knowing are ‘more than information or facts and are taught and learned in certain
20 contexts, in certain ways’ (Martin 2014 p. 294).

21

22 This description of a Western biomedical reality in an Indigenous context was once
23 the bedrock of Missionary work during an era referred to as ‘Mishin time’ (Mission
24 Time). This argument was brought to my attention by a friend and Ngapipi (uncle)
25 now in his sixties, during an informal discussion of the “No germs on Me”

1 campaign implemented across the Territory by the Department of Health. The
2 fundamental campaign goal was aimed at encouraging Indigenous people to wash
3 their hands. Reflecting on the government's educational method, it seemed to me
4 that the elder's thoughts returned to his childhood when he said that Bapa Sheppy
5 (a Church Minister on Elcho Island) always tried to change Yolngu ways (Kowal,
6 Franklin & Paradies 2013).

7

8 **3.4.2 Is public health practice culturally insensitive?**

9 In theory, the practice of public health according to Ashton and Seymour (1998) in
10 Petersen and Lupton (1996 p.4) was an approach that brought together
11 'environmental change and personal preventative measures with appropriate
12 therapeutic interventions, especially for the elderly and the disabled'. It went
13 beyond an understanding of human biology and recognised the importance of those
14 social aspects of health problems that were caused by lifestyle choices. In this way,
15 it sought to avoid the trap of blaming the victim (Kowal, Franklin & Paradies 2013).
16 Many contemporary health problems were therefore seen as being social rather than
17 solely individual problems; underlying them were concrete issues of local and
18 national public policy, and what were needed to address these problems were
19 'Healthy Public Policy' –which in other words is a systems thinking approach that
20 currently lacked the contribution of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Christie
21 2005).

22

23 The 'new' public health as described by the previous paragraph has replaced or
24 sanitised its outwardly patronising strategy through the application of cutting-edge
25 marketing techniques of the 70s and 80s to develop a honeycomb of government

1 and non-governmental agencies. These agencies subsequently reached out to
2 engage disadvantaged and non-compliant populations as described by Rowse
3 (2012) instead of a separate ‘people and cultures’ through community participation,
4 health promotion, health education, social marketing, healthy public policy, and
5 inter-sectoral collaboration (Anderson 2001). These agencies also triangulated and
6 measured their efforts and outcomes with epidemiology, biostatistics, diagnostic
7 screening, immunisation, health advocacy and health economics (Petersen &
8 Lupton 1996).

9
10 Petersen and Lupton (1996p. 15) argue that ‘in recent years, public health “theories”
11 posit one or more aspects of the “conditions of modern life” as a causative factor in
12 ill-health and as an object for reform’. Lack of exercise, over-consumption of
13 specific products and poor diet were main causes for ill-health that had inspired
14 public health practice to educate the ‘Other’. In this case, Indigenous people as a
15 population in need of health interventions were targeted with behaviour change
16 campaigns (Petersen & Lupton 1996), to improve health outcomes. Indigenous
17 people have been dehumanised and referred to as a ‘population’ (Rowse 2012) in
18 public health strategies that were generally concerning intervening in healthy
19 lifestyle choices. Petersen and Lupton (1996 p. 15) summarized the public health
20 ideology as such that ‘life should be lived rationally, in a profit maximising way,
21 with no room for such excesses as drunkenness, overeating, gambling, idleness, and
22 thriftlessness and so on’ The Weberian Protestant ethic linked with the rise of
23 capitalism had indoctrinated the public health professional with the notion that the
24 individual is a ‘rational, calculating actor who adopts a prudent attitude in respect

1 to risk and danger’ and ‘in respect [they] are closer to missionaries than to the
2 uninterested scientist that they believe themselves to be’ (Petersen & Lupton p. 41).

3

4 **3.5 ABORIGINAL CRITIQUE OF TECHNOLOGY USE IN PUBLIC** 5 **HEALTH**

6 A not-for-profit Indigenous organisation had led the technology innovation in
7 public health with the use of music videos laced with health messages for
8 ‘Bluetoothing’ between teenagers in 2009. The use of Internet Communication
9 Technology (ICT) was a popular terminology among government and non-
10 governmental organisation between 2009 and 2011, well before the use of
11 Facebook Pages. Jenny recalled how using technology attracted attention from
12 young people and said, ‘I think that there is excitement about ICT and it engages
13 young people and therefore within that excitement they’re gonna listen’.

14

15 My informants and interviewees discussed the secret sauce for the engagement of
16 young people and technology. They observed that engaging with user-generated
17 content through the use of technology in artistic and musical ways, seemed to
18 appeal to teenagers in Yirrkala. The service providers worked shoulder to shoulder
19 with young people, in a constrained health agenda (Lea 2005) to create music videos
20 to improve awareness of healthy eating. Jenny relayed the experiences she had from
21 working with youth. She said that ‘they were the ones in control, where that
22 information was going, and they were the ones who were in control of creating that
23 information, I’m talking 17 years old’. Jenny, being a media specialist and
24 entrepreneur critically reflected and said that she was not sure ‘whether they [the
25 young people] took it on as information for healthy foods’.

1
2 The knowledge generated from medical and epidemiological discoveries,
3 categorised as facts were commonly presented as truths to Indigenous people (Lea
4 2005; Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011). The general caution taken by researchers
5 and authors in their respective peer-reviewed journal articles, when aware of the
6 correlations or associations they had identified (Petersen & Lupton 1996), still
7 made solid recommendations based on their findings. Unfortunately, according to
8 Petersen and Lupton (1996 p. 43), ‘the translation of their research into forums to
9 which the majority of the population have access often dispense with such caution’.
10 Void of arguments and reflection on the subjective and context-bound nature of
11 associations (Petersen & Lupton 1996), science was often translated into absolutes
12 and was preached to Indigenous people in the same manner as Missionaries whom
13 civilised Indigenous people through forced living in houses and imposed western
14 notions of hygiene practices (Attwood 1989). Epidemiological research, according
15 to Petersen and Lupton (1996 p. 44) was further hampered by ‘its reliance on
16 probabilities and post-hoc observational studies that attempted to relate health
17 outcomes to exposure to hypothesised ‘risk factors’ that preceded the outcome’.

18
19 The term ‘public’ in public health practice refers to a segmented group in a society
20 based on the risk of acquiring specific diseases or disabilities (Petersen & Lupton
21 1996). The individual was bounded by unspoken rights and obligation to the new
22 public health ‘clan’ and respective ‘totems’ (flipcharts, videos, posters, pamphlets
23 and apps), to accept and conform ‘to the imperatives of expert public health
24 knowledge (Petersen & Lupton, 1996 p. 61). Public health called its approach
25 ‘holistic’ without giving due thought to what is included in the term ‘holistic’. A

1 holistic approach required attention to be given to the ‘environment’, according to
2 Petersen and Lupton (1996 p. 61), which incorporated ‘human relationship with
3 their spatial, temporal, emotional psychological and social dimensions’ in the
4 material world. It should also include Yolngu knowledge of health and medicine
5 (Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011).

6

7 This public health approach inadvertently placed other humans as risk factors;
8 whom you live with, your neighbours, your clan elders, your uncles, cousins and
9 people you share a drink with at the Arnhem Club on a Thursday night, puts you at
10 risk of disrupting your pathway to health and wellbeing. Societal change may only
11 occur when a certain number of individuals apply diligence, self-control and
12 discipline to improve their health and wellbeing through the adoption of healthy
13 behaviours. The programs that I reflected upon in Arnhem Land could be summed
14 up as public health programs with a goal to change societal norms by relying on
15 individual diligence, self-control and discipline. This agentic approach was
16 assumed to affect a network of change that will eventually have an impact on
17 society, community or clan. These strategies have been studied and empirically
18 concluded to be unsuccessful, according to Senior and Chenhall (2006, 2008a, and
19 2008b).

20

21 The Yolngu individual was burdened by a dual ‘cross’. The first was to function as
22 an individual who chose to practise healthy lifestyles without an enabling
23 environment. The second ‘cross’ was the expectation of a responsibility to change
24 or influence community or clan to live healthier lifestyles and take on the role of an
25 Indigenous leader. The analogy of the ‘cross’ was used to draw a possible parallel

1 between the intentions, expectations, attitudes and strategies of Missionaries and
2 the new public health professional. Moving on further into the arena of forced
3 participation, affected representatives of Indigenous populations (Rowse 2012)
4 were consulted before being thrown back into the Colosseum of their community,
5 to counter the impact of history, culture, norms and social inequality stemming from
6 chronic socio-economic deprivation. In the name of community development,
7 citizens have also been encouraged and offered to partake in 'decision-making
8 processes only insofar as this is in line with predefined and delineated governmental
9 objectives', according to Petersen and Lupton (1996 p. 148).

10

11 Participation of community members in public health activities thereby has become
12 a synonym for empowerment. Through the enabling efforts of public health experts,
13 the motivation and engagement of citizens, supported by relationships of mutual
14 transaction, sausage sizzles and freebies have become the 'correct' interpretation of
15 the loosely defined concepts and processes of enabling and empowerment, so
16 widely cited in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion by the World Health
17 Organisation (1986), according to Petersen and Lupton (1996).

18

19 I suspect that the lack of explicit definitions of the processes of enabling and
20 empowerment in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986) was
21 evident in the literature's description of barriers to participation in public health
22 programs. Barriers such as a lack of individual and community awareness, skills
23 and the capacity for problem-solving was simplistic and detrimental to the very goal
24 of 'empowerment' set out in the first instance by the Charter (Petersen & Lupton
25 1996). According to Petersen and Lupton (1996), the lack of expertise or

1 'knowledge problems' "are seen to compromise such faults as a lack of 'awareness
2 of the extent of the problem', or a lack of 'awareness of other agencies and group
3 activities, or ignorance about how to gain access to information". In may very well
4 appear to be that the process of empowerment, required power structures to
5 relinquish their superior status, privilege and decision-making through the
6 incorporation of Indigenous knowledge of medicine and health (Vass, Mitchell &
7 Dhurrkay 2011).

8

9 Indigenous people have been blamed for taking insufficient control over their health
10 outcomes and lives (Petersen & Lupton 1996). The lack of self-determination in
11 healthy lifestyle choices was the commonly identified source of
12 'misunderstandings' and 'conflicts' that arise between experts and lay people as a
13 result of differences in the way they approached decision-making. Whereas [public]
14 health professionals based their judgments on scientific 'objective' knowledge, so
15 one argument goes, lay people employed common sense, [or] 'subjective'
16 evaluations" according to Petersen and Lupton (1996 p. 153).

17

18 Delving again into strategies to improve 'voluntary' community participation to
19 take ownership of health problems, was the discussion on community development,
20 where the health departments and agencies have "sought to mobilise citizen
21 involvement" as argued by Petersen and Lupton (1996 p.154). The genesis of
22 'Community Development' as a movement, according to Marris (1985 p. 137) in
23 Petersen and Lupton (1996 p. 157), was installed by the "British, French and
24 Belgian colonial administrators in Africa and Asia as a means of stimulating local
25 leadership and drawing local factions into cooperation, and for securing resources".

1

2 **3.6 CONCLUSION**

3 This colonial logic, now entrapped in the public health practice under the guise of
4 cultural relativism (Feinberg & Ottenheimer 2001) and ‘community development’
5 according to Marris (1985) and Lea (2005 p. 1310) underlined the discourse of
6 empowerment as a tool masked in superficial tones of Indigenous agency in order
7 to fulfil government objectives (Petersen & Lupton 1996) to improve health
8 outcomes without reconciling Indigenous health and medicine (Reid 1978; 1983;
9 Vass, Mitchell & Dhurrkay 2011) with the Western biomedical model. It has
10 become apparent in this study, that in the case of the Indigenous communities and
11 the individual, involvement with public health programs ‘presupposed’ and
12 possibly forced a prerequisite of a ‘whole range of personal attributes, skills,
13 attitudes, and commitments, as well as detailed work upon the self of the Other’
14 (Petersen & Lupton 1996 p. 157) in order for programs to thrive, succeed and
15 become sustainable (Dodson & Smith 2003). The individual must become
16 somewhat assimilated into the dominant non Indigenous culture before he or she
17 can decide what it is to be a healthy Indigenous person.

18

19 Unfortunately, for public health practice, Mackenbach (2012) insisted that the
20 enduring conditions of socio-economic inequalities in health, particularly
21 between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and (from the interview
22 participants have discussed) now within Indigenous communities, is a testament to
23 failures of public health to create social change. In and amongst this brief discourse
24 of a lengthy subject on public health practice, the idea that social media and the use
25 of mobile technology as a useful tool to harness the agency of Indigenous

1 individuals to take ownership and control of their health and their destiny within
2 their current social disadvantage seemed to appear contradictory (Rennie et al.
3 2016). It seemed to me that this type of public health practice had set up the
4 oppressed people to fail at the onset. Although communication technology could be
5 persuasive (Fogg 2002) in specific contexts, mobile technology and social media
6 were often assumed to have the power to change personal behaviour without the
7 consideration of the influence of history, culture, kinship and the environment of
8 the individual and the community.

9

10 According to Kowal (2015 p. 17) 'a range of scholars including Indigenous
11 Australian academics, have questioned whether identities rooted in the past and
12 present oppressions could only reinforce their marginalisation'. The reinforcement
13 of Indigenous marginalisation, depicted as health narratives in the health promotion
14 effort, albeit done with transparent and accountable motives, has entrapped
15 Indigenous health in a cycle of deficits (Thrift, Nancarrow & Bauman 2011; Kowal
16 2015). The effect of this on my research was twofold. Firstly I had to become more
17 reflexive and skilful in language and culture in order build a more extensive
18 network (kinship-led) than earlier envisaged, to capture the intellectual discourse
19 of not only Yolngu leaders, and the feminist discourse but the unheard voices of
20 men, who were often unsuccessfully engaged by the public health and health
21 promotion communications strategists. My second challenge was to accept,
22 document and discuss my position as a researcher on a doctoral scholarship
23 (although a descendant of a Tamil Indigenous tribe and had grown up in a
24 developing country), and the implications for engagement, entirely different to the

1 familiar dichotomy of Indigenous or non-Indigenous which Yolngu were
2 accustomed.

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1 Aboriginal culture, history and impact in the scholarly world is also well
2 documented and weaved into a discussion on the social life of things and the
3 imminent globalisation in North East Arnhem Land. In my efforts to redistribute
4 my perceived benefits and the apparent knowledge that I have gained, I continue to
5 support Aboriginal Health Practitioners in professional and personal efforts. After
6 this research, I have involved one community member to be paid, in a joint research
7 project. Before completing this study, the broader Yolngu community and I
8 collaborated on an ethnographic film to showcase Indigenous Knowledge Systems
9 and an Indigenous Health Promotion Effort around tobacco control. The details of
10 this story are available in Appendix 3.

11

12 The efforts to incorporate reciprocity into my daily routine and learning as well as
13 sharing of my resources and knowledge are weaved into the pages of this thesis
14 with humility and thankfulness to the community. My engagement has been
15 responsible and guided every step of the way by Yolngu mentors and senior elders.
16 Consent that was free, prior and informed in all aspects of my research procedure
17 was attained without any coercion, force or the withholding of service and
18 assistance. Ample time was provided for participants to consider and withdrawal
19 from the research was processed immediately. The formal study of the Yolngu
20 language groups and cultural competency courses I attended during my work in the
21 Department of Health in the Northern Territory Government and upon commencing
22 my doctoral study at Charles Darwin University was reinforced by courses
23 conducted by Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation and seminars at the annual
24 Garma Festival.

25

1 As ethnographic research is void of research protocols that rigidly trap and
2 confound the exploration and meaning making process with apriori assumptions, I
3 request the reader to apply a systems thinking perspective in studying this thesis.
4 Just as information systems scholars may use confessional ethnography (Schultze
5 2000), critical ethnography (Myers 1997), postmodern ethnography (Harvey 1997)
6 and Netnography (Campbell et al. 2009), system thinking scholars posit that we
7 need to see how things are connected to each other within an entity (Baskerville &
8 Myers 2014). Rather than relying on implicit models or assumptions of how
9 functional elements of a given phenomenon are connected to each other as well as
10 how things will turn out from an intervention (as discussed in Chapter 3), Peters
11 (2014) argues that as researchers we must strive to improve the quality of our
12 perception of the phenomena as a whole including its parts, and especially how its
13 parts interact within and between each other. In order to achieve this I have used
14 ethnography, a methodology that is now becoming quintessential in engineering
15 design, social innovation, information systems design and organizational change
16 with a hope that these sciences will be incorporated into public health system
17 thinking in the future.

18

19 **4.1 THE STRANGER**

20 I was the new ‘stranger’ to Yolngu in the Gove Peninsula between July 2012 and
21 January 2013. Nhulunbuy, a small transient town with long-term non-Yolngu
22 residents, kept to small circles of friends, so those who recently arrived were
23 commonly grouped as ‘new strangers’ compared to those who were ‘permanent
24 strangers’. One can tell the new stranger by the way they engaged with Yolngu and
25 the way they succumbed to buying art in front of Woolworths or felt pressured to

1 lend someone money. The other strangers were superficially friendly people who
2 kept to themselves in a close network of colleagues, neighbours or community club
3 members.

4

5 The surf club in Nhulunbuy was where all the Balanda (European) congregated for
6 a drink and a burger, every Friday night. 'Goveites', as residents of Nhulunbuy,
7 socialised within their networks, discussed work and leisure activities without any
8 participation from the Yolngu community. It is possible that the membership fees
9 of the surf club endeavoured to produce that effect and rendered this non-
10 Indigenous community an exclusive setting.

11

12 The director of public health of the regional Aboriginal medical service, invited me
13 to show her my draft of the research proposal and offered to help me engage the
14 Miwatj Board (the regional Aboriginal Medical Service) in a discussion of my
15 research intentions and request a letter of support and provide recommendations
16 and guidance to my study. I accepted her offer, and we consulted on the proposal,
17 outlined the questions that would be of use to the public health program at Miwatj
18 Health and made a list of key contacts to consult. The director of public health was
19 also keen on experimenting with mobile technology and had applied for a grant to
20 trial its use with the men in the Strong Fathers Strong Families Program in Yirrkala.

21

22 She suggested that I applied for a position as the Regional Tobacco Coordinator,
23 which I declined to dedicate time and ethical practice to my research. According to
24 Hine (2015 p. 5), the 'ethnographer can best focus on understanding modes of life
25 through immersion in them, learning their values and practices from the inside, and

1 focusing on making active and strategic choices about what to study and how to
2 study it'. I saw employment with an Aboriginal Corporation as a challenge for my
3 immersion. Due to specific policies and practices, the employment structure would
4 have created a conflict of interest and raised complex ethical concerns that would
5 negatively impact on the study.

6

7 During my first field trip to Yirrkala, I worked closely with a public health
8 practitioner and socialised with Yolngu community activists; particularly John and
9 Jack. On the second field trip, before relocating permanently to Birritjimi, I spent
10 four weeks where I consulted stakeholders about my research, documented their
11 suggestions and concerns and offered them the opportunity to participate in the
12 critique of the research question during its draft stages (Appendix 2).

13

14 I made appointments over the phone and struggled with the fear of rejection as I
15 had been repeatedly told that non-Indigenous researchers were not welcome in the
16 region. Some organisations were friendly and found at least thirty minutes of their
17 time to meet with me, while others never returned my calls or replied to my emails.
18 The period of being a stranger lasted only briefly as I implemented a strategy to
19 learn and understand as many critical historical accounts (Warner 1958; Thomson
20 & Petersen 1983; Marika & Isaacs 1995) of prominent leaders of the Yolngu world,
21 both past and present. I learnt from past anthropologists that to understand the
22 culture and the law, is to show respect to the Yolngu people (Reid 1983). Showing
23 respect to my Yolngu acquaintances was not an easy task even though I was in awe
24 of their culture, and their language, which sounded almost like Tamil, sprinkled
25 with Malay lexicon, even though I found the languages and customs very

1 complicated. Here, there is no Lonely Planet book for tourists or adventurers. I tried
2 to connect to the Yolngu community through volunteering with Djarrak Football
3 Club, through my friendship with Bakamumu Marika, the leader of the Rirratjingu
4 clan and my Yolngu friend and mentor, Waninya Marika.

5

6 **4.2 OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF REJECTION**

7 Having grown up as one of an ethnic minority in Malaysia, I was trained to ‘know
8 my place’ in society. As a product of a post-colonial society steeped in institutional
9 racism (Wilford 2007), I could not help but feel inadequate and undeserving in
10 asking the government and non-governmental organisations for a meeting and
11 especially a letter of support for my research. This process made me nervous and
12 disempowered. I made appointments and attended meetings and wrote letters of
13 requests for a supporting letter, attached with an executive summary and with the
14 correct methodology (Agar 2004; Yunupingu & Muller 2009; DeWalt & DeWalt
15 2010; Coburn et al. 2013), explicitly stating how the research was culturally
16 appropriate and culturally sensitive. I sought support from the Centre for Disease
17 Control; the former workplace where I had initially begun my study of social media
18 and mobile phones for health promotion. The director showed little interest in my
19 research proposal and remarked that by the time my study was completed, Facebook
20 might not exist as things were changing so rapidly. The challenges that came from
21 initiating this study sometimes seemed insurmountable.

22

23 The more I tried to be present in the community and take note of my observations,
24 the more my ‘ideas and notions were challenged and resisted by the actions and
25 words of those (non-Yolngu) within the setting’ as discussed by DeWalt and

1 DeWalt (2010 p. 15). The expectation of my Yolngu observers was for me to engage
2 in pure participation, described by Jorgensen (1989) in DeWalt and DeWalt (2010)
3 as ‘going native’ and ‘becoming the phenomena’, a standard position and
4 expectation held by many Indigenous people from interstate and non-Indigenous
5 sympathisers of Yolngu.

6

7 The Traditional Owner of Yirrkala, Mr Bakamumu Marika returned my request for
8 permission to conduct my research with a different perspective; a positive and
9 supportive outlook with the hope that his people might benefit from our
10 collaboration. In an email sent from his iPhone, he wrote; ‘Dear Kishan, it is my
11 honour and privilege, to allow you to do research in my community and to help my
12 people, please feel free to email me or contact me on my phone’. Bakamumu’s letter
13 and support during the subsequent years in the Gove Peninsula were instrumental
14 in co-creating meaning in my ethnography.

15

16 **4.3 BECOMING PHENOMENA**

17 My family and I drove into Birritjimi from Nhulunbuy Airport at ten in the morning
18 with a carload of personal belongings, mostly clothes and books, when doors to the
19 twenty-five decommissioned Rio Tinto dwellings that constituted the community,
20 were still shut and everyone was half asleep. These houses were considered to be
21 in one of the most vulnerable areas to cyclone strength winds, which we,
22 fortunately, escaped in 2015. Only the dogs came out to see the new arrivals. There
23 were only four or five dogs and to my relief, they were not as many as the camp
24 dogs I had first encountered in Alice Springs three years earlier.

25

1 The name Birritjimi was used interchangeably with Wallaby Beach by Yolngu and
2 non-Indigenous residents. It had been Wallaby Beach until after the houses were
3 handed back to Rirratjingu traditional owners. Birritjimi was twenty kilometres
4 away from Yirrkala, the Rirratjingu clan's administrative capital. The 'Sugar Bag
5 Man created Birritjimi', and it was here that the mining company set up two rows
6 of houses for their managers with a bicycle trail leading to the refinery to the West
7 and Nhulunbuy to the East of the Gove Peninsula. The road to Yirrkala from
8 Birritjimi was sealed, comfortable and scenic. The big trucks took the dirt road, and
9 carried the bauxite, as did the conveyor belts carrying more to the refinery.

10

11 Over the months I observed, as I became, the observed. My Yolngu neighbours and
12 colleagues sophisticatedly regulated my participation and even observations. They
13 answered some questions willingly, ignored others comfortably, provided 'trans-
14 relevant' answers to a few queries enthusiastically and brushed away my curiosity
15 during certain occasions. I showed my anger and frustration in the open just as my
16 neighbours did, and learnt to decline in the same manner of sophistication bordering
17 on dishonesty with ample courtesy and tact. My Yolngu friends and neighbours
18 most likely experienced a similar difficulty regarding my behaviour. Customary as
19 it was in my culture to entertain guests at a table over a meal; I had embarrassed the
20 male guests by cooking in the kitchen and served them food. To my benefit, it was
21 my 'Ngapipi' (uncle) from Elcho Island who was bold and confident enough in our
22 relationship to question my position in the household as the cook.

23

24 Luckily, even though I did not attend Hindu Temples, I drew on the function of the
25 priest who also acted as a cook to raise my status in the eyes of my Ngapipi (uncle)

1 and Malu (father). I stressed that another man could only do the preparation and
2 serving of food for essential men. My male guests were happy with this explanation.
3 I tactfully assured my male friends, that I was not disempowered by my Balanda
4 (European) galay (wife). During one dinner with my wife's colleagues from
5 Galiwin'ku, a senior Galpu man with relatives in Birritjimi was obliged to answer
6 his mobile phone every three minutes on average with polite replies of 'bayngu
7 rrupiah' (no money). He answered the phone politely, with no signs of frustration.
8 These experiences taught me how to decline and yet feel comfortable and to
9 question Europeans norms that I have grown accustomed. Travel out from the
10 community for work always attracted lucrative per diems was known as T.A (travel
11 allowance) and relatives had become aware of this extra cash flow and would call
12 to ask for financial assistance. That was why my guest was compelled to answer his
13 phone not to send the wrong message that he was hiding his money from them, a
14 hypothesis which he generously confirmed over dessert.

15

16 **4.3.1 Engagement - building connections and expanding networks**

17 In the colder days when the sun began to set, I practised standing between Gerry's
18 house and ours, cautious of two community dogs, shirtless and barefoot. I forced
19 time to slow down and my vision to re-sensitise to this new environment, where I
20 observed a different pace and beat in the community. I noticed the number of people
21 who had woken up as I started to wind down for the day. The young parents in their
22 early teens and twenties walked past our house with their children, and often visited
23 the Tongan shop stocked with Coca-Cola, flour and sugar. I memorised words and
24 sentences from my friends teaching me Gumatj and used Gupapuyngu from a
25 textbook gifted by a professor to me before the relocation to Birritjimi. A mix of

1 both these languages became my tools for making friends, demystifying my
2 presence and introducing my ethnographic research in the community. Beginning
3 with a greeting and asking the passers-by the name of their clan, and what can be
4 hunted and whether there were mud crabs available, had a positive effect on
5 growing my connections and networks.

6

7 I became inquisitive when I discarded my ideas of professionalism and university
8 qualifications. To every person I met or was introduced to, I asked for their Yolngu
9 name soon after they mentioned their English 'yaku' (name). I typed their names,
10 where we met, their clan name and skin name directly into the Notes application of
11 my iPhone 4. I was guided by the need for researchers to show profound respect by
12 Reid (1983) and that shaped my method of engagement to acquire and incorporate
13 a childlike fascination for everything from the history of tobacco, to hand signals
14 and stories of Macassan heritage, which helped pave the way to learning from
15 Yolngu. I shared with my friends a few intimate and significant personal stories of
16 conflict in my own family in Malaysia, broken relationships, sibling rivalry,
17 jealousy and anger. More interestingly, we discussed the power imbalance between
18 black and white people, our shared experiences of inferiority and submission to a
19 post-colonial reality. To avoid standing out in Birritjimi and making others feel
20 inconvenienced by our benign 'invasion', we consciously left the yard in front and
21 around the back of our house untouched, mirroring the same conditions of the yards
22 of our neighbours. Imitating the way our neighbours 'cared' for their land and
23 property, we focused on the stunning views, the serenity, peace and relationship
24 which life in Birritjimi provided. But after six weeks, a cyclone 'clean up'
25 motivated us into a spring clean.

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We could no longer ignore the piles of dried leaves in the backyard and the possibility of snakes hiding between the leaves endangering the children who played there all the time and cultivated a desire to see a patch of green lawn again. When my wife returned from a conference with her Yolngu colleagues in Canberra, she brought a hose and a sprinkler with her because we noticed our immediate neighbour on the left had begun watering her lawn. She had also placed on erected logs about one metre high from the ground, giant oyster shells as decoration, seven of them in total, which drew a covert border between her property and her neighbours. She also had a few potted plants of which none had flowered. After setting up our sprinkler in the front yard, we started clearing up the backyard. This effort immediately resulted in the erection of a black tarp, an iron curtain between our house and the neighbour on the left with the giant oyster shells on display.



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Figure 4.1: The pile of leaves against the tarp fence

1 We could not understand why the tarp had gone up when we were only cleaning up
2 the leaves. Were we colonising their space or invading their privacy? I endeavoured
3 to be aware of our presence and the potential effect this may have on the neighbours
4 and as a result looked for opportunities to soften our dominating presence.
5 Nevertheless, our relationship gradually grew, and we had other opportunities to
6 build trust and friendship. The hospitality of my neighbours extended as far as their
7 front door, the porch and the sandy beach, the sunset and friendships our children
8 made with their grandchildren. We never entered a home, and neither were we ever
9 invited, but gladly accepted guests and playdates with the children in our home. The
10 windows in our house encouraged our movements to be followed and reduced
11 suspicion (Reid 1983). My neighbours' windows, however, were always covered
12 on the inside with curtains, newspaper and left-over duct tape from a previous
13 cyclone threat. Many windows had been replaced with wooden boards making the
14 already oven-like dwelling hotter in the wet season. The kids roamed around the
15 community as they would in a playground, barefoot, shirtless, and swam at the
16 beach claiming that it was shallow enough to spot a crocodile to escape in time.

17

18 The legs of the children had a few wounds. Some healed well, and others left scars.
19 One ten-year-old fell on an open fire, as had his ancestors during the Mission days,
20 as Ella Shepherdson (1981) had recorded in her diary, where she treated adults and
21 children who rolled into the open fire in their sleep. Somehow, resiliently, open
22 wounds healed with little scarring, but another quiet and life-threatening illness²³
23 took its place, scarring the heart, kidney and skin, resulting in a lifelong dependency

²³ Rheumatic Heart Disease

1 on the clinic, and even surgery for rheumatic heart disease and kidney failure
2 (Currie & Carapetis 2000).



3

4 **Figure 4.2: Children playing in the backyard of my house**

5

6 My son fell on his back on the road in front of our house. It was only a superficial
7 wound, so familiar in Birritjimi that the other kids, usually very careful of the
8 welfare of the younger ones, urged the games to continue without stopping to alert
9 us at home. A week later, he was tested positive for Streptococcus A. My son was
10 fortunate that his father was capable of requesting a specific test because of
11 pediatric medicine training, but this was not at all an everyday skills set in the
12 Yolngu community. It taught me how much risk the children were at contracting
13 Streptococcus A. This was puzzling because I recalled how much attention was
14 given to a more complex aetiology of being infected with, for example, scabies as
15 discussed in Currie and Carapetis (2000).

16

17 The immersion in Yolngu history became a newfound passion and gateway for
18 more profound and more meaningful engagement. I made it a point to identify my
19 Yolngu friends' clan, moiety and ancestors based on their surname, after having

1 learnt the names of all the elders and their respective clans through the study of
2 Warner (1958), Thomson and Petersen (1983), Marika and Isaacs (1995), Reid
3 (1983) and the collection of interviews from Ian Dunlop's Yirrkala Film Project.
4 Ian Dunlop's ethnographic films helped me understand the context and history with
5 its rich visual frames filled with background noise, movements, discussions, and
6 body language.

7

8 Although many people were friendly and accepted my presence, still many more
9 were suspicious and avoided my acquaintance. They chose to have nothing to do
10 with me. Several senior men and women refused to exchange more than a glance
11 with me even though we shared mutual friends but when out of the Yolngu public
12 gaze (usually at the Captain Cook Shopping Centre), they conversed freely with me
13 or made eye contact. The politics between and within Yolngu families were
14 elaborate and sophisticated. In this context alliances and loyalties could sometimes
15 be questioned without relevant pretext. With this conclusion, I managed to free
16 myself from the feeling that I had spoilt a relationship and moved on and focused
17 on those who were comfortable with me. It was not possible to comprehend
18 everything. It was around this time that my reflections and questioning led to an
19 awareness of clan affiliations (Rowse 2012) or 'Ringgitj'.

20

21 **4.4 CULTURAL IMMERSION**

22 My attempted immersion in the community was punctuated by phases of shock,
23 anger and awe (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010) as I realised that participation in the life
24 of my informants became a reflection of the words of Geertz in DeWalt and DeWalt
25 (2010, p. 29); 'You don't exactly penetrate another culture, as the masculinist image

1 would have it. You put yourself in its way, and its bodies forth and enmesh you'.
2 The enmeshing of my 'self' by my Yolngu informants began the deconstruction of
3 a capitalist modus operandi that challenged everything I had learnt, particularly my
4 desensitised view of the post-colonial repression of Indigenous people including
5 my colonial heritage (Rowse 2012).

6

7 After six months, the emotional involvement from the cultural immersion began to
8 take shape. An understanding of who to 'know' and how much participation was
9 necessary became clear from the kinship networks and affiliations between the
10 Marika family, volunteering with Djarrak Football Club in Yirrkala and the nights
11 out in town. I became physically ill from the stress engendered by the steep learning
12 curve. As someone who had seen suffering and marginalisation but had become
13 desensitised, the plight of the Yolngu in Birritjimi and Yirrkala was opening up old
14 wounds and this disturbed me both emotionally and mentally. The injustice heaped
15 upon women, children and some men in the community were challenging to
16 understand. The children played amongst rusted and discarded cars, eating very
17 little, while their mothers resorted to buying tinned food, flour and Ngarali
18 (cigarettes) that appeased hunger temporarily and made the best of their
19 predicament.

20

21 'Who adopt you?' was what I assumed to be the Yolngu approach to determining
22 what kin relationship held us together and how we would refer to each other;
23 whether as 'wawa' (brother) or 'ngapipi' (uncle) and other familial designations.
24 At one point I felt that my adopted brother had exclusive rights to my resources
25 where other Yolngu especially from other clans, as a result, were not encouraged to

1 share in that connection. Many would walk away without explanation or conclusion
2 after hearing that I was adopted into the Rirratjingu clan. Brice, a Dhalwangu man,
3 my beloved friend from Birritjimi was beyond ‘adoption’ and superficial kinship
4 ties and was always affectionate to my family and me.

5

6 Yolngu volunteered sporadically to become part of my life in Birritjimi, and
7 sometimes their involvement ceased or refrained temporarily. I assumed this had to
8 do with the economic, social and political dramas that ruled the lives of Yolngu,
9 not knowing which affiliations will see them through their current or future
10 hardship. My lack of a traditional office space made time for me to walk around in
11 the town square where I was accepted to ‘hang out’ with Djarrak boys, or danced
12 amongst them at the Arnhem Club and posted Facebook photos of my grandparents,
13 great-grandparents and family in Malaysia until I became predictable and familiar
14 to Yolngu. I was often overwhelmed with information, much of which was lost by
15 the time I made it to a quiet corner to type what I could remember into my iPhone.
16 Pen and paper, although useful tool, would have disabled my identity as a learner
17 and projected the image of a potentially malignant researcher stealing information
18 from Yolngu only to misrepresent it later.

19

20

21 **4.5 EXPLAINING MY RESEARCH, JUSTIFYING MY INTRUSION**

22 I practised explaining my research with Yolngu opportunistically. I tried different
23 syntaxes and sentence structures, using words that did not merely convey my
24 intentions but created a well-balanced overview of my study. It was customary for
25 most men to be engaged in work with Rio Tinto Alcan, government departments,

1 Miwatj Health or with one of the many businesses and it confused Yolngu when I
2 said I was a university student. My replies to Yolngu's inquiry about my study
3 evolved and became more complicated as I refined my relationships in the
4 community, which in turn affected the formulation of my research questions. These
5 were some examples of my responses when asked about my research activities:

- 6 • I'm here to learn Yolngu Matha and Yolngu culture to study in university.
- 7 • I'm now learning about Yolngu history, about Mawalan, Wandjuk,
8 Milirrpum and Roy Marika, leaders from Yirrkala.
- 9 • I'm here to learn how Yolngu used the new technology brought by
10 Macassans to Arnhem Land.
- 11 • I'm here to learn about how Yolngu use new technology like mobile phones,
12 Facebook and YouTube in Arnhem Land.

13

14 I learnt to diversify my cultural advisors, informants and networks as widely as
15 possible. Limiting my study to a few select people would not allow for a well-
16 rounded understanding of the social life of the community and its actors, especially
17 the personalised tools they used so discreetly, i.e. mobile phones and social media
18 (Blakeman 2015). Eventually, suspicion from both the Indigenous and non-
19 Indigenous residents in the Peninsula was resolved through repeated interactions
20 and the sight of my children and wife. I established my presence at the town shops,
21 on the oval three times a week and during late night conversations at the Walkabout
22 Hotel and the Arnhem Club. My Yolngu friends began to formulate their definition
23 of my doctoral study. To them, I was interested in foreign objects that did not belong
24 to Yolngu. I was not interested in 'manikay' (traditional songs) or 'bapurru'

1 (traditional ceremony), and instead, my questions and interests were about trivial
2 yet discreet (Blakeman 2015) objects like Facebook and mobile phones.

3

4 My conversations with Yolngu opened with an acknowledgement of the great
5 leaders of the past like Mawalan, Wandjuk, Wonggu, Munggurrawuy, Daymbalipu
6 and Narritjin. Yolngu always welcomed this topic without suspicion, and even the
7 quiet ones were able to come out and speak with great fondness of their forefathers.
8 The ethnographic films from Ian Dunlop were also shot at the same Walkabout
9 Hotel, where the young people, still unemployed were spending their welfare
10 payments and time “de-Missionizing” their past and becoming globalised, more
11 autonomous and merely doing what they liked doing (Burbank 2006). It became
12 apparent to me that such a setting was more conducive to talking to men, some who
13 were senior elders while other were youth and emerging leaders. Together, we
14 worked diligently to theorise on the adoption of new technology speaking
15 comparatively of the processes that took place during the Macassan era and
16 generating ideas on how best for me to operate as an ethnographer.

17

18 This ethnography was mainly influenced by Wandjuk’s use of the typewriter
19 (Marika & Isaacs 1983) and by Mawalan’s legacy. The latter had taught his oldest
20 daughters to create works of art for economic sustainability. The adoption and use
21 of wireless radio by leaders of the Djapu clan during the homelands movements of
22 the seventies was also attractive to the study. By connecting these stories of their
23 leaders using new technology and Mawalan’s social innovation, I was able to hear
24 from my informants and interviewees and took note of their analysis of the current
25 use of mobile technology and social media amongst Yolngu.

1

2 **4.6 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING - A NON-REDUCTIONIST APPROACH**

3 The unreasonable demands of any research work with human beings and the ethics
4 committee required a reductionist approach to the standard age and gender
5 categories. At draft stages of my proposal, I thought of young people like teenagers
6 and young adults. Teenagers were boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 19,
7 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), when young adults were
8 people between the ages of 18 and 34²⁴. This slight overlap but the stark difference
9 between teenagers and young adults was evident. In my research proposal, I chose
10 to look at the social life of the mobile phone and social media amongst teenagers
11 and young adults, with the overlap mentioned earlier, as including 18 to 34 year-
12 olds.

13

14 According to the categorisation of age, in the Yolngu system, there were no words
15 for teenagers or young adults. Yolngu have not appropriated English words for
16 teenagers in the same way they have taken 'mutikar' for the motorcar. For example,
17 a male Yolngu was raised from 'you' (baby) to 'djamarrkuli' (child) and then
18 became 'dhirramu' (man). It was obvious to me after receiving ethical approval and
19 living in Birritjimi that the 'dhirramu' cohort I was following ranged from 12-14
20 years to a man in his early 40s, but not a senior elder, traditional owner or
21 'bungguwa' (leader).

22

²⁴ <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features40April+2013>

1 Adding to this layer of complexity was the kinship designations that intertwined
2 different roles and relative seniority amongst Yolngu men and women (Williams
3 1986). An uncle, grandfather, or nephew was simultaneously a senior relative to an
4 older man even though still a teenager. People lived their lives relative to each other
5 (Feinberg & Ottenheimer 2001), not merely based on ‘age’ differences, but
6 according to Yolngu system of Gurrutu – kinship (Williams 1986). The ‘mother-
7 child’ relationship or ‘Yothu Yindi’ (Williams 1986) is a central organising and
8 negotiating structure, according to Christie & Perret (1996) in Muller (2012). A
9 lateral supporting structure to this form of central structure (Christie and Perret
10 1996 in Muller 2014), were defined by women. Williams (1986) refers to the ‘mari
11 gutharra’ (grandmother-grandchild) relationship which together with ‘yothu yindi’
12 relationships created ‘a set of interlocking rights and duties and provided the
13 structure for a comprehensive set of checks and balances in the Yolngu’ world
14 (Williams 1986 p. 52).

15

16 Guided by Williams (1986), my sampling strategy became geared towards
17 interviewing a sufficient number of informants with a ‘yothu yindi’ and ‘mari
18 gutharra’ connection. Since many of my engagements with Yolngu men were
19 temporally sporadic, informal and during the late hours of the night, my ability to
20 engage them was due to the absence of the colonial method of pen, paper, consent
21 forms and tape recorder. A traditional anthropological approach would have
22 reduced the interaction into an exchange of possible guesses of right answers to
23 what would have been perceived as European inquiry.

24

1 I had ample opportunity to discuss and cross check all my learnings between men
2 from different clans with a yothu yindi and mari gutharra relationship to me and
3 therefore allocated my in-depth interviews with people who were harder to talk to
4 but were available during business hours in an office or formal setting, particularly
5 women. Here, the participant information sheets and consent forms were used with
6 interviewees who complimented the open masculine discourse with Indigenous
7 feminist perspectives. Countering the fears of Marika, Ngurruwuthun & White
8 (2009), my position as a non-Indigenous researcher was reversed in that sometimes
9 I became the 'object' of research under the subjective gaze of the Indigenous people
10 and therefore claimed no expertise in the outcomes of this ethnography. It is
11 obvious to me that as I became objectified under the subjective Indigenous gaze,
12 the writing of what I saw and how I participated, the answers and analysis that I
13 recorded was based on the 'objectivity' conferred upon me by my Indigenous
14 informants. In brief, I go so far as to claim that this ethnography was a joint effort
15 of participants, observers, the observed, the non-participants and the non-observed.
16
17 I interviewed a total of twelve people through in-depth interviews that lasted
18 between 90 and 120 minutes. Community members who expressed their wish to
19 participate in this study voluntarily were given the Participant Information Sheet
20 (Appendix 5) and Consent Form (Appendix 6) for their consideration. When the
21 potential interview participant had had enough time to peruse and think about their
22 commitment as well as discuss within their families, and a decision was made, they
23 would contact me via mobile phone or Facebook and arrange for me to collect the
24 signed documents.

25

1 The initial interviews were formal and required a lot of time to explain my research
2 purpose, privacy and confidentiality and the use of consent forms, and that a
3 participant can withdraw from the research at any time. It took several interactions
4 and meetings, which also included coincidental meet-ups with common
5 acquaintances at the shops that enabled them to agree to an interview.

6

7 The interviews were organised after mapping out services and programs in which
8 interactions with young people or teenagers took place. Follow-up informal
9 interviews were held opportunistically for comments and insights as events and
10 observations unfolded between 2013 and 2015. The comments and feedback
11 between interviews and informal follow-ups based on current events provided
12 complexity and depth to the ethnography. Between five and ten potential interview
13 participants rejected my request to be interviewed but were happy to discuss the
14 subject over informal interviews that took place opportunistically over a period of
15 two years. They participated by verbally sharing their screenshots of conversation
16 and comments made in the online space. The quotes that have made it into the thesis
17 with the expressed permission of the interview participants have been paraphrased
18 to avoid identification and the breaking of confidentiality. We conducted interviews
19 in the town library, at the Walkabout café, in a private room at Miwatj Health
20 Aboriginal Corporation Office, over the phone and at the Yirrkala primary school.

21

22 **4.6.1 Limitations of Ethnography**

23

24 The two fundamental characteristics of this research method, firstly make it quite
25 conducive to partnership and the empowerment of research with Aboriginal and

1 Torres Strait Islander people as it requires the researcher to immerse in the context
2 entirely. Examples of such immersion, the study of history, culture and the language
3 of the Yolngu were provided in this chapter and alluded to from time to time in the
4 body of this thesis. A cross-cultural perspective was sometimes referred to enable
5 a distinct perspective to the white non Indigenous research having never
6 experienced the other end of colonisation (Hammersly 2018; Orr 2016; Pink 2015)

7

8 The reliability of this study, however, is a question that will trouble the reader as it
9 is measured by the ability of another researcher to replicate this study. Because I
10 was the first and to date, the only non-Indigenous researcher from a developing
11 country my approach and method had minor variations that make reproduction
12 difficult. Unlike other research where the external variables are well controlled,
13 ethnographic research does not have this facility but can be better guided by the
14 community and the events that occur and the effects these events have on the
15 narrative, rather than a sterile living lab that provides little context and complexity
16 of the phenomena (Hammersly 2018; Orr 2016; Pink 2015).

17

18 Table 4.1 in the following pages is a summary of my in-depth interview
19 participants.

20

Table 4.1: Table of In-depth Interview Participants

No.	Reference	Gender	Role	Interesting features
1	3918	Female	Nurse	Part-time app developer. Trained in Yolngu cultural protocol in health service provision.
2	3917	Female	Community worker, manager	Provided the first Internet service and computer training program for Yolngu teenagers, and financial counselling for young adults and elders.
3	3916 James	Male	Men’s program manager, youth worker, Drug and alcohol workshop organiser	Accompanied the growth and development of several young people from childhood to young adulthood in Yirrkala. Lives in Yirrkala.
4	3915	Male	Agriculturalist	Worked in partnership with strong women in Yirrkala, and mentors their grandsons. Lives in Yirrkala.
5	3914	Female	Financial counsellor and trainer for Internet and phone banking in North East Arnhem Land.	Studied Facebook as an honours project for her undergraduate degree. Worked closely with Yolngu men and women to use Facebook Pages to source free resources and air charters.
6	3913 Sean	Female	Senior management in Aboriginal Corporation. Lived in and worked in remote Aboriginal communities.	iPad and internet project developer for young men in Yirrkala.

No.	Reference	Gender	Role	Interesting features
7	3912	Male	Youth sport and recreation worker moved from a remote community to Nhulunbuy.	The organiser of a remote community football league.
8	3911 Cindy	Female	Senior woman. Entrepreneur.	Worked closely with Yothu Yindi and other youth projects.
9	3910 Janet	Female	Daughter of late Yolngu leader. Manager of the well-being program. Mother of teenagers.	Insight into the lives of teenagers in the community pre- and post-mobile phone and social media.
10	3909 Sam	Female	Senior female elder. Manager. Mother of teenagers.	In-depth analysis of relationships and the dynamics of jealousy between romantic partners.
11	3908 Joe	Female	Cultural advisor, interpreter, chairman of the Aboriginal board.	A young adult with experience of the first introduction of the mobile phone in the community. Uses Facebook to engage the European and Yolngu community.
12	3907	Male	Senior elder is orbiting between two remote communities including Yirrkala. Called me up to inform about Galka. Doesn't believe in Galka. Health worker.	Mobile phone Facebook use. 'Hangs out' with the young adults.

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CHAPTER 5 - YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR EXPLORATION OF TECHNOLOGY

The Buku Larrnggay Mulka Arts Centre provided four Apple iMacs available for the use of the community. A small room with a long table for the computers was purpose-built against a glass window looking into a theatre. It was an after-school ‘technology playground’ for teenagers and children. Instead of footballs and boots, young people brought a pair of headphones and cables to connect smartphones, Samsung flip phones and MP3 players to the computers when their music playlist needed an update or to watch videos on YouTube. The facility was air-conditioned, and some young people chose to escape their boredom into the cold comfort of the Arts Centre for a few hours, instead of sitting at home under old fans that moved hot air around. The Mulka Centre was established to protect the cultural knowledge and cultural capital of the Yolngu of Northeast Arnhem Land under the management of Traditional Owners and community members. The centre provided a training ground for future Indigenous leaders, employment opportunities for youth and a production house for Indigenous inspired art and media.

According to Taylor (2012), a digital divide has long existed for residents in the remote Northern Territory, but since the roll-out of the Internet-enabled ‘Next G’ mobile network from 2006, its affordability had allowed organisations to share their Internet access with the broader community, as seen in Yirrkala. Although the Indigenous residents in the Northern Territory made up a third of a 230,000 (Taylor 2012) and were more disadvantaged especially from a socio-economic standpoint

1 when compared to other Australians (Taylor 2012), their recent access to the
2 Internet had become ubiquitous (Taylor 2012; Brusse et al. 2014; Carlson et al.
3 2015).

4

5 The theatre in the media room was connected to one of the iMacs. A variety of
6 favourite Yothu Yindi music videos and Yolngu Boy (a film about young men and
7 petrol sniffing in Yirrkala) were often screened. The football grand-final between
8 Djarrak, Gopu or Nguykal were often played for kids who watched their brothers
9 and uncles perform acrobatic stunts on the oval. Amateur dance competitions were
10 also screened in the theatre with young people who choreographed and performed
11 their version of contemporary Indigenous youth culture. Benches were built into
12 the theatre for seating and under the large screen on stage was a stage enough for a
13 small four-piece band. Kinship, men, history from Ian Dunlop's documentaries and
14 sporting victories of the past were celebrated through the aid of YouTube videos
15 played in the theatre for a growing young generation in the process of identity
16 formation. The Mulka Project, responsible for recording the events at the Garma
17 Festival and family funerals, made and archived the videos for everyone in the
18 community, according to Gurrutu (kinship).

19

20 The Mulka Project had many instruments; cameras, iMacs and computer servers of
21 professional standard and quality. They also acquired a drone amongst their well-
22 equipped inventory. The equipment was purchased from grants, and some were
23 gifted as a symbol of partnership and solidarity. Behind the director's desk was a
24 photograph of Wonggu Mununggur. Wonggu was a Djapu clan leader, who had
25 twenty-five wives and was a symbol of power and revered by young and old, a story

1 I learnt from reading Thomson & Petersen (1983). He took what was not ‘his’
2 through the aid of his spear and gained prestige and power for his clan. The
3 Indigenous director, in his forties, spoke English intertwined with ‘Dhangu’ (a
4 spoken language in Yirrkala), chewed Nicorette, and was uninterested when he met
5 a researcher or ‘do-gooder’ as he called me.

6

7 I imposed myself on him as a Tamil with a Malay education instead of a doctoral
8 student from Menzies School of Health Research. When I thought I had his
9 attention, I opened up to him about my research intentions and asked for his opinion.
10 He walked into the media room, turned on a computer, and started a search through
11 the archives. When he finally found it, he suggested that he had the answer to all
12 my future inquiries. He played a YouTube video clip of an anti-tobacco social
13 marketing music video with three teenage girls and young men. The production of
14 the video clip was based on a familiar template generally used in remote Indigenous
15 communities. Hip-hop music in Yolngu Matha was performed by a group of six
16 teenage boys and girls with this call for action: “Yaka, Yaka, Yaka, bunjjurr
17 ngarali” (Don’t, don’t, don’t smoke tobacco).

18

19 I watched the video clip carefully, trying to pick out what he wanted me to
20 understand, and tried hard not to be found out that, compared to him I had a minimal
21 idea of how to read the hidden behaviours of this well-choreographed video clip in
22 a cultural context more complicated than I was accustomed to. He carefully pointed
23 out to me certain faint elements in the body language, which he interpreted as being
24 contradictory to the message in the song. Having raised his children in Yirrkala, he
25 interpreted the attitude of the performers based on his experience of almost twenty-

1 five years of community life. He explained how these young people disregarded the
2 message they had sung and how the process of raising awareness on the harms of
3 smoking, was instead a futile activity and waste of precious resources enriching
4 everyone except people in Yirrkala. His advice to me and everyone else coming to
5 Yirrkala as do-gooders were this; to leave the young people alone, focus on
6 providing jobs and stop telling them what to do. He was not angry in his approach
7 to the development of healthy behaviours, but he suggested leaving ‘teenagers’
8 alone without health promotion messages. I did not initially realise that his words
9 would prompt me to think about public health and health promotion differently, as
10 discussed in **Chapter 3**. In the meantime, the four iMacs sat elegantly and waited
11 patiently for me to explore the digital footprints left by the majority of young users.

12

13 I used open and publicly accessible records available on the browser history in the
14 computers on each computer to get an idea of the iMac users’ recent web activity.
15 These applications were created as a quick and easy way for users to navigate to
16 frequently used websites. They do not reveal any personal information. There were
17 four-to-five weeks of ‘browser history’ on each of the computers in the Arts Centre.
18 I mustered the courage to ask the director for permission to view the browser history
19 on the iMacs. He had already returned to his desk, quite happy with himself after
20 proving to me that music videos benefited no Yolngu teenager. As Hine (2015 p. 8)
21 argued, ‘no single solution to doing ethnography for the Internet will be found,
22 because what the Internet is can vary so dramatically’, made me think about
23 diversifying my methods of investigation and exposure to the social life of mobile
24 phones and Internet activity on social media websites for the formulation of my
25 research question.

1
2 My request, formulated with a tone of apology and hope, instead of curiosity and
3 excitement seemed to make him consider, and we continued our discussion. He
4 changed his trajectory from his desk and the phones that continued to ring, as the
5 dry tourist season was approaching, to a mounted iPad at the entrance of the
6 exhibition hall. The iPad was mounted and locked with a particular case that
7 provided users with access to the Arts Centre's digital information portal. The lock
8 on the iPad made it impossible to return to the 'home' screen, with all its other
9 applications, and therefore access to the Internet. These iPad fixtures in galleries
10 and exhibitions were an interactive tool designed for the curious tourist and visitor,
11 enabling them to watch and listen instead of reading pamphlets and brochures.
12 Without hesitation, I whipped out my iPhone, interrupted his introduction and with
13 his permission, started to film what he called a groovy story of how young people
14 interacted with an iPad purpose-built as an information portal to the artefacts and
15 artwork on display. The young adopters he said, 'Within twelve hours of setting up
16 the system, had hacked it, and completely subverted it [and] made the system suit
17 their desires, and their desires were to see images of themselves'.

18
19 'They subverted the plan', he said with a proud conviction. 'These young people
20 have not been trained in this, they do not have access to a home computer, they do
21 not have a photo album, they do not generally have a mirror in their house,' he
22 continued trying to paint a pictorial context of my benefit. As prolific users of
23 mobile technology, young people in Yirrkala were subverting the plan to suit their
24 exploration of a world within and outside Yirrkala. According to the director, it was
25 a futile attempt to force a plan or agenda onto young people in Yirrkala and believed

1 that they cannot be directed, persuaded or coerced with seemingly superficial
2 benefits. He said, 'Just give them access to the technology' implying that
3 technology would either entertain or provide jobs and improve standards of living
4 in Yirrkala.

5

6 The questions I considered were:

- 7 • What empowered these young people to 'subvert the plan', appropriating
8 the technology which was meant for public use into a device for
9 entertainment?
- 10 • Were they having fun or creating?
- 11 • Why was this interpreted as a discourse on power instead of a set of low
12 expectations of young people?

13

14 These were young people who also used YouTube as an archive for videos made
15 from Samsung flip phones to Android or Apple smartphones and shared with family
16 members across the different communities in North East Arnhem Land. What other
17 plan have they subverted, in this instance? The browser history data showed that
18 the young people were not using the Yirrkala Arts Centre computers to watch social
19 marketing video clips or resources on numeracy and literacy (Appendix 4). Was
20 subverting the plan a conscious resistance to social and economic expectations that
21 the broader society had placed on remote Indigenous communities to assimilate?
22 Was this equal to the resistance to the Methodist Mission's goal to change Yolngu
23 into gardeners (Thomson & Petersen 1983), teaching Yolngu 'white man skills' in
24 order to make that transition from a traditional lifestyle into a European way of life,

1 only to strengthen the progress of white invaders in the Northern Territory
2 (Thomson & Petersen 1983)?

3

4 The mobile phone and social media may represent the 21st Century versions of tea,
5 sugar, flour and tobacco (Rowse 2002), I considered as I reflected on the words of
6 Thomson & Petersen (1983) that Yolngu were only attracted by ‘flashy and
7 superficial, the less important, the material things – tobacco, clothes, alcohol and
8 objects of material wealth’. Thomson & Petersen (1983) went further in warning
9 the authorities (Commonwealth Government) in the late 1930s that Yolngu will
10 sacrifice anything to gain possession of superficial material objects and will
11 eventually die in a ‘state of spiritual and cultural agnosticism, adrift in no man’s
12 land between the world of the white man and the black’. According to works of
13 scholars who have worked alongside Yolngu scholars, the concern for the Yolngu
14 appropriation of new technology (Thomson & Petersen 1983) was not consistent
15 with the appropriation of Macassan technology over 200 years, which contributed
16 to the creation rather than the destruction of cultural knowledge (McIntosh 2013).

17

18 **5.1 DJARRAK FOOTBALL CLUB YIRRKALA 2012**

19 Ronaldo came to 7 Wuyal Road to pick me up for the drive in his four-wheel drive
20 to Yirrkala. A Torres Strait Islander man in his forties with a muscular physique,
21 Ronaldo loved his turtle meat and apologised for coming late as he was scrubbing
22 his hands from the particular smell that didn’t excite the non-eater of turtle meat.
23 Dean was in the driver’s seat and blasted ACDC loudly from his CD players as
24 though he was sixteen, not sixty-one. Dean had spent most of his life in Indigenous

1 communities and was ‘married-up’ more than once to a black woman. He assisted
2 Ronaldo, and I, in turn, assisted Dean with the bi-weekly football training sessions.

3

4 On Thursdays, it was harder to attract players for training sessions when the
5 Arnhem Club and the Walkabout Tavern conducted another type of training for
6 men and their women. Men between the ages of fifteen and thirty participated in
7 football clubs that were affiliated through kinship structures and alliances. They
8 prepared themselves for the intense Saturday matches despite being exhausted from
9 late nights in town. The men stayed up often until closing time at three in the
10 morning where they socialised away from Yirrkala or Birritjimi or even from their
11 romantic partner.

12

13 Djarrak Football Club was synonymous with the Rirratjingu clan. The players were
14 the warriors who ‘protected’ the reputation of the clan and upheld the banner of
15 pride for their family members, on the oval. Playing for Djarrak was held in high
16 esteem; their players were considered as future Rirratjingu leaders. A player gained
17 the attention of senior men and the members of the board of directors from the
18 Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation on the oval and ceremonial practice. These
19 senior men were their fathers, uncles and grandfathers, who barely had time to spare
20 during their early years, where engagement was scarce due to funerals or conflict.
21 Many young men also became estranged with the senior men due to massive
22 engagement in Yolngu land rights and advocacy movements in the past, as well as
23 Aboriginal Corporation and board trustee responsibilities.

24

1 Dehydration from a hangover, hunger, exhaustion and interpersonal conflict with
2 their partners never stopped a player from a match, unless the police made an arrest.
3 The men showcased their leadership, strength, speed and acrobatic skills as a group
4 of teenage girls sat with their backs slightly turned away from the oval. They
5 somehow followed the game, albeit at a safe distance away, lest they are accused
6 of flirting with another woman's man. At the Yirrkala oval, my role involved
7 organising water bottles and balls for the players. After several weeks of silence, I
8 eventually received more interaction when I heard the words; 'gapu ga!' (water!),
9 which triggered me to run towards a player with a five-litre bottle of cold water.
10 Holding on to a pair of boots in overcrowded houses and playing an intensely
11 competitive game under lack of nutrition, I felt ashamed of my privilege.

12

13

14 **5.2 BLUETOOTH INTO RESEARCH**

15 According to Hine (2015 p. 19), "ethnography is distinctive in its use of embodied
16 experiences of the research as one of its primary means of discovery". Unlike other
17 research methods, the goal of this study is to "celebrate the involvement of the
18 researcher in the whole process of engaging with the field, gathering data and
19 interpreting results. "Yo, yo, Ma!" was the response I received from Jimmy the
20 captain and I understood as 'yes, yes, ok' when he gave me permission to make a
21 video from a collection of stills and live footage of the team. I had to fight the urge
22 of asking every player because Jimmy was the captain and doing so would have
23 undermined his authority. I wanted to engage as a researcher from a variety of roles
24 in order to diversify my perspectives. With an announcement to the team by the
25 coach, he iterated to the men that they have the option to refuse being photographed

1 or filmed. The captain replied ‘yes, yes, ok’, as a spokesperson on behalf of his kin
2 indirectly reaffirming his status as a son to the Traditional Owner of Yirrkala.

3

4 I edited a visual journal using iMovie on my MacBook Air after a week of taking
5 photos and videos. For almost four weeks my only interaction with the players was
6 triggered by their call for water, ‘gapu ga!’ but on this day something else
7 happened. I arrived at the same time as Lenny who had a brand new LG smartphone.
8 Other players with phones kept them hidden; making it a challenge to visually
9 ascertain what type and level of technology were being used. Lenny mentioned his
10 battery is very low as he used it earlier for Internet banking (Taylor 2012,) in order
11 to buy a present online (ACMA 2008 in Taylor 2012).

12

13 One player realised that his Bluetooth was malfunctioning on the phone that he
14 borrowed from his grandmother, while two others shared a phone with their partners
15 and were not sure of the password to activate the phone and could only answer
16 phone calls. These men just carried the mobile phones so that their partners could
17 call and check up on them. The mobile phone had been instrumental in assuring
18 lovers and partners of each other’s fidelity. The young men in this situation seemed
19 to be tied to a phone, which functioned as a ‘leash’ or a ‘chastity belt’ in the modern
20 Yolngu relationship. Here, the cultural conservatism of women worked against the
21 polygamous traditions men had assumed traditional rights to and the mobile phones
22 acted as an innovative surveillance tool and symbol of trustworthiness.

23

24

25 **5.3 A YOLNGU THEORETICAL VIEWPOINT**

1 Referring to the use of film, the late Wandjuk Marika, a Rirratjingu elder,
2 considered the usefulness of technology to immortalise first-hand sources in the
3 Yolngu oral tradition in knowledge transfer. From Marika's audio transcripts, we
4 know that he encouraged the use of film when he said; "before we never look the
5 old person who passed away. There is a new way to operate today" (Marika &
6 Isaacs 1995). Marika was excited at the opportunity to record and view the photos
7 and videos of people who have passed on. I think he was excited that his life's work
8 and that of his illustrious father Mawalan would be preserved and accessible to
9 Yolngu youth of the future.

10

11 The fight against the mining giant Nabalco and the government in Milirrpum versus
12 Nabalco and the Commonwealth Government in 1971 saw Wandjuk Marika the
13 nephew of Milirrpum and other Yolngu leaders use the 'flashy and superficial' in
14 the case of the typewriter to engage the dominant structures at play (Marika and
15 Isaacs 1995). Through an old typewriter, Wandjuk became the main link between
16 his father Mawalan, the senior elders of the clan and other White Australian who
17 were closely associated with the political strands of power in the land rights struggle
18 (Marika and Isaacs 1995). Together the typewriter and the bark painting (Brigg &
19 Maddison 2011), the old and new forms of communication became the Yirrkala
20 Bark Petition that amplified the Yolngu voice for recognition of their ownership
21 over land and sea (Da Costa 2006 p. 670; Yunupingu & Muller 2009). 'The typed
22 text of the petitions in both English and Gumatj languages were framed by paintings
23 of sacred clan designs communicating ancestral narratives of creation and the land
24 and sea estates of the Yolngu' (Brigg & Maddison 2011, p.1; Yunupingu & Muller
25 2009).

1
2 The Bark Petition, typewritten by a Yolngu man, did not reflect a state of spiritual
3 and cultural agnosticism as feared by Thomson in the 1930s (Thomson & Petersen
4 1983). Tapes, cassettes, video and television, however, according to the first
5 chairman of the Indigenous Arts Council, pushed the mind away from Yolngu
6 culture and law and gave rise to antisocial behaviour (Marika & Isaacs 1995). The
7 cultural conservatism that I observed was applied broadly, and exceptions for
8 technological innovation were made when it served the purpose of cultural
9 continuity. The autonomous individual, the Yolngu youth in Yirrkala today was
10 forced to negotiate the cultural conservatism as predicated by Yolngu elders and
11 the late Wandjuk Marika himself.

12
13 The cars for hunting, the phones for video calls between romantic lovers, a photo
14 of a deceased grandchild on a Samsung flip phone, the knocks on the door for
15 chilled drinking water from a refrigerator, the Android or Apple tablet that live
16 streamed a funeral ceremony in the homelands for a sick relative in hospital in
17 Nhulunbuy and the near concealment of one's own mobile phone number were
18 examples of the messy, uncategorised, yet to be deconstructed osmosis of
19 innovation and cultural conservatism in the lives of everyday Yolngu. The strong
20 currents of change did not allow Yolngu the space or the freedom from oppression
21 in order to interpret and categorise, theorise and debate, as they probably did when
22 the Macassan seafarers arrived with alien artefacts and tools. Yolngu had the
23 months during the dry season to theorise about Macassan tools and ideas. It is
24 possible that between the stimulus of the adoption of individualistic technology like
25 the mobile phone and social media, the response of applied Yolngu traditional

1 knowledge systems is yet to include new tools within Yolngu cosmology fully, and
2 thereby caused the gap between opportunity, experimentation and disorder.

3

4 **5.4 FORMULATING THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

5 A growing number of anthropological studies of media use among marginalised
6 people (Miller & Slater 2000) provided examples that enabled a more unobstructed
7 view of what was happening on the ground. Such work had already shown the
8 promise of challenges to "theories of communication and technology as bringing
9 about modernity and individualism" and homogenization (Tenhunen 2008, p. 531).
10 In the context of the latter possibility, ethnography such as Deger's (2006) counters
11 fears that the cultural specificity of Aboriginal perception will be erased as it
12 demonstrated instead that their culture acted as a guide for their media use. Does
13 one's culture act as a guide at all times in the production and use of media during
14 the adolescent phase of identity exploration (Senior 2003; Chenhall & Senior
15 2011)? Alternatively, is the feeling of 'belongingness' to globalised youth culture
16 (Kral 2010, p. 14) the principal motivation for the use of mobile phones and social
17 media by Yolngu youth?

18

19 Foucault (1980) in Bevir (1999) proposed that written and spoken forms of
20 communication are influential in creating the world into existence in the same way
21 as material things, such as the production and distribution of goods and services.
22 Using the term 'discourse' to describe this as a social process (Foucault 1980 in
23 Bevir 1999); he argued that it always involved power. My research endeavoured to
24 find out what created the reality for people in Yirrkala using mobile phones and

1 social media. How did the mobile phone and social media shape or amplify their
2 thoughts and behaviours?

3 Other questions that I aimed to uncover were:

- 4 • What was the role of the mobile phone and social media today? Will it be
5 combined with the old ways of communication, as was the creation of the
6 Bark Petition?
- 7 • What were the prevalent attitudes towards mobile phones and social media
8 in the community? Is it a binary of positive and negative attitudes as
9 explained by Krech, Crutchfield & Livson (1974) as a result of complex
10 emotional processes?

11

12 Elders who were against the presence of the mobile phones in the community had
13 moved back to the homelands where phones were redundant due to the lack of
14 mobile connectivity (Taylor 2012), while other elders were compulsively
15 communicating with the broader Australian society. Their (senior elders and
16 traditional owners) use of mobile phones, the local and national newspaper as well
17 as social media in order to participate in the political, social and economic life of
18 the nation was becoming the norm.

19

- 20 • How do these new objects belong in the Yirritja and Dhuwa moieties, within
21 the Madayin ceremonies (Keen 1990; 2006), in the kinship system of
22 Gurrutu and the Yolngu law or 'Rom'?

23

- 24 • How did sorcery or 'accusations and suspicions of sorcery' as 'prominent
25 strands in the cloth of Yolngu thought, conversation, gossip and social life'

1 (Reid & Williams 1984 p. 126) interacted with mobile phones and social
2 media?

3

- 4 • Did the training of Yolngu teenagers in 'Raypirri Dhukarr' discussed by
5 Gaykamangu (2012) include the use of mobile phones and social media
6 under the authority of 'Ngarra (Yolngu parliamentary) Law' by default?

7

8 During the formative stages of my research, I was convinced that a social marketing
9 campaign for behaviour change in health promotion that used mobile phones and
10 social media would satisfy the needs of a community challenged by literacy and
11 stigma. It was only through living and deeper connections with my Yolngu
12 neighbours in Birritjimi and 'family' in Yirrkala that altered my perception and re-
13 formulated my research question. As a field researcher strapped with little financial
14 assistance, my methods had to be feasible and pragmatic. Any method of inquiry
15 that interested me was a 'system of strategies and operation designed – at any time
16 – for getting answers to certain questions about events' (Hine 2015)

17

18 I discovered how my original understanding of mobile phones and social media had
19 clouded my perception of the remote Indigenous mobile phone and social media
20 use. As funerals came and went more often than the change of seasons, movement
21 between the homelands and Yirrkala, Yirrkala and town, the perceived reality of
22 the life of Yirrkala for the leaders and Yirrkala for the followers, my perception of
23 order in the context of Yolngu and communication technology began to take shape.
24 I wanted to tell the story of Yolngu through their use of social media and mobile
25 phones as I became aware of their plight for social equality and opportunity. I

1 practised how to bridge the ‘experience-near’ forms of description that people used,
2 to talk about their world and the ‘experience-distant’ concept that inhabited
3 academic texts, abstracted from the specificity of situations and allowed for
4 comparisons to be drawn between them” through several drafts and conference
5 presentations (Geertz 1973 in Hine 2015, p. 27). This proved to be difficult when I
6 found myself limited by a minimal understanding of the many Yolngu languages. I
7 could only try in the words of Geertz (1973: 58) in Hine (2015, p. 27); ‘to figure
8 out what the devil they think they are up to’.

9

10 My formulation of the research question was penned on my phone one Saturday
11 morning, after a tearful exchange with a young man from Yirrkala outside the doors
12 to the ‘pokies’ room. He heard his best friend’s voice bid him farewell through the
13 mobile phone before taking his life. I wondered if the mobile phone had not existed,
14 would he have been able to look his best friend in the eye and reinvigorate hope
15 (Syme 1998) when instead the mobile phone became the conduit for disconnection
16 to life itself. It was also the first time that I learnt of the Lost Boys and their use of
17 technology. Indeed, as Hine argued (2015, p. 28):

18

19 The internet (in this context, the use of social media) and the digital (mobile
20 phones) were not available to us in any transcendent sense but were emergent in
21 practice as they were realised through particular combinations of devices, people
22 and the circumstances.

23

24 It was my intention to foreground my relationship-building experiences, and
25 personal exchanges in Appendix 2 as Moberg (2012, p. 41) described Lila Abu-

1 Lughod's (1995) 'A Tale of Two Pregnancies'; a foregrounding of the
2 anthropologists experience [as] a significant break from the third person,
3 omniscient narrative style employed in traditional ethnography'. Having freed
4 myself from 'objectivity' as some postmodernists argue, I found myself to a degree
5 politically engaged, quietly using the strength of my analysis to 'give voice to the
6 silenced Other, particularly having identified sources of oppression (racial,
7 colonial, gender, sexual) and theoretically championing the liberation of the
8 oppressed' (Moberg 2012, p. 41).

9

10 Young people and some of their elders did not want to be forced to follow social
11 rules. The Lost Boys played with rules, bending them as far as possible to create
12 opportunities for themselves (Moberg 2012). The Lost Boys were not sterile victims
13 of change imposed by colonisation or globalisation but as Moberg (2012) argued;
14 'had instead come about as people recombined, and reorganised cultural elements'
15 and therefore attempting to write objectively on such complex phenomena is a
16 difficult task. This chapter, however, had attempted to give a three-dimensional
17 description of how mobile technology was used but limited by the instrument of
18 qualitative interviewing and participant observation. Scheper-Hughes (1993, p.
19 170) points to this so accurately, and she described her ethnographic work in these
20 words: 'my analysis must be taken as incomplete and contradictory, like reality
21 itself'.

22

1 **CHAPTER 6 - MOBILE PHONE AND GURRUTU**

2

3 **6.1 THE MOBILE PHONE AS AN ADOPTED ENTITY**

4 Young people, who slept through the hot afternoons, were often seen with their
5 babies having a stroll at five in the evening. A mother with a mobile phone tucked
6 under her t-shirt often pushed a stroller and knocked on the door of the Tongan shop
7 to buy a can of soft drink for three dollars and a sausage roll for ten dollars. The
8 mobile phone seemed to be part of the Yolngu person, like a digital dilly bag that
9 carried information as the ‘new message stick’ sweetened by memories, photos and
10 music.

11

12 I observed young parents in their early twenties with their first-born who was as old
13 as their youngest sibling. According to my Tamil cultural script, to be married with
14 children required a man first to acquire some material comforts and potential for
15 employment to sustain an adequate standard of living. In the Indigenous context,
16 contrary to my own beliefs, I was amazed at how little young parents materially
17 required for raising happy and healthy children. In addition to the cost of food,
18 power cards, take away fried chicken and chips, taxi fares or petrol for the ‘mutikar’
19 (car), young people today had taken on the cost of owning and maintaining a mobile
20 phone. The high uptake and adoption of mobile phone among Indigenous
21 Australians (Brusse et al. 2014) were observed in Yirrkala and Birritjimi. Mobile
22 phones were the most adopted form of ICT among young people in remote
23 communities, which according to Brusse et al. (2014) surpassed “television, video
24 games and another form of technological access to the internet.

25

1 Customarily, everything purchased was shared amongst close kin and members of
2 the household. The mobile phone, contrary to other material items refused to part
3 from the hands of the owner as quickly as a fifty dollar note or a share of the turtle
4 or dugong meat. Parents, however, were generally accustomed to sharing their
5 mobile phones and iPads as toys for toddlers and children. The technology
6 entertained their cousins in their adolescent years, older relatives and sometimes
7 grandmothers in the household. The grandmothers have become accustomed to
8 mobile phones and played video games on tiny screens. A new tradition of
9 consumerism (Arnould & Thompson 2005) had created a yearning to own mobile
10 phones, to talk to relatives in another community and to listen to songs and videos
11 bought through an online store. The words of Appadurai, accurately reflected my
12 thoughts; 'if a global cultural system is emerging, it is filled with ironies and
13 resistance, sometimes camouflaged as passivity and a bottomless appetite, for
14 things Western' (1996, p. 29).

15

16 The global cultural system was showing itself in what seemed to be the beginning
17 of a demarcated class system as documented by Schein (1999, p. 347) albeit in
18 China, as 'the emergence of ever finer calibrations of social stratification indexed
19 through key objects or styles of consumption'. From my perspective, limited
20 opportunities and employment pathways were compensated with the ownership of
21 mobile phone, video games, music and social media. Unlike Nhulunbuy with its
22 BMX track, an 18-hole golf course, an Olympic size swimming pool, two
23 gymnasiums, a patrolled beach, two squash courts, three tennis courts, a basketball
24 court, a mountain bike track, several parks and playground equipment, there was
25 only the mobile phone and social media to keep the Aboriginal community engaged

1 and entertained. The inhabitants of remote communities had very little to keep
2 young people engaged, their talents cultivated, their youthfulness invigorated and
3 their happiness sustained.

4

5 **6.1.1 Individual ownership and aspirations of things Western**

6 The individual ownership of a mobile phone conferred an identity that sets a person
7 in Yirrkala apart or differentiated themselves as individuals from the communalism
8 of their traditional ways of life (Schein 1999). As the acquisition of most material
9 objects for the average Yolngu person was out of economic reach, the acquisition
10 of mobile phones became a way of constituting selfhood against communalism that
11 some resisted (Schein 1999) while others remained confined to. The global
12 consumer culture aimed to cultivate individualism and created an 'aura of
13 individuality by offering tantalising objects and media products to be manipulated
14 in the production of selves' (Schein 1999, p. 367). Schein (1999, p. 367) quoted Ian
15 Angus²⁵ who argued that:

16 It is not so many goods that are for sale nowadays as lifestyles. Moreover, here, it
17 may well be, the inner logic of industrialism reaches its apogee: not good for the
18 individual, but 'individuals' produced through the staging of goods. Cultural
19 identities produced industrially and exchanged at will. The previous cultural
20 homogeneity due to the uniformity of production methods has been displaced by a
21 diversity of cultural identities focused on consumer choice.

22

²⁵ Ian H Angus, 'Circumscribing postmodern culture', in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, Ian H Angus and Sut Jhally (eds), New York, Routledge, pp 96-107.

1 With more than one person employed in the household, the opportunity for an
2 adolescent or young person to own and manage a mobile phone became more
3 achievable and pragmatic. There was less competition for other essential resources.
4 ‘What comes into being is not only a culture of individualism but also a culture of
5 desiring, consuming individuals yearning to be fulfilled’ (Schein 1999, p. 368).
6 Young people ought to be fulfilled not only through the ceremony and cultural
7 events but also through the acquisition of material objects provided by their kin or
8 purchased themselves.

9

10 Over the course of three years, I witnessed how young people celebrated their 21st
11 birthdays at the ‘Arno’ (The Arnhem Club) with shirts, suits, dresses and DJs. There
12 were presents and ‘shouts’ of drinks and food from family members and friends.
13 Their children, some old enough to play by themselves, bounced against the walls
14 of the blow-up jumping castle together with their uncles and aunties only a few
15 years older than them. The parties were filled with flashes from mobile phone
16 cameras, and Facebook was littered with moments, which seemed happy. Photos’
17 were captured and shared, tagged and commented, liked and celebrated online. The
18 guests were not whole clans, not extended kin, but a nuclear family made up of
19 fewer than twenty people. Was this reality on Facebook merely a curated identity
20 for an online version or an aspiration for a second life, an unfulfilled goal and an
21 attempt to mask the stress and frustration of growing up with little resources and
22 opportunities? Lattas (2000, p. 342) used Marxist theory and explained that ‘people
23 were created through their products, and through objects that we develop as
24 subjects, for they create us as much as we create them’.

25

1 **6.1.2 The challenges of individualisation**

2 There is a perceived need by non-Indigenous people that in this Yolngu community
3 young people wanted to differentiate themselves as a teenager and to project an
4 image of a modern youth equipped with employment and a mobile phone. This
5 aspiration may seem ordinary, just like the other non-Indigenous people in town,
6 but to Yolngu youth, it betrayed the concept of ‘Yolnguness’ (Marika & Isaacs
7 1995) and to show off was culturally inappropriate. The Yolngu youth explored this
8 process of differentiation as the “objectification of subjects and the subjectification
9 of objects” in a situation in which subjects (Yolngu) were ‘internalised into objects
10 and objects (mobile phones) internalised into subjects’ (Lattas 2000, p. 342). The
11 interruption of Yolngu lifestyle by modernity and the appearance of affordable new
12 objects (mobile phones) disrupted the natural course of their Indigenous ‘subjects
13 away in different directions, allowing individuals and communities to become
14 something other than themselves’ (Lattas 2000, p. 342).

15

16 Could this be a modernity that Marika (Marika & Isaacs 1995) and Thomson
17 (Thomson & Petersen 1983) feared, would be forced onto Yolngu? Martin (2014,
18 p. 294) rightfully argued that ‘Aboriginal social mores are essential processes’ that
19 guide the Yolngu to ‘live, learn and situate themselves’. Some young people, on the
20 contrary, aspired to an individualised system of ownership of new technology for
21 the sole purpose of regaining control in their lives, in ways determined by them
22 (Collin et al. 2011; Third et al. 2011). The youth, globally, made deliberate use of
23 mobile phones, according to Madell & Boyd (2015) to control peer-to-peer and
24 family interactions, albeit consistent within the existing offline social context.

25

1 This challenge to cultural values regarding personal ownership through the
2 adoption of digital technology should not be underestimated. For many, the
3 prolonged personal ownership of a mobile phone became a source of conflict and
4 resentment within family circles and extended youth networks in the community of
5 Yirrkala. The mobile phone, therefore, sometimes, dependent on the status of its
6 owner, had to become a transient possession in order to quench the flames of
7 conflict that resulted from the need to preserve the principle of communal
8 ownership (Hogan et al. 2013).

9

10 **6.2 THE TRANSIENT MOBILE PHONE AS A SYMBOL OF MODERNITY**

11 The mobile phone became the resource that filled Yolngu dwellings with access to
12 information, photos, music and news. The shattered television that once
13 broadcasted Yolngu media similar to their Central Australian cousins (Michaels
14 1986), the broken-down vehicle that sat for years by the road unfixed, the lack of
15 money for a charter aeroplane to visit family in other communities, were now being
16 replaced by video calls. Phone calls were used to ask for lifts and cigarettes, what I
17 called ‘cyber humbug’, also included the ability to share things by copying and
18 pasting, without necessarily losing ownership and decreasing commodity. ‘I think
19 in Yirrkala every teenager has a mobile phone and they know how to use it, how to
20 download music, they send it from another person’s phone using Bluetooth’ was a
21 clear description of the digital user landscape, according to a young person called
22 Jenny who recalled being the first Yolngu teenager to own a mobile phone in the
23 Gove Peninsula.

24

1 For the first time in Yolngu history, downloading and sharing music, Bluetoothing
2 media, copying and pasting photos and making videos did not result in a reduction
3 of the owner's resource or capital. Every item of digital media could be copied and
4 shared. Digital resources could remain in the hands of the owner despite copious
5 sharing, and in fact sharing of such resources also included the possibility of
6 improving one's status (Senior & Chenhall 2012; Boyd 2013). When mobile phone
7 credit was low or depleted, digital media such as songs, photos and videos were
8 shared via Bluetooth. In the past, an axe or a dugout canoe, when shared, left the
9 owner with nothing in return but a cultural ideology of reciprocity or exchange
10 (Ganma). Now copies of artefacts were made before sharing, and the practice of
11 sharing could occur without the loss of the original object or resource. Although
12 mobile phone content could be replicated and shared, the mobile phone itself must
13 be purchased, repaired when broken or replaced when lost. Despite these
14 challenges, the mobile phone was considered a necessity for many young people in
15 Yirrkala, as it reflected their 'coolness' through practices of consumerism, adhering
16 to favourite trends and youth culture (Hebdige 1979; boyd 2013).

17

18 Cindy talked at length about what she thought the meaning of mobile phone
19 appropriation meant to youth. She said, 'mobile phones: they see it as participating
20 in the current trend. As if any young person wants to be considered a part of the
21 contemporary society'. She explained that the youth wanted to be connected to the
22 Internet, were prepared to spend their savings and often invested in a liability in the
23 form of a mobile phone, which according to Sean, a community health worker and
24 coordinator of the Strong Fathers program, 'often grew a pair of legs and walked
25 away'. Sean, with a tone of disbelief, said, 'I barely know a Yolngu who has kept

1 the phone for more than a few months. People always knock em off'. He wondered
2 why some health and research institutions got on the technology trend and 'dumped
3 apps and videos' in a broad scale speculation that a popular tool will have a
4 behaviour-changing or knowledge-enhancing effect.

5

6 Phones were known to get lost when parents or older siblings were engaged in social
7 activities or work, away from their unlocked rooms that lacked furniture to keep
8 valuables safe. 'Kids get into your room, they get the phone' said Sean, when he
9 described the common room in a Yolngu household, with few social boundaries for
10 children, who often did as they pleased (Burbank 2006). Sean said, 'Children get
11 the phone they drop it, or they take it outside, and it gets left out in the rain or gets
12 lost. The parents think "Oh the phone is not there anymore, I will just go buy another
13 one"'. Sean recalled during the interview how having lived for many years in the
14 community. He had become accustomed to updating the phone numbers of his
15 mates several times in a year.

16

17 Sean explained how it got a bit confusing when keeping in touch with his Yolngu
18 peers via mobile phones; 'It's like my phone or my galay's (wife) phone. Whose
19 number is it really? For a while, I was ringing up one of the boys, and I would get
20 the Mrs because they were sharing a phone until they got another phone' he said.
21 Phones break without any opportunity for repairs or replacement of parts. Only the
22 community stores or the post office sold phones and Yolngu could not make claims
23 within the warranty period or fix their broken devices. Cindy, on the other hand,
24 did not see phones that exchanged hands as a problem. She said:

1 They [family] might want your phone, but I don't see that as much as an issue, I think it is
2 because you can get locally such low-cost phones, 79 dollars. I mean, I have seen seven
3 years and 6-year-olds with the phone. They don't have credit, so they use them more as
4 mp3 players.

5

6 Young parents juggled adolescence and parenthood amidst financial constraints,
7 and as a result, were burdened by the daily grind of episodes of conflict and
8 negotiations with their partners. Daughters and their mothers from late teens to mid-
9 thirties, only half a generation between them, competed for mud crabs, mobile
10 phones and prepaid credit or social media time. Like older siblings, they explored
11 a world they had to adjust to and negotiated with their traditional needs and
12 traditional roles. Money was shared between generations, mother and daughter
13 whom both raised children and who held on to as much money as possible for their
14 individual needs.

15

16 Jenny said that 'there are many families where money is just an object, it has no
17 value and so were phones, they are things that can be replaced' but conflict arose
18 between family members in the prioritization of monetary resources (Hogan et al.
19 2013), which was sometimes seen as compromising the children. Jenny explained
20 that it was not uncommon when some parents 'got money and the kids crying for a
21 phone they might take that as a priority over a baby at home needing nappies'. Even
22 senior elders seemed to have caught up with this trend and desired to be in touch
23 with their grandchildren over mobile phones and Facebook. They too, like their
24 grandchildren, struggled to keep their mobile phones. Jean said 'This one lady, she's
25 not on FB (Facebook) but loses her phone four to five times a year. Everybody

1 (loses their phones), I reckon it also involves other people taking phones, and there
2 is no follow-up because of that whole culture of sharing. I'd say that more the case
3 than actually losing it'.

4

5 The challenge many service providers and families encountered with transient
6 mobile phones was that the phone number usually became redundant. During the
7 three years of fieldwork in Arnhem Land, only a small handful of contact's phone
8 numbers remained unchanged. My adopted Yolngu brother bought a new phone
9 almost every six months, and every time it came with a new phone number. Mobile
10 phones were in a continuing cycle of being lost, broken or replaced but the
11 complexity with renewing one's mobile phone was exacerbated by the renewal of
12 mobile phone numbers, which reduced the reliability of owning a mobile phone.
13 Part of the acceptance of constant renewals of mobile phone numbers in the
14 community was the unspoken desire to inhibit family members 'humbugging' for
15 help (Petersen 1993), for money, power cards, tobacco or food.

16

17 **6.2.1 The mobile phone as a tool for demand sharing**

18 Jenny was accustomed to the constant calls from a family with mobile phones and
19 access to her phone number in order to ask for power cards. She said that her
20 concern was not as much the 'humbug' which her position in the community
21 allowed to circumvent (the pressure from kinship), but 'it makes people lazy and
22 if they didn't have my phone number they'd just walk from one side of the
23 community to the other and knock on my door'. For others, the mobile phone often
24 went missing when 'humbug' became unbearable and was the reason behind why
25 some Yolngu refused to own a mobile phone for fear of being harassed by family.

1

2 The stress that some families endured from constant negotiation through phone calls
3 from extended family members to ask for money affected many social relationships
4 in Yirrkala. The mobile phone became interpreted as a gateway that extended the
5 pressure from family to share in the economic resources. Stan, who worked with
6 Indigenous clients, commented:

7 Clients were getting calls like humbug with the Gurrutu (kinship) system of responsibility.
8 So I was thinking about my client. It's probably increasing the access for humbug via
9 mobile phones. They'll call to see if they've got some money. It is speeding up or facilitating
10 a cultural tradition that's already in place.

11

12 In order to circumvent this 'cyber' humbug where family can call you at any time
13 of day and demand things from you, one can only repeatedly reassure the relative
14 on the other end of the phone that whatever resource they were requiring was simply
15 not available or 'bayngu' (don't have), as it was impolite in traditional terms to say
16 'no'. Some people resorted to social media in order to indirectly shame and vent
17 about the pressure of humbug. Unlike a packet of cigarettes, where cigarette sticks
18 could be stashed in different pockets and shared on certain occasions with specific
19 kin, the mobile phone cannot be shared in the same way. Men socialised at night,
20 played games on their phones, watched movies on the television or on their mobile
21 phones, chatted on Facebook and enjoyed a few 'short ones' (dumbulu – smoking
22 the last inch on a cigarette) with their siblings who bought a packet of Winfield
23 Blue and then stashed the rest of the cigarettes away, but the mobile phone is harder
24 to hide.

25

1 Once the mobile phone had made an appearance, it would be considered impolite
2 to keep its presence hidden from siblings, children and senior members of the
3 family, especially when internal resources within the household were scarce. A
4 young person in this context may have been under pressure to give up his newly
5 acquired mobile phone to appease traditional obligations towards uncles or other
6 senior family members. Yolngu youth who used mobile phones with memory cards
7 were able to circumvent the transient problem of mobile phones when demand
8 sharing was entrenched and resulted in violence. Sammy said:

9 They've got memory cards as well, if the uncle said I'm gonna take your phone and I'm
10 gonna give it to you, later on, they just go 'tick' (shows her phone with gesture of taking
11 memory card out) and put it in their pocket and their data is in the little memory card.

12

13 The fixed-line phone was made for a family to share within a public and accessible
14 area in the house. It was also more robust and endured many hands and playful
15 children. The mobile phone, on the other hand, could easily be broken when
16 tampered-with in the wrong way or dropped. In this instance, young people with
17 Android phones were able to rescue their memory cards, on which private and
18 personal photos, music and videos were stored, and were able to keep them safe
19 until a new mobile phone was purchased or gifted by a relative. According to Jenny,
20 young people also used pin numbers to protect their personal and private content
21 on mobile phones. She said:

22 Kids have pin numbers on everything. You can ask for the phones and they'll give
23 it to you. They know that the only thing that you can access is the dial pad, and
24 everything else is locked, they've got pin numbers on it. This is even on flip
25 phones, and they've got privacy locks. If you go to 'messages', 'gallery', 'songs'

1 and stuff. The phone is going to be useless to the uncle if he takes it. He can only
2 use it for calling. He can't access anything else. Because he probably doesn't know
3 that it's locked. When they return to ask for the password, they're gone by then.

4

5 The transient nature of mobile phones was eventually remedied through the
6 utilisation of memory cards when young people began to take other peoples'
7 memory cards for their use. Young people worked out by themselves the value of
8 information-laden in memory cards that soon became a prized commodity. A
9 frustrated Joe confirmed this observation when he said in a follow-up interview:

10 You won't believe it; I've had four memory cards stolen this year. Well, mainly
11 [by] family but because my memory cards, cause I got music off my laptop and all
12 my family contacts and they take it because I got a lot of music and photo, they
13 take it and whatever they like they keep, everything else they delete and claim it as
14 their own and add whatever they want in there.

15

16 The transient nature of mobile phones in a climate lacking opportunities, resources,
17 employment, simultaneously amidst the emergence of Yolngu middle-class
18 families with air-conditioning and rights to royalty payments, employment and
19 better education, had added more stress and frustration to young people as they
20 strived for modernity. They were commanded by their elders to uphold traditional
21 values of communal ownership and obligations according to Gurrutu (kinship), but
22 when they see no economic benefit and a widening social gap between families
23 with connections to Aboriginal Corporations, hope faded into anger. As Scheper-
24 Hughes (1993 p. 169) argued for the people of Alto do Cruzeiro in the following
25 words; 'their lives are marked by a free-floating, ontological existential insecurity

1 in which there are never enough resources and opportunity to be shared around the
 2 campfire and to satisfy the generational thirst for basic needs'. Young people, their
 3 parents and elders from Yirrkala who lacked a mobile phone, considered
 4 themselves to be victims of chronic deprivations that caused some to be nervous
 5 and insecure and in turn, made adults compete with their children for resources
 6 (Scheper-Hughes 1993).

7

8 **6.3 THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH MOBILE** 9 **PHONES**

10

11 **6.3.1 The Individual Yolngu case**

12 During the week, I fell into the pattern of giving my neighbour a lift into town for
 13 work. He was thrilled with the arrangement. After two weeks, he broke the silence
 14 of the ten-minute journey to work when he talked about hunting and that a particular
 15 type of flower had bloomed, which signalled the fattening of the stingray, ready to
 16 meet his pointy spear and satiate his craving for seafood. Initially, this young man
 17 was unsure of my 'Yolnguness' and considered that I might be 'jealousing' my
 18 wife²⁶When he talked to her about Yolngu Dhawu (knowledge), but as we enjoyed
 19 spending time together on weekends, his concerns were dispelled.

20

21 This was a young man who often cried and said that he had no-one to care for him.
 22 His mother died when he was young, and despite having close kin, he lamented
 23 being neglected by the broader Yolngu community and struggled with gossip and

²⁶. The author is referring to an emotion of suspicion and anger towards his partner in the context of engagement with other men.

1 jealousy, which spread not only by word of mouth, but also facilitated by the use of
2 mobile phones and text messaging, Facebook and Divas Chat. What he experienced
3 as the constant surveillance of his life by the members of his community became a
4 burden for him. Stories of him having sexual relationships with women from the
5 wrong skin worried him. These digital stories were being texted and spread to other
6 youth in different communities via social networking sites and SMS (Short Message
7 Service). The wide distribution via mobile phones confirmed a rumour into a
8 believable truth. Eventually, he moved into a unit and spent more than half his
9 fortnightly salary to pay for his own 'space' and privacy. By moving out of his
10 aunt's home, he showed independence. As a symbolic act that defied the
11 conventions of culture, and constantly being visible and accountable for one's
12 activities in order to ward off suspicion, he was bold and frustrated, but he explained
13 that he valued his personal space over cultural norms.

14

15 The mobile phone kept him engaged with his social networks on his terms. It
16 enabled his own economic needs to be fulfilled as his money was spent on online
17 shopping. He conducted private chats with friends and maintained a long distance
18 relationship via a Facebook app on his mobile phone. He was able to avoid being
19 alone by communicating with friends and family via mobile texting and Facebook
20 without being under the surveillance of neighbouring youth and extended family
21 that were jealous of him.

22

23 **6.3.2 The outliers**

24 Brice's family was strict with their children's school attendance. Brice and his wife
25 both had mobile phones and used them daily to manage their work, conduct art sales

1 and talked to family in different communities. Their oldest, Jason had already been
2 a father for three years when he took a break from married life to be back at home
3 with his parents. He had an iPhone with headphones in his pocket that kept boredom
4 at bay, an iPad for his three-year-old and looked forward to Christmas when he
5 would give it to her. He got a lift to Yirrkala every morning where he worked at the
6 Arts Centre and the Mulka Project. His cousin Charlie worked two jobs and got him
7 a second job with the 'night patrol mob'. That kept both Jason and Charlie busy
8 from eight in the evening to about midnight.

9

10 These young men who worked a full day's job occasionally played footy, but rarely
11 did I see them hang out with young people who were unemployed. They orbited
12 between the community and urban towns in the Territory and made rare
13 appearances in the Gove Football league in order to play and socialise with their
14 uncles and close relatives. Their lives seemed organised despite the chaos around
15 them. They shopped online and got their clothes, caps and shoes sent to a business
16 address they have sourced themselves. Their phones gave them the economic
17 independence that allowed them to save their hard-earned money through online
18 purchases instead of the inflated prices in town. It was also an opportunity to stand
19 out amongst their peers with more modern clothing, while others only had access
20 to used or donated clothes.

21

22 Jason and Charlie's lives were shared daily, on Facebook and the old lure of AirG's
23 Divas Chat, no longer excited them or met social engagement needs. Facebook was
24 the new Divas Chat for the employed, individualistic, modern and fashionable.
25 Their mobile phones were not as transient as was common amongst their less

1 independent peers. The young men's families supported their independence and
2 protected them from demand-sharing with extended family networks. Charlie tried
3 to cook and eat what he desired. He had a pot and a pan in a kitchen shared by ten
4 people, a rare asset in a kitchen where take away food, tinned food and two-minute
5 noodles was the norm or the staple. He used a spoon to toss and stir the two-minute
6 noodles from Indonesia in a bowl.

7

8 He bought packets of protein powder from Woolworths to gain muscle mass in
9 order to look active and fit. He lamented the difficulty of being a single cook in a
10 household where nobody supported him but demanded that his food be shared.
11 Two-minute noodles and white toast was a staple, and when extra money was
12 available, the Tongan shop was only a stride away for a sausage roll or a pie,
13 followed by lollies and soft drinks. Even though he was happy to share his meal
14 with his cousins, he told me that life in his partner's community was more
15 comfortable as they did not have to share everything with family. Charlie hoped to
16 move to another remote community in the Central Desert or an urban centre, with
17 less overcrowding, or even to Darwin where he might eventually have more
18 autonomy. He looked forward to saving up his money to buy an Android tablet or
19 maybe a laptop but only when it would be safe from misuse and sharing. He told
20 me how many young people were afraid of work because they got harassed by their
21 relatives for money, primarily via mobile phone calls. He suppressed his frustration
22 and anger with a brief cynical laugh at the culture of demand sharing, as he rejected
23 my suggestion to take up a position at the local petrol station when I also offered to
24 help him craft a job application and address the selection criteria. His mobile phone
25 was the only visible tool that belonged to him, that contained his hobbies, his

1 preferences, and photos of his loved ones. He escaped into his space in the mobile
2 phone, where he felt in control.

3

4 With several bank accounts and ATM cards in possession by a Yolngu adult,
5 Charlie told me that some accounts were deliberately empty and some secretly-held
6 money for Christmas presents or for a rainy day. These young people had learnt
7 from their elders how to manage their traditional obligations in a world in which
8 technology allowed them to circumvent obligation and ‘Gurrutu’ (Kinship). The
9 mobile phones’ access to Internet banking made the convenience of personal
10 financial planning and management an opportunity for some but a burden to others.
11 In certain households, the extended family called on the mobile phone and insisted
12 on a transfer of money to their accounts and for any excess resources to be shared.
13 When they were refused, citing empty bank accounts, some relatives insisted for
14 proof via screenshots that confirmed the bank account was empty.

15

16 **6.3.3 The entrepreneurial youth**

17 Birritjimi revived its football team and became a strong Galpu (Dhuwa clan) team
18 in the Gove Football League through the initiative of an entrepreneur and musician.
19 The Galpu clan in Birritjimi were not politically or economically as powerful as the
20 Rirratjingu clan in Yirrkala or the Gumatj clan in Gunyangara. They were all
21 affiliated with each other through marriage but the men from Birritjimi, I assumed,
22 wanted a distinct identity and so the Baywarra Football Club became a pathway to
23 assert themselves as they gradually emerged from the shadows of two giants, the
24 Rirratjingu and Gumatj clans.

25

1 The team's captain was a young entrepreneur who used mobile phones to take
2 photos of the footy matches and organise training and transportation to the oval in
3 town. The mobile phone acted as his personal computer and personal secretary and
4 with a fence around his house, his mobile phone was off limits to demands of
5 Gurrutu and demand sharing. The mobile phone was particularly crucial to the
6 young entrepreneur who stored new songs that were composed and recorded in the
7 studio. The entrepreneur had access to music editing software and could post music
8 clips on YouTube or Facebook. He used tablets, and music editing software
9 streamed from the Internet via his mobile phone to sell instruments online. Instead
10 of a modem and a broadband connection, the mobile phone with a large data
11 package was practical and financially manageable in the context of his community.

12

13 **6.4 THE YOLNGU BUSINESSES THAT SUPPORTED TECHNOLOGY** 14 **USE**

15

16 **6.4.1 Dhimurru Rangers**

17 At eight-thirty in the morning, a Dhimurru vehicle pulled up in front of the
18 Peninsula Bakery as I ordered a coffee. The young men spoke 'Aboriginal English'
19 mixed with Yolngu Matha. They were dressed in grey uniforms with the symbol of
20 Yirritja and Dhuwa cockatoos on their shirts. They picked up a few bottles of
21 Gatorade, Paul's ice coffees and sandwiches. Then off they went to locations where
22 they conducted land and forest conservation, smiling and cheerful. They were
23 rangers based in the Gove Peninsula.

24

1 The men were engaged in conversation while listening to music with one ear-phone
2 plugged in their Samsung flip phones or smartphones and the other dangling over
3 their collar. These young men worked under challenging conditions and high
4 temperatures, with sometimes only one meal in the morning. They may have
5 considered a snack later in the afternoon, at one of the four takeaway outlets in
6 town, before coming to the Arnhem Club for evening social drinks.

7

8 The Rangers used their phones conscientiously and were aware of the perils from
9 excessive use of Facebook and Divas Chat. Their posts contained little content on
10 personal relationships or girlfriends, work or community issues, according to one
11 of my interview participants who spent a few years working with them. Their focus
12 instead was on mateship, sports and recreational activities, especially in the
13 homelands during the dry season. They were well-supported young men who spent
14 quite a lot of time with their parents, who also enjoyed a drink at the pub and hunting
15 on weekends with their children. They kept their relationships hidden from the
16 surveillance of other community members. They were protected by the political and
17 socio-economic clout of their parents, grandparents and uncles, and this dictated
18 their own culture around mobile phone use.

19

20 To these young people, the mobile phones were less a symbol of modernity than a
21 tool for communication and were used for keeping in touch with close friends and
22 family. Their phone numbers often remained intact within their inner circle of
23 friends. They often engaged in social activities in private, uncrowded homes, away
24 from the gaze of the broader community, or in the homelands hunting with their

1 parents' four-wheel drive. They kept their relationships away from community
2 surveillance.

3

4

5

6 **6.4.2 Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation**

7 Leaving the Woollies (Woolworths) car park in a four-wheel drive with 250 dollars'
8 worth of food for the weekly Strong Father's Cooking Class, were the Miwatj
9 Health Strong Fathers team; the four Yolngu men and one Balanda – a non-
10 Indigenous program manager. They made up a well-respected and competent team
11 that worked together for about three years. Between international travel, live
12 performances and cooking classes for men, these Strong Fathers formed alliances
13 with a selection of young men who often socialised at the Arnhem Club. The
14 patterns were hard to predict, as friendship and kinship, challenging to follow and
15 objectify, were in constant flux. The men did not see mobile phones as a status
16 symbol and neither did they have a personal Facebook profile. They were
17 experienced celebrities and would one day become community leaders. I was
18 invited to one of their classes to conduct a session on cooking a traditional Tamil
19 dish. I had twenty-five young men that evening in five different cooking stations.
20 Each station was made up of men with a strong bond between each other. They
21 either shared a house or were in alliances that shared resources together.

22

23 The mobile phone in this context was a tool that belonged to professional men with
24 critical traditional roles in the community. They were economically independent
25 and a symbol of balance between a traditional Yolngu lifestyle and modernity. They

1 were inspired by Yothu Yindi band members and travelled with senior elders for
2 concerts and press conferences. The mobile phone enabled them to be in touch with
3 family, mainly when they travelled interstate or overseas. Their young wives were
4 often concerned with the celebrity status of their male partners, and some relied on
5 mobile phones in order to dispel any suspicion, gossip and jealousy that often
6 plagued young people who dared to stand out from the crowd and challenge the
7 status quo.

8

9 **6.4.3 Yirrkala as a holiday destination for youth from the homelands**

10 Yirrkala can be likened to the Bali of North East Arnhem Land for Yolngu from the
11 homelands²⁷. A trip from the homelands and the indefinite stay with families in the
12 already overcrowded houses in Yirrkala provided young people with easy access to
13 takeaway food, health services, and shops, banking facilities, two pubs, footy grand
14 finals and traditional ceremonies that were predominantly funerals. The homelands
15 youth had five free entries to the Arnhem Club after which they had to be sponsored
16 by members and pay an annual membership fee. The other convenient option and
17 free for everyone was the Walkabout Hotel.

18

19 The youth at the Walkabout Hotel were a mix of local Yolngu from the Gove
20 Peninsula and some from the region, as far as Ramingining and inland as far as
21 GanGan. They looked much leaner than their peers from the Peninsula, spoke less
22 English and were less materially affluent. They had simpler phones and were
23 considered more 'traditional' by others living near Nhulunbuy. Here in the town of

²⁷ Remote outstations where Yolngu reside on their ancestral lands (Altman 2010).

1 Nhulunbuy, a young person from a more remote Yolngu community became
2 attracted to the pervasive use of mobile phones by youth from Yirrkala and was
3 often seen in town unboxing their new phone. The youth from both the homelands
4 and Yirrkala often saw the mobile phone as a symbol of wealth. Someone who
5 could afford a more sophisticated smartphone began differentiating themselves
6 from the more common Samsung flip phone owners and achieved a superficial form
7 of Indigenous stratification. The flip phone was not just affordable, but easier to
8 part with when required by family and was often never to be returned to the original
9 owner. According to Bourdieu (1984, p. 213) in boyd (2013), 'taste also serves as
10 a mechanism and marker of distinction, and people's tastes are rooted in class
11 distinctions'. The class distinctions observed here were slowly forming themselves,
12 and supported the claim from Appadurai (1996, p. 16) that 'geographical division,
13 cultural differences and not boundaries tended to become isomorphic'.
14

15 **6.4.4 Mulka Project and the Yirrkala Arts Centre**

16 There were a small but enthusiastic number of young people who engaged and
17 worked with the Mulka Project and the Yirrkala Arts Centre. It was not as much a
18 revolving door as it could have been for many. Young people who came to work
19 with this Indigenous employer and who had to juggle their priorities and demands
20 of relationships in the community were able to receive culturally sensitive and
21 appropriate support. Whether from their partner, family or culture, young men were
22 forced to live up to expectations as a provider. The Yolngu ex-hunter had to be
23 employed to provide resources for living in the Yirrkala of 2015. These young men
24 turned to employment at the Arts Centre as an opportunity for positive relationships
25 and little or no stress. They worked with Indigenous filmmakers and artists. They

1 had the support of reliable and established families who toured with Yothu Yindi
2 or held art exhibitions in Sydney and London. These men dressed differently and
3 possessed a style that was a fusion of contemporary Australian and African
4 American culture. They ran international marathons, debuted their films overseas,
5 and some were interviewed by the SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) television
6 network or awarded the Northern Territory Indigenous Youth-of-the Year award.

7

8 These men were provided with support workers who mentored and groomed them
9 for future leadership. They lived in the same house as Aboriginal Corporation Board
10 members, chairpersons and managers of Yolngu enterprises. They were the direct
11 descendants of the men who signed the Bark Petition and engaged in the court
12 proceedings against Nabalco and the Commonwealth Government. Young men
13 who worked here were surrounded by the inspirational and spiritually uplifting
14 Yolngu art and history. Their mobile phones often could be heard playing
15 traditional song lines from a recent funeral they had attended.

16

17 Although surrounded by technology, and with a mobile phone in their pockets,
18 these young men received much support and mentoring from the traditional Yolngu
19 artists who arrive from different parts of the region. Their close connection to
20 Yolngu art and history was a form of rehabilitation for many who felt excluded and
21 marginalised.

22

23 **6.4.5 Youth under the radar**

24 At the Garma festival of 2013, I barely saw young men or teenagers. The Yolngu
25 community at the festival site was made up of older men and older women who

1 arrived with their partners, children or grandchildren. Young people were rarely
2 seen although there was a free public bus provided by the town administrator.
3 Young students from Victoria and Canberra who participated in the Indigenous
4 youth forum at the festival were bereft of the company of youth and teenagers. Their
5 only engagement with Yolngu was usually with elders and senior elders who
6 worked for Aboriginal Corporations. When I drove into Yirrkala one night with
7 Lester, he helped me realise how young people were continually evading the
8 suspicious gaze of their fellow community members while trying to be an
9 adolescent and young adult. They felt their actions were monitored as they explored
10 relationships, dated, Facebooked and chatted via Messenger or listened to music
11 together at the basketball court from mobile phone speakers while their parents,
12 elders and younger siblings slept through the night.

13

14 Tommy was scared of his wife's reaction when we offered him a free seat on a
15 flight to Gove for his nephew's funeral. His wife said, out loud, that Tommy had a
16 girl in Yirrkala and that was his motivation to attend the funeral. I wondered if
17 Tommy, who looked like he was in his 50s, had a girlfriend. He just stood outside
18 his house at eleven-thirty at night and lamented the loud hip-hop music that drifted
19 on the night's breeze from the basketball court in front of his house, while his son
20 and girlfriend swiftly walked past him into the house. The practice of the betrothal
21 of 'promised wives' where older women were marrying younger men, had been
22 unofficially discontinued by young people in Yirrkala. In the relatively new context
23 of being able to choose one's partner, the mobile phone was central in organising
24 'hook-ups' between teenage romantic partners and even senior men who longed to
25 engage with other partners in different communities. Trust between romantic

1 partners and established couples became a scarce commodity, since opportunistic
2 romantic affairs became more organised and convenient, thanks to the mobile
3 phone.

4

5 Women faced a different type of challenge when they went to work and left their
6 unemployed husbands at home. For some women, their husbands ensured that their
7 wives did not look attractive to another man by preventing them from showering,
8 or self-grooming. One of my close friends, who lamented her husband's addiction,
9 could not help but undergo feelings of stress from the jealousy and insecurity of her
10 partner. She said 'I am at police station making a statement for my partner that
11 being threatened and cheated on me because he got jealous of my career and what
12 I have achieved in my life and trying to pull me down!'

13

14 **6.5 THE MOBILE PHONE AS A SOURCE OF TRUST AND INFIDELITY**

15 Charles recounted a shared experience between teenage lovers:

16 P and G both couldn't go to work. They just were jealous of each other and couldn't
17 be out of each other's sight. You know what happens, they just start to bicker and
18 argue, and we did talk about it.

19

20 The teenage couple kept a close eye on each other and checked their mobile phones
21 'contact list, call and text messaging history under suspicions of infidelity. They
22 were almost convinced that their partner would cheat on them because of the ability
23 of the mobile phone to transcend 'place' and seek out interested parties for romantic
24 engagements.

25

1 Romantic partners borrowed each other's phones to look at their partner's contact
2 list on their mobile phone and then posted on Facebook a warning to potential
3 admirers of their partners, for example; 'If any of M girls gonna meet my man I'll
4 folk'sz the shit of you Bitch'. The presence of mobile phones in the relationship of
5 the couple mentioned by Charles created much pressure and distrust. Charles
6 showed me the screenshots of the anonymous text. The young romantic partners
7 resolved the tension and distrust with shared mobile phone pin codes and Facebook
8 passwords. The sharing of pin codes and passwords allowed the mobile phone to
9 continue to be part of their lives and reduced the opportunity for inter-relationship
10 suspicion and jealousy. Families who were involved in the conflict and confusion
11 between young romantic partners, according to Beth, took 'sides over teenagers'
12 fights' in which 'kinship is taken on board' and 'kinship will demand uncle's
13 support' the teenager and take action. Beth was concerned about some families in
14 Yirrkala. She said that in Yirrkala there were some families who

15 Are really down there in the food chain. They get harassed. That woman with her
16 two kids that died recently through suicide was because of bullying and harassment
17 by adults. She was lower on the food chain and was always copping it.

18

19 I probed further to understand this system of social hierarchy. Josephine kindly
20 explained; 'like when your mum and dad should not have married for cultural
21 reason (wrong skin) where they sit in the kinship system. I know of individuals who
22 were gang-raped because of wrong way and your offspring cops it too'. According
23 to Freire (1972) in Clark and Augoustinos (2015, p. 22), 'maintaining a culture of
24 silence was common to oppressed groups and indicated that silencing was
25 destructive as it inhibits its members to look at their world critically or to collaborate

1 with others'. Unfortunately, in the Indigenous history of resistance and speaking out
2 against lateral violence (Langton 2008; Gonzales et al. 2013), were issues often
3 ignored at official and political levels (Sutton 2009) and therefore speaking out
4 became a deterrent (Freire 1972) and silence, a sign of defeat.

5

6

7

8 **6.6 MOBILE SMARTPHONES AS A PRECURSOR OF SOCIAL** 9 **INEQUALITY IN YIRRKALA**

10 The Yolngu young people were the protagonists in this story of the mobile phones
11 in the Gove Peninsula as they managed their traditional roles amidst the tradition-
12 defying capability of the mobile phones to create gossip, suspicion and conflict
13 amongst youth and family (Hogan et al. 2013; Carlson et al. 2015). The young
14 people came together and socialised at different locations in town, their lives
15 intersected, all kin, connected to song lines that told the story of their beginnings of
16 the Djangkawu and the Wawilak sisters (Marika & Isaacs 1995). Now my heroes
17 and heroines lived out their stories through mobile phones' predictive texts and
18 autocorrect.

19

20 Indigenous art was slowly being replaced with youth culture's digital photography
21 and video production. The youth who had gone to school in urban centres and were
22 exposed to global culture became the cultural intermediaries for the import of the
23 mobile phones and eventually social media into remote community life. Young
24 people with employment and secondary education often preferred to own
25 smartphones for easy access to Internet banking, Facebook, and YouTube.

1 Smartphones captured photos and videos and could store more copious amounts of
2 media as a mobile media bank. However, smartphones usually had a shorter life
3 span and were quickly dropped due to their large size and active youth lifestyle.
4 Joey recalled when one of his neighbours posted an update late one night in
5 approximately these words; 'I can't believe. My bloody iPhone screen smash, coz
6 I was really blind drunk last night!'

7

8 Not all young people had equal opportunities and access to own a mobile phone or
9 chose to own a phone. In my informal interviews and attempts to talk to these young
10 people about the absence of a phone in their lives, I only found one young man
11 during an opportunistic lift from Birritjimi into town that explained that the mobile
12 phone created more problems for him. These young people, according to my
13 interview participants seemed isolated, uncared-for and lacked community support.
14 There was no uncle at home, to buy a phone for them, no grandmother to answer to
15 their cries for a tool that helped them feel normal, like other Yolngu youth who
16 were watching music videos on YouTube. A few Yolngu owned Samsung
17 smartphones or the premium Apple iPhone. The Apple iPhones were harder to
18 maintain because it was difficult for Yolngu to update their iTunes account or
19 download apps without a credit card. The absence of credit or debit cards and a
20 personal computer limited the use of the iPhone for updating software and backing-
21 up contents.

22

23 Julie recounted a story that happened to her White Australian friend who wanted to
24 facilitate a Yolngu friend's experience with an iPhone. 'She had a mum come in
25 her house the other day who had just bought a new iPhone but had no idea how to

1 use it and needed an iTunes account to set it up', she said, speaking quietly in the
2 children's playroom of the Gove library after she got off the phone trying to reinstall
3 her iCloud account on her new MacBook Pro. She rolled her eyes, still in pain from
4 the long telephone conversation with Apple customer service and continued saying

5 Tthat this was a huge ordeal to this set up for this Yolngu lady who struggled with
6 this technology ten times more than we struggled with. So she is using my friend's
7 iTunes account and that leads onto problems around buying music, whose credit
8 card and privacy, other social media stuff that gets linked to your phones and
9 computers and wanting to come back every day to plug her phone in the laptop to
10 do whatever, to charge or to update apps or use Wi-Fi.

11

12 Based on her recent experience with Apple customer service and having worked
13 with Yolngu for seven years, she confirmed that 'there's no way some of the Yolngu
14 family [I know] will be able to sort out their phone like the way I spent five hours
15 on the phone with Apple'. I asked Julie, what could be done to support young people
16 to negotiate their interaction with contracts and online purchases. Without much
17 deliberation, she said

18 You have to be pretty clued up on the stuff and if you're struggling to understand
19 simple concepts that are hard enough for a young person growing up with English
20 as a first language living in White culture let alone somebody that's struggling to
21 read or speak English. Moreover, they go 'click' I agree to these terms and
22 conditions.

23

24 The young people who use Apple iPhones were more often better educated and
25 employed. They had the skills to navigate the rigorous requirements of credit cards
26 and software updates, English speaking customer service representatives and last

1 but not least the hefty price tag. The Samsung flip phones were not as sophisticated
2 as the Apple or Android smartphones and were commonly known as 'Yapa Phones'
3 (Yapa meaning sister) which symbolised the more widely female client base and
4 possible inferior status. All phones ran on prepaid sim cards, and credit was easily
5 purchased in town. A relative with access to money and a corner store was able to
6 purchase credit and text the details of the reload voucher to someone without
7 money.

8

9 The Samsung flip phone was an essential generic communication tool. It was not
10 as exciting as a smartphone but durable and shareable with family members.
11 Owners were less attached to these \$60 phones and could part with them to maintain
12 relationships and satisfy demand-sharing by Gurrutu (kinship). The ownership of a
13 flip phone was often associated with lower socio-economic status, rather than just
14 a convenient and simple tool for communication. Very often even senior elders and
15 traditional owners were seen to upgrade their Samsung flip phones to Android
16 smartphones that enabled better photography and ease of use from the wider screen
17 and user-friendly layout.

18

19 In the community, Android operating systems and Apple smartphones coexisted
20 like middle-class relatives at a working-class family's Christmas party. The owners
21 of smartphones exuded a new level of sophistication, one that took them out of the
22 'bush' image that a Traditional Owner used for an example when motivating the
23 Djarrak Football team before a game with Gapuwiyak. He said; 'Don't think they
24 are from the bush, you can beat them easy, be careful'. There was a clear delineation
25 between the urban Yolngu living in Yirrkala and those from the more remote

1 interior. It was this type of differentiation that smartphones enabled young people
2 to acquire, and helped set them apart from each other despite the overwhelming
3 gravitas of communalism and clanship. Young people continued to be influenced
4 by globalisation and the media, sought to embrace individuality within the
5 traditional context and negotiated the conservative attitude towards technology.

6

7

8

9 **6.7 SORCERY AND MOBILE PHONE**

10 Mobile phone numbers changed continuously, and only a small minority of people
11 were able to keep their numbers safe from public knowledge. Just like cigarettes
12 and money, safely stashed away only to emerge at the bar counter or when requested
13 by a close and trusted relative, the mobile phone was hidden from the public eye.
14 In the non-Indigenous world when young people met, phone numbers or Facebook
15 details were most probably exchanged. In the community, phone numbers were not
16 easily shared, when only girlfriends, partners, children and parents had one
17 another's phone numbers. The phone numbers were only for close kin and not to be
18 shared in case they fell into the 'wrong' hands. Galka²⁸ (Reid 1983) often called
19 and threatened community members, forcing them to abandon sim cards and phone
20 numbers, and left them no other option but to purchase a new phone number and
21 sometimes even a new mobile phone.

22

²⁸ Sorcery

1 Jones once called my mobile phone to inform me that he received a call from Galka.
2 The caller introducing himself as Galka to which Jones replied with, “Fuck off”.
3 He laughed as he recounted the story because he had decided that the caller couldn’t
4 have been Galka. He made it very clear to me that he didn’t believe in Galka but
5 didn’t explain why. This complexity of when a phenomenon was related to Galka
6 cannot be objectified into a formula or predicted (Reid 1983). It happened
7 organically and opportunistically. Simon explained his understanding of Galka in
8 the age of mobile phones. He said;

9 People think that unknown calls are Galka calling you. They can send stuff to you
10 via Bluetooth, and the Bluetooth got Galka. I've heard stories, but I've never really
11 seen it. They say that Galka is using phones to get a hold of someone's number to
12 say I'm calling, I'm coming to get you.

13

14 Since Galka’s use of mobile phones to raise fear, anxiety, conflict, and stress
15 amongst community members, many Yolngu had begun involving the police in
16 anti-cyberbullying activities. Soon news of the police’s ability to scan and track
17 down mobile phone numbers threatened people and Galka’s supposedly cyber-
18 bullying activities. Alleged perpetrators and even Galka had to now, find other
19 means of communication to reach out to potential victims. Social media became the
20 next avenue, as it was almost impossible to be traced, due to the practicality of
21 creating fake online profiles. Signs of such behaviours were discussed both offline
22 and online. An informant once posted the following warning to which he gave me
23 verbal permission to cite:

24 Get a life low life dogs you mob wait think I’m dumb I’ll do it another way black
25 magic so you black low mother fucking dogs will die from now on if you talk shit

1 to me will make you cripple black magic way this time if your family talk shit to
2 they will be on my list as well no jokes want to be six feet under try me all it takes
3 is one phone call fucking not joking.

4
5 In this chapter, I deconstructed the seemingly simple, mobile phone, whose only
6 general meaning was that which the technology had conferred through its enabling
7 features, such as to create and consume media and to connect people between vast
8 distances. The heterogeneity of actors in this community painted an approximation
9 of how the technology was used and the differences between subgroups that shared
10 one 'communal' culture and traditional law. The mobile phone was wrought with
11 ambiguity, caused social demarcations, inequality and lateral violence. The use of
12 social media in the next chapter extends this argument further.

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CHAPTER 7 - FACEBOOK AND KINSHIP

Social media is a broad term that encompasses separate digital applications or websites such as text messaging, interactive websites, social networking sites, digital message boards, forums, blogs, microblogging (e.g. Twitter), wikis (collaboratively produced web content), ‘game modding’ (fans modifying computer games), video hosting sites and more (boyd 2013; Byron et al. 2013, Brusse et al. 2014). Facebook is a social networking site used by over one billion individuals as the world’s most popular online social networking site (Darvell, Walsh & White 2011). The purpose of Facebook, according to Darvell, Walsh & White (2011) was to ‘give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected’.

According to Mitchell and Ybarra (2009), there were constant shifts in patterns of Internet use that occurred rapidly, where this form of continually evolving technology that cannot be restrained, kept parents, health professionals, policymakers and law enforcement guessing where the next social problems like cyber-bullying would happen. A series of focus groups with youth and parents in Norway, a developed country with an Indigenous population similar to Australia, found that teens used mobile phones to create boundaries between themselves and their elders (Ling & Yttri 2006). The mobile phone as the conduit of online interaction according to Ling & Yttri (2006) was used to undermine family traditions and interaction in favour of peer communication. According to Jenny, a mother of teenagers in Yirrkala; young people in the community were

1 Not going to their parents for advice, they're looking at the Internet. I guess it
2 makes them ignore the important things and so they're more interested in what
3 their friends are doing and keeping up with whatever is "IN" at the time.

4 For most teenagers and young adults, social media use was influenced by a need to
5 communicate with existing friends, which in turn has shaped adolescent
6 development in new ways (Davis 2012). According to Ito et al. (2009) and
7 Subrahmanyam and Smahel (2010) in Davis (2012), social media had become a an
8 essential part of adolescent experience of peer to peer relationship as well as how
9 emergent technologies such as social media and mobile phones were used as a place
10 to hang out and chat.

11

12 Adolescents believed that their online peer communications have a positive effect
13 on the quality of their friendships, as confirmed by Subrahmanyam and Smahel
14 (2010) and Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006), but at the cost of severe
15 intergenerational conflict and loss of parental control (Valkenburg & Peter 2011).
16 The state of 'co-presence' according to Ito and Okabe (2005) created an opportunity
17 for young people to maintain a sense of connection to their peers regardless of
18 physical location or time of day. Davis (2012) argued that social media use fulfilled
19 the developmental need of young people for belonging, but at the cost of developing
20 young people's abilities to remain with their feelings of boredom and draw on their
21 inner resources to work through it (Brechtwald & Prinstein 2011). Digital media,
22 which included Facebook, had become a central way of communication and a way
23 that adolescents experienced their peer relationships (Ito et al. 2009;
24 Subrahmanyam & Smahel 2010; Carlson et al. 2015; Senior, Helmer & Chenhall
25 2016).

1
2 Facebook, in the remote Aboriginal context, had been adopted by male and female
3 teenagers, young adults and senior elders. Social networking sites like Facebook
4 allowed young people to explore their identities, extend their friendship networks
5 and amplified their opinions; all of which are healthy aspects of adolescent
6 development, according to Mitchell and Ybarra (2009), Carlson et al. (2015) and
7 boyd (2013). In a general ward at the Gove District Hospital, Sam, a nurse trained
8 to work with Indigenous patients and their families, noticed many young mothers
9 and grandmothers who had 'Facebook on their home screen, even on normal phones
10 (Samsung flip phones)'. A young female community worker explained that her
11 friends 'hang out' with family and friends on Facebook and reckoned that young
12 adults over 25 'definitely use Facebook, they've got more access' because 'they're
13 employed and working'.

14

15 **7.1 DIGITAL FRIENDSHIPS**

16 'There's a boyfriend and girlfriend, and they have a list of friends', Josephine said,
17 showing her friend list on Facebook to me as I flicked open my own friend's list to
18 mirror her action. She continued to explain the dynamics of the new Yolngu teenage
19 love story in the world of social media and mobile phones, a 'ménage à trois'
20 between lovers and their technology. Josephine discussed the conflict and tension
21 young people experienced when engaged in romantic relationships. She gave me
22 the impression that the conflict and tension had been accepted as a norm in the
23 community. Could it be possible that social media sites like Facebook and Divas
24 Chat facilitated an entrenched habit of surveillance in the community as an
25 acceptable use of the online space? The ability to expand one's networks and get to

1 know other interested parties for romantic affairs had become more convenient
2 since the adoption of mobile technology. Josephine said that ‘every young people
3 in Gove is fighting over jealousy with their boyfriend and girlfriend’ because of
4 their ability to network with other youth. She explained that the contact list, or
5 friends list on Facebook, did not fit in with the Yolngu law of kinship which takes
6 into consideration the respectful relationship between poison-cousins as avoidance
7 relationships. Adding to our discussing, Josephine concluded that a young person
8 often struggled within a romantic relationship;

9 They have a certain person that the girl or the boy doesn’t get along with. They
10 think straight away that they’re talking to each other like friends and then they
11 argue, asking why this person on your friends list?

12

13 Josephine knew that in general young people were intimidated by other youth and
14 struggled to keep their romantic relationships stable. They felt that their partners
15 were preyed on by other people in the community for a relationship or sex. The
16 Facebook friends list was seen as a list of opportunities for their romantic partner
17 to meet other girls or boys and thus created a relationship plagued with distrust and
18 suspicion.

19

20 **7.2 THE SOCIAL LIFE OF FACEBOOK**

21 The Facebook wall on my iPhone 4 was quiet and still. All the protagonists were
22 busy in getting to work, or still asleep. It was only seven-thirty in the morning as I
23 prepared the children to be taken to school. I dropped my kids into a world in which
24 the non-Indigenous kids and their families separated their friends into groups in

1 which some were 'acquaintances', others, 'family', but the unwanted news was
2 hidden or deliberately blocked from their Facebook feed.

3

4 This self-management of the non-Indigenous Facebook wall was not a common
5 strategy amongst Yolngu youth. From my observations and discussions with young
6 people, they were more vulnerable online due to a lack of knowledge of privacy
7 settings to keep unwanted people out. Young people added friends on Facebook
8 from within the region including people whom they had never met based solely on
9 the physical attractiveness of a profile photo and name valence (Greitemeyer &
10 Kunz 2013). I scrolled back on my Facebook wall to the contents of postings from
11 the previous night when life in cyberspace was filled with drama, emotions,
12 narratives and discourse. Facebook was aglow with exchanges between two people
13 who lived in the same house, and those as far apart as Sydney and Hobart.

14

15 Regional communities like Elcho Island, Ramingining, Maningrida, Millingimbi
16 and Groote Eylandt were also active with young people on Facebook, who shared
17 photos, music and videos, and commented on each other's lived experiences.
18 Although kinship laws dictated the engagement between young people online and
19 offline, there were enough differences in opinion to generate interpersonal conflict.
20 When members of particular clans and their established alliances (Rowse 2012) or
21 Ringgitj (inter-clan alliances), interact and exchange ideas and discuss current
22 events whether offline or in cyberspace, a risk for disagreement, jealousy and
23 tension may be present. The clans interact with each other through a traditional
24 alliance, and often the young people engage in a competitive discourse about which
25 alliance or clan is superior. This often escalates from an act of bullying between

1 teenagers to a conflict between families because kinship will dictate that the elders
2 protect the younger members of their family or clan. An interview participant who
3 was also a senior Aboriginal elder explained that ‘for boys, it’s proving yourself to
4 your brothers, everybody, your group, your friends, especially your brother’. A
5 remote area nurse also commented on the importance of enforcing self-pride in the
6 clan or family. She said ‘family relationships are so important to Yolngu and the
7 communication that can occur and the problems that Facebook can cause’ when she
8 paused and thought carefully with a frown of concern and then finished her sentence
9 by saying ‘they just don’t understand those risks’.

10

11 Outside the boundaries of conflict, Facebook also managed one’s memories. Young
12 people kept a digital album as a collection of videos and photos that could be shared
13 with family and friends. Beyond the finite identities of clan, skin and Indigeneity,
14 young people used their Facebook profile photo as an opportunity to differentiate
15 themselves from the structures of Yolngu politics and reflected their individuality.
16 Their first names were used interchangeably with a nickname but were always
17 accompanied with a surname. The young people often identified with their paternal
18 clan, except for a small number who decided to take on the surnames of their
19 mother’s clan. They explained their change of protocol and cited the lack of support
20 or engagement from their father’s clan and justified the use of their mother’s clan
21 surname. The profile photos of boys and men, of flexed biceps and a muscular
22 abdomen, included photos taken during social events at the pub, where young men
23 posed proudly with a bottle of Bundaberg Rum or Jim Beam (Beullens & Schepers
24 2013).

25

1 The women favoured profile photos of themselves with a child or best friend. Their
2 photos were often decorated with Japanese ‘purikura’, a digital photo sticker that
3 decorated online profile photos. The younger girls typically used decorations with
4 bright pink or orange coloured shapes, such as hearts and diamonds, and stars as
5 borders. Though framed photos were never made, bought or hung on the walls in
6 their homes, the girls were quite artistic in using Facebook to decorate their digital
7 walls with photos of themselves and their loved ones. Profile photos in traditional
8 attire often debuted just after the Garma festival in August or during a funeral
9 ceremony in the homelands. Comments of encouragement and admiration naturally
10 flowed beneath the photo including ‘likes’ for the photo itself and the comments
11 made about the photo. This act was seen as being proud of their Yolngu culture and
12 clan.

13

14 There was no other customisation to an individual’s Facebook profile and users
15 resorted to posting content to generate attention and to be heard and seen amongst
16 the multitude of postings. I noticed how status updates on Facebook were
17 sometimes written in different scripts and symbols: ‘Ya EveryOne I’m Here la
18 Maninqridaa 2tt Putt a Biq Show Baa Y0u M0b (10l’Sz)’. I assumed that there was
19 an effort to demonstrate individuality through the written text, as argued by
20 Foucault (1980) in Bevir (1999). Facebook came to life with discussions and
21 comments on the events that played out after dark, interrupted by dawn and the
22 obligation of work and eager children on their way to school.

23

24 My adopted Yolngu ‘grandson’ from Millingimbi sat in front of the steps leading
25 to Westal Avenue with an iPad connected to a Telstra 3G Wi-Fi signal (Taylor

1 2012). He was not interested in the people standing in front of him nor raised his
2 head to talk to them. Except for interruptions of the family who asked him for a
3 smoke or 'rupiah' (money), he was not easily distracted from his iPad. When the
4 battery ran out, he left the iPad for me to charge in my office while he went off to
5 purchase chocolates, sweet and snacks for his children in Millingimbi. Next to my
6 office was a store that sold everything from PlayStations to iPhone chargers, clothes
7 to remote control cars. The shop was exclusively utilised by the Yolngu community,
8 while most of the non-Indigenous community purchased their clothes, Christmas
9 and birthday gifts online.

10

11 **7.2.1 Community Facebook Pages**

12 Yolngu who owned a vehicle sometimes visited the Gove Notice Board Facebook
13 page where the non-Indigenous community discarded or put up for sale their
14 unwanted material belongings through garage sales. This brought many Yolngu to
15 the homes of middle-class non-Indigenous people in town, as they looked for a
16 bargain. In addition to its role in advertising second-hand goods, the Gove Notice
17 Board Facebook Page was often used as a mass broadcaster. A recurring example
18 was when non-Indigenous residents had supplied or purchased alcohol for Yolngu
19 friends. The family who was affected by the drunkenness used the notice board to
20 warn non-Indigenous 'do-gooders' do not comply with such requests, as others
21 were affected by the alcohol-fuelled violence and conflicts. Interspersed between
22 Facebook users who posted, commented-on and liked the content was a significant
23 number of people who lurked without showing themselves to others.

24

1 The unseen Facebook users consumed the media posted online and read the
2 comments and were entertained by the discussions and arguments without open
3 participation. The invisible Facebook users often engaged in private conversations
4 in person or through private Facebook messages with friends outside the Gove
5 Notice Board Facebook Page. When I casually queried my non-Indigenous friends,
6 I found most of them were aware of the activities on the Gove Notice Board
7 although no over interaction was visible on the actual Facebook Page and neither
8 were they interested in exchanging their thoughts.

9

10 **7.3 FACEBOOK, KINSHIP AND PUBLIC LIFE**

11 According to Jones, an interview participant and senior elder, Yolngu added their
12 ‘poison cousin’ of the same gender on Facebook while others added ‘poison
13 cousins’ regardless of the traditional law, because there was no verbal exchange or
14 physical contact. Being friends with the ‘poison cousin’ on Facebook merely took
15 on a reflection of the offline world. For those unable to attend funerals, Yolngu
16 Facebook users shot and shared photos for family members. Photos of dancers and
17 men with bilma (clapsticks) and yidaki (didgeridoo) overcame the tyranny of
18 distance and the high costs of chartering aeroplanes for funerals that occurred on
19 large numbers in the region. During the funeral of one senior elder in 2013, there
20 were photos taken and posted from inside the inner sanctuary where ‘the body’
21 (Burbank 1994) was kept, and only certain men were allowed in. This was another
22 example of how other family members who were unable to make the journey for
23 the funeral could still be part of it, via Facebook.

24

1 According to Christofides, Muise and Desmarais (2009 p. 341), 'Facebook
2 provided a unique research environment because of its constant usage patterns and
3 its ability to connect online and offline relations'. This phenomenon was replicable
4 in the remote community setting in North East Arnhem Land where both female,
5 male and transgender teenagers and young adults have adopted its use as a result of
6 the simplification of its applications and its availability on mobile phones for a price
7 of forty to eighty dollars. Frances was a community support worker at Anglicare
8 for many years and witnessed the adoption of mobile phones and subsequently
9 social media by youth. She talked about the usability of technology that allowed for
10 young people to be in control of their entertainment and connections with people
11 through a screen in the palm of their hands. Francis said:

12 'You've got a mobile phone these days, and it opens up the whole world to the
13 Internet. The kids know how to surf the internet on their phone, they are not silly.
14 Lola said one day that all these kids were sitting outside Anglicare one day because
15 they hacked into the Internet and there were all these kids outside Anglicare they
16 were using the Internet. One had figured it out and told the others. They found all
17 these kids outside with their phones downloading songs'.

18

19 Some young adults have faced suspension and even been criminally charged from
20 information posted on Facebook (Peluchette & Karl 2008). Public profiles of young
21 people unaccustomed to privacy setting in the digital worlds display a lack of
22 concern about the consequences of their online conversations, which they assume
23 is merely an extension of their offline world. Having lived in the community for
24 more than a decade and seen kids grow into adults, Sean noticed young people using
25 Facebook to score drugs and was concerned that employers could have seen that.

1 He said: 'I knew a young man who upon employment posted a photo of his contract,
2 with the actual dollar figure of his annual salary followed by an afternoon drinks
3 photo on the same day' during business hours. Sean said some young people
4 showed off to other peers in Yirrkala and was known 'for posting photos of his
5 luxurious meals, always with a side of salad, hanging out on fishing trips with his
6 boss, on a long, expensive boat and not showing up to work on Fridays and
7 Mondays'. These employed youth are often connected to 'Big Men' as discussed
8 by Langton (2008) and were protected. The common reaction from my neighbour
9 who saw the same string of posts on Facebook commented: 'You have got an
10 iPhone and I have just got a flip phone. You think you are good because you've got
11 djama (work)?'

12

13 **7.4 ONLINE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

14 Adolescents in the community used mobile phones and social media to reinforce
15 existing relationships. A mother in her late thirties with teenage and primary school
16 age children, frowned when she recalled a recent discussion with her teenage
17 children on Facebook use, where young people in Yirrkala were 'absolutely
18 distraught' when they did not know what their peers were up to, every minute of
19 the day. Reaction to curfews and constraints to checking the Facebook wall of their
20 peers, 'was pretty scary, too' said Sam. This mother juggled work and cared for a
21 family, and was also concerned about the wider social network of their outside-of-
22 school friends. She said 'there are probably more people that they [her teenage
23 children] communicate with on Facebook than they would at school'. Christofides,
24 Muise and Desmarais (2009) found that a large number of Facebook friends were
25 interpreted as a source of high social capital. One particular young person in the

1 community was proud that he had 650 friends on Facebook and was surprised that
2 I had less than 100.

3

4 We shared our teenage stories of phone calls from fixed lines at home, describing
5 our feelings of being too embarrassed to speak into the receiver ever aware of the
6 curious ears of other family members who pretended to watch television or listen
7 to music, during an interview with Sam. She said 'It used to be such a special feeling
8 when someone you had a crush on would call you, but today these relationships and
9 communication happened without restraint', with perceived superficial intimacy.
10 Today, Sam sees the landline telephone intimacy replaced by a 'group of kids who
11 either live to cause trouble or, you know, flirt with each other' via Facebook and
12 mobile phones. The use of Facebook and Divas Chat has, however, been
13 instrumental for young people to keep in touch with family, partners and friends,
14 especially when they have to move away to another city for boarding school
15 (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais 2009). They still kept in touch to remedy the
16 longing of the heart to be on country through the exchange of stories and photos.
17 Joan, who worked at the hospital in Nhulunbuy, said 'there was a woman who was
18 admitted and couldn't go home, so she ended up listening to the funeral through her
19 phone'.

20

21 The ability to relieve stress and social anxiety became contradictory when online
22 communication enabled young people to become vulnerable to sexual predation.
23 According to Subrahmanyam and Smahel (2010), this was exacerbated when youth
24 online communication replaced communication with parents and elders. Gross
25 (2004) found that 'adolescents used instant messaging', now a consolidated service

1 within a social networking application, or social media site such as Facebook, that
2 enabled discussion and gossip which bordered on online bullying. A financial
3 trainer who facilitated workshops for Yolngu on Internet banking and the use of
4 email said that there was a similarity between issues faced by mainstream
5 Australians and Yolngu; 'I know that bullying is on there and that's definitely a
6 similarity between cultures. Yolngu suffer with that as well'.

7

8 'I guess it has made them [youth] more independent' explained Sam. Independence
9 was profanity in the Yolngu communal life which neither allowed nor tolerated
10 privacy, confidentiality and decision-making without the involvement of family and
11 elders, mainly grandmothers. Sam confirmed my interpretation in the following
12 words; 'I would say [independence] is probably not a positive thing because Yolngu
13 and Yolngu culture, things were done as a family'. Relationships with elders and
14 critical decision- makers had been severely affected at the expense of maintaining
15 online relationships and conflicts that were spread more rapidly than word of
16 mouth. According to Sam;

17 All our strong elders move out to the homelands to get away from this sort of stuff.
18 They do not see their families and their grandchildren. They get tired, they get sick,
19 and they lose or run out of energy with dealing with these issues.

20

21 Issues of conflict were made worse by the rapidity of information spreading along
22 digital networks in a community. boyd (2007) discussed the downfall of digital
23 communication and how teenagers were affected by this feature of 'amplification'.
24 She pointed out that the intrinsic limitation of privacy in social networking websites
25 enabled young people to copy words and pictures in screenshots which were

1 subsequently shared with others who were not the intended audience (boyd 2007).
2 An interview participant who travelled weekly on light aircraft to different parts of
3 Arnhem Land said that her client (from another community) had been recently
4 bullied on Facebook. She said 'a girl was writing stuff about her on Facebook, here
5 in Nhulunbuy. She was upset because things were being thrown on Facebook that
6 weren't true'.

7

8 Joan explained that in the offline world you can still take your words back, but it is
9 almost impossible online. She said 'it is true whatever you write and it is out there
10 straight away. Moreover, you can't take it back..., you can't do that when you write
11 something on Facebook, and everyone has already seen it'. She had even spoken to
12 the police about the problem of Facebook and 'even Divas Chat; there's a lot of
13 fights that's starting from comments made'. 'If I send a text or picture to so and so
14 saying you're a bitch, then many people will look at it and think it is Yuwalk (the
15 truth), that it is true and believe it' said Jenny. She heavy-heartedly recounted a
16 story of a young man who took his life over text messages. 'He'd been a sniffer;
17 he'd done his time in Don Dale (juvenile penitentiary). He came back and was on
18 the island, but the issues [bullying] continued when he got access to a phone'. The
19 attempt to isolate him from his environment and negative peer influence by his
20 family was thwarted by the pure ability of the phone to reconnect to old and abusive
21 networks, which made him vulnerable to mean and hurtful comments regarding his
22 past.

23

24 **7.5 CONSTRUCTING ONLINE IDENTITIES**

1 Online identity was constructed by sharing information such as pictures and
2 interests. Identity was not only an individual characteristic, but it was also a product
3 that consisted not only of individual posts on Facebook but also what others share
4 and say about that individual (Christofides, Muise and Desmarais 2009).

5

6 Vital developmental tasks of adolescence according to Hill (1983) are categorised
7 as identity, autonomy, intimacy and sexuality. The category as per Hill (1983) was
8 proposed as critical social variables by Subrahmanyam (2008), which included
9 media technologies that psychologically connect the physical and virtual worlds.
10 This process resulted in the exploration and construction of identity in the virtual
11 world that becomes a playground for development issues from the physical world,
12 such as identity and sexuality (Subrahmanyam 2008). Board members from a
13 particular Indigenous Corporation were ‘concerned about technology and social
14 media’ according to Jenny as well.

15

16 I was struck by the reason cited by my interview participant who explained that
17 emergent technology had the potential to counter the positive effects of culture and
18 that technology use itself erodes culture. This argument once again ran counter to
19 Deger’s (2006) position that culture acted as a guide to online communications.
20 This also formulated a much weaker argument when I thought of the intrinsic ability
21 of Yolngu warriors, who ‘gathered’ (a specifically gendered task) trepang for the
22 opportunity to hunt for turtles and dugong on dugout canoes (Thomson & Petersen
23 1983) during the Macassan trade era, as an episode of cultural erosion. Here, culture
24 did not act as a guide, where men performed a female gendered task of collecting

1 tre pang but used it as an opportunity to hunt. This transactional behaviour was
2 evident in many aspects of Yolngu life.

3

4 Research by Subrahmanyam (2008) had proven to be pertinent in defining the
5 discussion of youth online communication and relationships. Similar to the
6 concerned “Board members” of the Aboriginal Corporation in North East Arnhem
7 Land, the first concern was about the “nature and quality of online and offline
8 relationship” and secondly “whether the effects are positive or negative”
9 (Subrahmanyam 2008). Josephine, who grew up as a teenager with a mobile phone
10 had seen that;

11 On Divas Chat and Facebook, [that] [you] can actually make fake profiles, like
12 using fake name, photo, so you don’t know who you’re talking to like if you're
13 messaging someone, they could say bad stuff to you, and you don't know who it is.
14 It might have an impact on you. Like you feel upset about what they're saying.

15

16 I discussed with Josephine a few more critical things that puzzled me about Yolngu
17 reactions in the face of online gossip and bullying. I specifically wanted to know
18 how young people coped with negative comments and online bullying. I cited the
19 example of ‘blocking’ people online. By using blocking mechanisms, the person in
20 question will never be able to use that online profile to see my Facebook profile and
21 communicate with me. They could even be reported and be banned by Facebook.
22 Josephine said ‘young people don’t block or unfriend. I don’t know’; unsure of
23 whether this is common sense, only uncommon amongst Yolngu youth, as she had
24 grown up with a white father. She continued to explain ‘I think some have worked
25 out how to do that. Or I think they close their profile down and make another one’.

1 The act of closing down online profiles seemed to me like a digital act of suicide.
2 The young people used this opportunity to start fresh in cyberspace after a period
3 of 'mourning'.

4

5 **7.6 COUNTERING GALKA VIA FACEBOOK WITH THREATENING** 6 **STATUS UPDATES**

7 The spiritual powers of certain individuals and sorcery or Galka (Reid 1983) had
8 consistently emerged in my discussions. There was a man whose son was born to a
9 Yolngu woman from a town in West Arnhem Land who defied place and time in
10 the interest of protecting his children and grandchildren. He could foresee illness
11 and counter the effects of sorcery with just a mobile phone call. He called his son
12 when his youngest grandchild fell ill and told him to hang a piece of cloth above
13 the door of their house to prevent evil spirits and cure his illness.

14

15 I often listened to such stories of power and influence. These were stories of
16 amazing Yolngu with spiritual powers, and even though I struggled to accept the
17 idea of sorcery, I realised that my presence as a non-Yolngu acted as a form of
18 protection for any Yolngu in my presence because Galka only affects Yolngu. The
19 passengers in my car, during a drive from the Club back to Birritjimi on one
20 occasion, claimed that certain parts of the winding road from town to Birritjimi was
21 haunted, but they were safe as they travelled in a car that belonged to a non-Yolngu.
22 After a long night of dancing with youth from Yirrkala and Birritjimi, after we
23 enjoyed a rare moment of stress-free partying, we found ourselves outside the Club
24 with no taxi to getting back to Birritjimi. I said: 'I'd love a walk back home even
25 though it is almost ten kilometres'. I also posted these exact words on Facebook

1 and received a 'like' from my friend standing a few metres away with his phone in
2 his hand. He immediately reached back into his pocket for his Samsung Galaxy S4
3 and called his friend who was a taxi driver. His smile disappeared from his face and
4 his speech no longer slurred but urgent.

5

6 'I thought you were happy with the walk back to Birritjimi because you just 'liked'
7 my post on Facebook' asked him. He explained that a 'like' can merely be an
8 acknowledgement or a 'ma' – an 'okay' or a 'yes' but not an agreement or an
9 enthusiastic reaction, which would have been a 'manymak'. No one dared to be
10 walking about at night between town and Birritjimi. Between the lights of the
11 refinery and the streetlights in town, the road to Birritjimi was Elm Street for
12 Yolngu. Jonny said to me that if I ever saw something suspicious, I should say;
13 Yesu Gare! (Jesus Lord) and this will chase Galka away.

14

15 A Solomon Islander with dreadlocks, who offered to buy a round of drinks, joined
16 my friend and me at the pub. He was muscular and had a physique built from
17 resilience and a tan from working all day outdoors. The voice of my Islander friend
18 sounded familiar although for one whole year we avoided eye contact, suspicious
19 of one another, a behaviour that even I, an open and friendly character, succumbed
20 to in the latter part of my fieldwork. We spoke freely of the positive power of Galka
21 for two hours amidst the coming and going of clients at the Walkabout Hotel. I
22 noted the theme of the conversation was centred on romantic relationships and how
23 Galka was used as a protection for men from jealous wives and girlfriends. My
24 Islander friend assured us that if we ever encountered any Galka problems, that he
25 could get a hold of a stronger or more potent version of Galka. My new friend

1 assured me that he knew someone in the Solomon Islands who could organise
2 everything, even the death of another human being. Getting someone killed through
3 sorcery was not uncommon. My Yolngu friend smiled, and quietly sipped his drink
4 in agreement. They were both cautious about what they posted on Facebook and
5 were slightly concerned about how young people today were using Galka to
6 threaten others in the community for fun.

7

8 Facebook was a useful tool to produce threats and warnings that directly and
9 indirectly assisted the user to assert and proclaim their feelings. Threats were made
10 on Facebook towards individuals and groups. It was written in code, understood by
11 the people within the social network with access to the events that led to such
12 outbursts. Threats and warnings were given with such conviction as though
13 speaking directly to a perpetrator only via a public posting on Facebook as
14 recounted to me by a male interview participant:

15 Whoever this person is who's trying to call from unknown, you're a mother
16 fu...king asshole who's got no better things to do but just want to watch
17 pornography, I tell you ... you better be ready when I find out about you cause you
18 are gonna be properly embarrassed by me in front of your mother and father.

19

20 Without deliberation, a few individuals took matters into their own hands,
21 crowdsourced solutions and tracked down perpetrators using Facebook. These were
22 individuals who did not believe in sorcery:

23 04** ***** Dhuwal yolku number find this person and let me know because of
24 the thread (threat) everybody every here in Galiwin'ku. If you find this person f&f
25 on my list, inbox me straight away ok.

1

2 It was hard to find some objectivity or procedural reason as discussed by Reid
3 (1983) in the attempt to understand when prank calls were just pranked calls and
4 when they were from Galka. Reid (1983) confirmed this lack of pattern in Yirrkala
5 several decades ago, and with that, I decided not to delve deeper into differentiating
6 the process of Galka naming.

7

8 The status updates on Facebook reads as though the person was speaking directly
9 to the perpetrator. The witnesses (the Facebook friends) although not visible, are
10 palpable. It was similar to walking on the street in full view of the supposedly non-
11 observing public, and proceeded to persecute and accuse in words and threats as per
12 Burbank's Fighting Women (1994):

13 Get a life low life dogs you mob wait think I'm dumb I'll do it another way black
14 magic so you black low mother fucking dogs will die from now on if you talk shit
15 to me will make you cripple black magic way this time if your family talk shit to
16 they will be on my list as well no jokes want to be six feet under try me all it takes
17 is one phone call fucking not joking.

18

19 The mobile phone number, as mentioned earlier was a commodity to be protected
20 from exploiters using Galka, or just those looking to amuse themselves in a
21 community where young people were afflicted with 'boredom'. Being careful of
22 Galka and announcing this on Facebook was protective, as though Facebook itself
23 was a talisman: 'Can't believe My lil brother L2# is Drunk n his Just. Asking me to
24 book Taxi For him to go to Yirrkala Like Honestly. That place is Full of Shit Galka
25 everywhere'. The use of a public noticeboard like Facebook was a tool to show

1 transparency and become accountable lest the all-surveying eye of the community
2 made a judgmental statement and accused the silent 'lurker' of perpetrating a foul
3 act.

4

5 **7.7 REFLEXIVITY ON FACEBOOK**

6 The protagonists in this digital extension of the traditional remote community
7 regularly reflected on the events and even what they described as their cultural
8 conservatism. They posed questions, disagreed with controversial status updates or
9 'liking' the messy exchange as a sign of solidarity with their ascribed alliances
10 (Rowse 2012). In a Facebook public message that addressed the community in
11 English, a young man explained how technology was beneficial. He was tired of all
12 the negative comments and reminded every one of the positive uses of Facebook
13 and mobile technology. He said:

14 You can ring family and friends or use digital technology for phone banking.
15 Using it to video calls, live stream teaching friends, students, Government people,
16 sports, culture, leisure and many more from place to place, out bush to the city,
17 country to country and more.

18

19 He concluded that the negative aspects of mobile technology and Facebook use
20 were correlated to young people who were: 'too carried away, locked in their
21 bedroom, using it to send text messages that abuse people'. Children were raised
22 entirely autonomously when compared with non-Indigenous children in the
23 community. They often had access to mobile phones when playing and were
24 capable of accessing illicit content on the Internet:

1 Kids watching porn of naked images, xxx sex videos, behind closed door, post
2 images of themselves, or underage young kids have naked sex and sending it on text,
3 not knowing that image or videos can end anywhere in the cyber [cyber] world, or
4 other people that hurts feelings of family and members of our community.

5

6 Adults were often asleep during the day, as old people and children were given
7 room to sleep at night in overcrowded houses. Sleeping in shifts was the norm in
8 some remote communities. Despite the lack of personal space, young people, even
9 children used every available opportunity and explored sexuality and their sexual
10 fantasies through mobile phones. Without the availability of physical space and
11 privacy, young people were forced to get creative and used technology to transfer
12 their physical selves into digital images and become cyborgs (Haraway 1987) who
13 extended their sensual pleasures and exploration of the physical body into the more
14 convenient space between two mobile phones.

15

16 Adolescents already disadvantaged by a lack of adequate housing, had to act with
17 extreme caution lest they offend the all-surveilling eye of a society enwrapped in the
18 ups and downs of a communal life: 'Be careful what you say in social media,
19 because no matter what, we live in a hypersensitive society in which people are just
20 looking for any reason to be offended and make a huge deal about nothing' were
21 Joe's comments during our first interview. The voices of young people sometimes
22 brought a political tone of the oppressed, fuelled by the discourse in the media on
23 the prime ministers plan for education:

24 School is from 9 to 5. School on Saturdays. Taking away all Centrelink benefits.

25 Can't drink until 21 * can't drive until 21 * taking away aboriginal culture from

1 schools tony abbot this poxy ngarmadine think he good lil
2 yarlinga!!&#copyNpaste if you think this not Right!

3

4 The feeling of confusion was often used to describe the state of affairs in the
5 community. The discussion of non-Yolngu people handling the affairs of the
6 community was always met with suspicion:

7

8 Feeling confused because this is run by freaks who thinks they know what Yolngu
9 people needs. But really all they are here for is their own interest to build their
10 houses by money taken away from Yolngu communities which leave Yolngu even
11 more confused. WHEN is THIS nonsense GOING to STOP!

12

13 The monitoring eye was cast widely upon all members of the community, using
14 Facebook to express disappointment and frustration on the part of their fellow
15 Yolngu for the lack of solidarity and support (Darvell, Walsh & White 2011).
16 Yolngu youth struggled in their daily lives negotiating relationships whilst being
17 afflicted with gossip according to Sam who read this post out loud to me:

18 Sick and tired of dumb Yolngu people from still the same just all good at talking
19 shit about other people and some got no jobs just play cards 24/7 and always gotta
20 be so fucking jealous and competitive ungrateful bastards get a real-life lazy idiots.

21

22 A young person was concerned about the welfare of young people and wanted the
23 conditions in which they grow, learn and play to be conducive to 'live long and
24 strong', saying:

1 Why little young kids smoking & drinking in young time, they just killing they
2 selves they won't see they grandchildren in the future or even live long & strong,
3 no wonder some young people dying too quick because they got no good.

4

5 But the solutions to these problems lie not in addressing them, as a young person
6 who grew up with such poor living conditions, decided that retreat seemed like the
7 best option:

8

9 Gotta bad feeling diz house got problem & the people itself has problem also wish
10 I was a million air [millionaire] so I could fly anywhere leave all diz shit behind
11 me or go up 2the moon &live – they said therez life up in marz why not piss off
12 that way & start a new life or make friendz with whoever I bump in 2 which I could
13 that 4bloody real?

14

15 This feeling of despair was interchangeable with feelings of belonging and nostalgia
16 for community life. Many young people choose to remain in their communities even
17 though they completed their secondary schooling in Brisbane, Townsville,
18 Melbourne, Sydney, Cairns or Darwin.

19

20 **7.8 JEALOUSING**

21 In this context, 'jealousing' is not to be interpreted exclusively as 'jealousy' from
22 Burbank (1994, p. 57) but is also complimented with the works of Langton (2008)
23 and Davis (2004). In *Fighting Women* the word 'jealousing' is linked to aggression
24 in women's conversation, which at times it seemed to be used as a synonym
25 (Burbank 1994). The interpretation that I made was based on an in-depth interview

1 and follow-up discussions with a mother and grandmother who worked to improve
2 opportunities for young people in the community. In this context, the word
3 'jealousing' referred to a feeling of being threatened by potential future partners,
4 past partners and infidelity on the part of a current romantic partner, which resulted
5 in the prolonged antagonism between two individuals. Jamie, who was involved in
6 women's empowerment programs in the community confirmed that 'jealousing'
7 paralysed youth development: 'Oh jealousing is a death. Yeah oh for sure' she said.

8

9 It was during the Garma Festival in 2013 when I bumped into a young man in town
10 with a mobile phone and earplugs, who requested a ride to another community. I
11 complied and asked him about his plans to attend Garma when I noticed that he was
12 unsure and looked distressed. I said to him that I noticed only a handful of Gumatj
13 and Galpu youth, mostly male and female elders including their grandchildren were
14 present at the Festival. I wondered where the majority of young people were and
15 decided to lay out a hypothesis and watched his reaction. I said 'maybe no young
16 people come because of miyalk (women) and dhirammu (men) too much
17 jealousing?' He nodded with a smile and agreed that it is better for young people to
18 avoid such public interactions in order to prevent assumptions made of young men
19 and women being unfaithful or flirting with the opposite sex. I later confirmed this
20 observation with another interview participant who also worked as a cultural
21 advisor and was a strong bilingual leader in the community. She had struggled to
22 work alongside men due to the 'jealousing' from her unemployed husband. Jamie
23 also recounted a conversation she had not long ago during a follow-up interview.
24 She had been training young girls to be ready for work, and after a few days of
25 training, a young girl came into training looking unlike she did on the first day.

1 Jamie asked: 'Why are you not washing'? And the girl answered: 'Because my
2 husband is jealousing me. He thinks when I come here combing my hair, I'm trying
3 to pick up'.

4

5 Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009) found that the high-frequency use of
6 Facebook amongst young couples predicted jealousy-related feelings and
7 behaviours such as regularly checking a partners profile and being suspicious of
8 their online activity. According to Susan, who paid close attention to the dynamics
9 of mobile phones and social media in her community for the past 15 years
10 contributed a comment that again clarified how technology is a conduit of a social
11 issue. She said that 'jealousy and the thought that you will meet someone, it can
12 happen to anyone, any age, before [mobile phones and social media] it was
13 opportunistic, now social media and mobile phones makes it much easier.'

14

15 The police in town often received complaints about relationships that fluctuated
16 between aggression, violence and reconciliation, due to the poisonous attitude of
17 jealousing one's partner: Susan recalled that she often noticed romantic partners
18 who said; 'Just finished from talking on da phone with my man gana miss him so
19 so much gana love him so much no matter wat' after the police had taken him away
20 for jealousy related domestic violence complaints. The online surveillance was
21 often enabled by an exchange of Facebook passwords during the trust-building
22 phase between romantic partners and used as a display of loyalty. A friend of a
23 study participant reported that a young mother who just delivered a baby spied on
24 her partner and posted this statement for him and his family and friends to see: 'I

1 hate you. Did you forget that I know your password ya fuck face, go for fuck them
2 little sluts because I don't want you near me'?

3

4 In the event of a falling-out in the relationship, when the trust was violated, private
5 and confidential collections of media were divulged online as relationship and
6 jealousy porn. When relationship porn as status updates on Facebook was fuelled
7 by online comments and the ridicule, the matter often became a family violence
8 issue for the police who struggled to enforce court orders between couples. A young
9 interview participant once recalled her words that she posted online after an incident
10 with her partner: 'At police station making a statement for my partner that being
11 threaten and cheated on me because he got jealous of my career and what I have
12 achieve in my life and trying to pull me down'!

13

14

15

16 **7.9 THE STRESS FROM FACEBOOK**

17 The Walkabout Tavern, otherwise known as 'The Cage' by long-time residents,
18 was an accurate description of this watering hole. It had seen young people erupt
19 into pub brawls that defied the strong police force and screaming girlfriends who
20 pleaded to end the heartless pounding of a fist against flesh, and an eye for an eye.

21 The courtyard was arranged with seven to eight tables, all stainless steel and rust
22 proof and made in a factory not far from where my maternal grandmother lived in
23 Malaysia. In the centre was a circular bench with a shrub growing in the middle to
24 soften the hard and aggressive feeling of a remote mining town pub filled with a
25 history of violence.

1

2 Only a month ago, a particular sergeant on night duty offered me a lift back home
3 in the police wagon in the interest of my safety. I recognised the danger I had put
4 myself in, but I preferred the walk and the chance to participate and observe in the
5 post-pub, crawl back home. I was doing my usual visual count of who was around.
6 There were the usual faces of young people I knew. Earlier that night I observed
7 some who sang traditional songs and used two index fingers at the table to replace
8 the 'bilma' or clapsticks. A woman stood up and danced a step that only men
9 performed. It reminded me of a James Brown move, with both feet, offbeat, that
10 twisted outwardly while the toes planted firmly on the ground and bent elbows. The
11 dance choreographed the search for wild honey by following the wild bees back to
12 their nest in the forest.

13

14 The DJ's music fifteen metres away was drowned by the jubilant voices of young
15 people who celebrated their culture with alcohol, songs and dances, as they would
16 have celebrated whilst being watched by Macassans curing 'trepan' (sea
17 cucumber) and cooking 'berata' (rice) with salt and tamarind juice. Amongst the
18 greeting and acknowledgements that followed immediately after my arrival in the
19 'arena' of the pub, a young girl in her early twenties with short hair, shiny black
20 skin and big eyes almost filled by big black pupils came up to me and said: 'Hi
21 Kishan'. She was the only Yolngu who said my name when others called me wawa
22 (brother). We met on my first visit to North East Arnhem Land. She had always
23 been quiet but confident, and a capable young girl until poached by a new
24 organisation in town and based on her reflections was left to her own devices

1 without sufficient support and mentoring. She said to me, 'Five dollar Kishan, just
2 five dollar or I will kill myself'.

3

4 I managed to excuse myself from the situation and found her aunt quietly playing
5 a game on her Samsung flip phone. She heard my story while taking a few short
6 glances at me before returning her attention to the video game. She said that there
7 was stress everywhere and stress contributed to the misery of Yolngu people
8 especially the adolescents and that stress had now migrated online, especially onto
9 Facebook. Having heard what I recounted to her of my conversation with her niece,
10 I mentioned that she (her niece) could no longer handle the 'jealousing' she faced
11 from her extended family both offline and online. Her life was unstable, and she
12 was full of hurt and disappointment over the words of her cousins. Her aunt thought
13 about it for a minute, finished her drink and asked me to take them both home.

14 There was no discussion to be held, and no intervention that could have been
15 brainstormed for seemed to us was something systemic. A simple problem
16 identification exercise and labelling such incidents as bullying would not have
17 indeed captured the extent of the issue. There were tension and different
18 interpretations of the meaning of clan hood, bravery, support and empowerment.
19 As all these values may see identical to European values, the hierarchy and
20 compromise of practising these values what was appeared to my study participants
21 and me as different from dominant culture studies.

22

23 **7.9.1 Cyberbullying on Facebook**

24 Yolngu perceived written and verbal words as the truth or 'Yuwalk'. A Facebook
25 status update, a comment, and a chat on Divas Chat including photos and videos

1 could be Yuwalk. When a statement was made, it was accepted as the truth and that
2 the event has or will come true, without a doubt. In the words of James, 'if I sent a
3 text or picture to [someone] and saying "you're a bitch" – then many people will
4 look at it and think it is Yuwalk, that it is true and believe it'.

5

6 When a social media and mobile phone content became a catalyst for conflict,
7 family members of the teenagers effected often became embroiled in the conflict.
8 'Teenage mother won't necessarily [get involved], and tend to isolate themselves'
9 according to Jenny, but for the others, they think that they;

10 Have kinship and [they're] sharing this with my Gurrutu (kinship), and Gurrutu
11 has responsibility to support me. So they will take sides to this bullying text. And
12 we're gonna take your side as a family because this is Yuwalk. They are sending
13 this around, and we believe it. And we're really upset by it.

14 According to Frances: "A lot of fights now start due to social media. Now they'll
15 take a screenshot, (a controversy which) someone has already deleted and go show
16 everyone'.

17

18 According to Susan, young people will take on the perpetrator as a show of
19 manhood and solidarity. She explained:

20 For boys, it is proving yourself to your brothers, everybody, your group, your
21 friends, especially your brothers. I notice the first time people start fighting, they're
22 at that age where they need to prove to their brothers that I can man up.

23

24 Joe's nephew had shown him a video taken via mobile phone shared around the
25 community via Bluetooth. Joe said: 'When you watch a video with people actually

1 punching and stuff, I don't know why they watch it. I think it is to tease the family
2 of the person who won the fight, and they think that's cool'.

3

4 Communication is a sensitive practice in the Yolngu culture, and online conflict has
5 the potential to damage the Yolngu community because of its ability to be
6 misconstrued, altered, amplified and shared rapidly. Joe also said that young people
7 were taking risks with bullying when 'Family relationships are so important to
8 Yolngu ... and the communication that can occur and the problems that Facebook
9 can cause, they just don't understand those risks'. Steven explained that due to a
10 lack of activities and engagement with young people, they found detrimental ways
11 to express their feelings and used creative but fake online profiles. He said;

12 'On Divas Chat, and on Facebook, you can actually make fake profiles, like using
13 fake name, photo, so you don't really know who you're talking to like if you're
14 messaging someone, they could say bad stuff to you, and you don't know who it is.
15 So it might have an impact on you. Like you feel upset about what they're saying'.

16

17 Some of these conflicts also happened between geographical locations. Jones
18 recalled that a significant conflict that began between families became a
19 geopolitical tension between two communities. He recalled how Divas Chat
20 referred by Jones as AirG was eventually used by community members to settle an
21 'argument [between] People from Elcho with people from Ramo, all the time'.

22

23 Another issue came to the attention of a few study participants which involved
24 amateur pornography being posted on a website by young people from North East
25 Arnhem Land. A senior female elder from Yirrkala said in a follow-up interview:

1

2 I had a discussion with you about a website (www.ufym.com) that is a concern for
3 us, and it involved a couple of local girls. If their brother had seen that, who knows
4 what the consequences would have been. Back in the day, they'd probably get
5 bashed. But it may be ignored now, but they would still be brothers who would be
6 extremely offended or embarrassed. And it was rumoured that the people in the
7 clip who were doing this were not right skin either.

8

9

10 **7.10 REASSURANCE SEEKING ON FACEBOOK**

11 According to the work of Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) and Carlson et al.
12 (2015) regarding online communication and relationships, adolescents were using
13 digital tools and social media to primarily reinforce existing relationships, both with
14 friends and romantic partners. From my study and discussions with Indigenous
15 youth both formally and informally, I observed that the youth were integrating these
16 tools with traditional law and culture. The need to integrate social media, especially
17 social networking sites like Facebook, came from a need to create privacy in their
18 overcrowded surroundings. Sites like Facebook betrayed the young person into
19 thinking that they had found privacy online, and this was a suitable environment to
20 explore sexual identity and relationships.

21

22 The perception on the part of some Yolngu youth, of relative privacy and personal
23 space in the online world, was misinformed or not informed at all of the covert
24 limitations of privacy as discussed by boyd (2007). Regarding social media, boyd
25 (2007) explained that words and photos could be copied or altered and shared with

1 people who were not the intended audiences, an act was done out of trust and respect
2 but easily betrayed upon an event of conflict and jealousy.

3

4 A girl in her teen was quoted by her mother during an interview where she said
5 'who writes that shit on Facebook' when she described an example how some
6 extremes of behaviour or deviation from the norm, played out in online community
7 life. The mother urged me to look closely. She said, 'you'll notice that on Facebook
8 with comments' pausing to find the correct words, 'you notice the status updates
9 [on Facebook] that young people write and you wonder, where they're head at, you
10 know even at home'. Embedding her example into the home environment, the
11 mother wanted me to understand that the physical idea of home and family, often
12 in overcrowded housing meant very little to a young person. Vulnerable youth often
13 felt emotionally and mentally isolated in the community.

14

15 Clerkin, Smith and Hames (2013) assert that adolescents were attracted to
16 engagement with peers over the Internet instead of face to face interactions because
17 it provided elements of social interactions that included self-disclosure and identity
18 exploration as critical needs in their development. Young people with lower self-
19 esteem considered Facebook to be an attractive means of disclosing personal
20 information (Forest & Wood 2012). Facebook has the potential for a positive
21 outcome for those who struggle interpersonally, but when used ineffectively may
22 confer harmful long-term vulnerability.

23

24 In between the walls of houses plastered with repairs and refurbishments, amongst
25 tents in the backyards and dwellings beyond economic repair, in chronically

1 overcrowded houses; it was hard to imagine how young people could feel lonely.
2 My Facebook wall consistently contained posts of young people who sought
3 reassurance and drew attention to the possibility that there was indeed a sense of
4 loneliness felt by some teenagers and young adults. Jenny, a generous interviewee
5 with her time and knowledge was emphatic to my questions and was kind enough
6 to explain the situation. She had raised three teenagers and supported them through
7 their turbulent years. She said: 'they [teenagers] have a perception or maybe trust
8 issue' as she turned her gaze away from me towards her partner who sat with us and
9 drank coffee. This was a sensitive topic because 'trust' was taken for granted in
10 communal Indigenous societies as being a natural phenomenon, an essential
11 element of communal living. She said that young people were 'not sure whom they
12 can talk to about their issues'. Jenny always thought it was just her perception and
13 doubted her gut instinct on this slight malfunction of the perfect communal society
14 often romanticised by mainstream Australia. She said: 'after twenty-two years I
15 now feel the opposite. There's never any privacy. I felt that there's no such thing
16 within a Yolngu context of privacy because you just never get a minute on your
17 own'. Being on your own is considered abnormal. Jenny generously guided my
18 thinking to conclude that young people still felt isolated despite being surrounded
19 by family and kin because they felt unable to talk about their concerns and issues.

20

21 Clerkin, Smith and Hames (2013) suggest that individuals who were challenged
22 with interpersonal communication may benefit from the Internet as an intermediate
23 solution towards becoming more connected and engaged with others. Bonetti,
24 Campbell and Gillmore (2010) found that children and adolescents who complained
25 of being lonely, and in the words of Jenny, 'I feel so alone, and I feel like I've got

1 no one I could talk to', were according to Clerkin, Smith and Hames (2013) more
2 likely to use the Internet for communication about personal and intimate themes.

3

4 Opportunities for children and adolescents to explore and fulfil their critical needs
5 in identity works through the Internet (Clerkin, Smith & Hames 2013) were evident
6 in Sam's words; 'That's right, girls have been taking photos of their fanny'. This
7 seemed to have become a normal part of youth life and according to Sean's
8 experience, he observed that 'they [teenagers] think they're sending [a private
9 photo] to a boyfriend or someone they fancy but its posted to the [Facebook] wall'
10 of 'young teenage girls putting pictures of themselves wearing pretty much nothing'
11 as a form of reassurance-seeking (Evraire & Dozois 2011).

12

13 Lee also observed that 'a lot of them [youth] would look up fights in communities,
14 fights in Numbulwar', similar to Sam's nine-year-old who was on YouTube doing
15 'a bit of Yolngu Boying, filming fights, teasing'. The term Yolngu Boying became
16 popularised by a famous feature film produced in Yirrkala with local actors who
17 showcased the turbulent lives of young men ushered by their elders to turn to
18 tradition, culture and law in order to find health and wellbeing. It was a visual
19 ethnographic response to the rising rates of petrol sniffing in the community. The
20 young men were depicted in the film as cheeky, adventurous and playful, causing
21 trouble to the ranges, parents and policy but all for the sake of an excellent
22 adventure and being close to land.

23

24 My own observations agreed with the research findings from Gentile, Twenge and
25 Freeman et al. (2012) and Gonzales and Hancock (2011) who demonstrated that the

1 most prolific and ardent producers of status updates and media content, spent more
2 time on Facebook, and were young people who had higher levels of self-esteem in
3 the offline world. This was not hard to understand, as these young people were often
4 exposed to various opportunities, evident in their position or status in the
5 community and their influence in the broader community through work, sports and
6 their connections to influential families. Many young people waxed and waned
7 from the effects of perceived social support on Facebook or Divas Chat (Evraire &
8 Dozois 2011). Young people received a response and support that often began with
9 a 'Like' and ended with a positive comment. However, this interaction rarely
10 replicated itself in the offline world and forced young people to become addicted to
11 the virtual social support available on social media. This phenomenon can be
12 associated to the research findings of Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006), in
13 which the Internet use of young people studied as being conducive to increased
14 levels of self-esteem and perceived support from the social environment. Evraire
15 and Dozois (2011) strongly suggest that the perceived support from social ties was
16 a result of excessive reassurance-seeking and was particularly challenging to the
17 maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships. Negative feedback can
18 sometimes be the result of the absence of feedback or comments from a post.

19

20 According to the opinion of several vital informants, excessive Facebook
21 reassurance-seeking may be a result of a lack of activities and targeted services for
22 youth and teenagers. This has had a negative impact on identity constructs relevant
23 for interpersonal functioning, including self-esteem (Clerkin, Smith & Hames
24 2013). It is well summed up in the words of an interviewee whom one day posted
25 his feelings of disappointment from the lack of online engagement with his peers.

1 He said; ‘not feeling very positive might just deactivate my account until whenever
2 I’m ready’.

3

4 Towards the New Year celebrations at the Arnhem Club in 2014, a Yolngu friend
5 sent me a text. It said: ‘This year I feel really empty inside me. I know it’s not me
6 someone help me find me a better home to spend time away from Yolngu people –
7 away from NT’. I found out later from him that no-one commented back and
8 provided any verbal support offline and was intrigued by the lack of responses from
9 his peers and extended family. Young people sought reassurance within their online
10 social networks as they explored identity, sexuality and relationships. In Clerkin,
11 Smith and Hames (2013) the relationship between Facebook reassurance-seeking
12 and self-esteem was heavily implicated with two other interpersonal functioning
13 (Van Orden et al. 2010 in Clerkin et al. 2013):

- 14 • Thwarted belongingness (e.g. I am alone); and
- 15 • Perceived burdensomeness (e.g. I am a burden).

16

17 The combination of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness has the
18 potential to be incredibly damaging when experienced conjointly. According to Van
19 Orden et al. (2010), they may produce the desire for suicide. In a meta-analysis,
20 Evraire and Dozois (2011) concluded that negative feedback as a result of excessive
21 reassurance-seeking or a combination of both was detrimental to the maintenance
22 of healthy interpersonal relationships. Glimpses of young people’s status updates
23 on Facebook became a reflection of their offline self, in which the path to
24 depression was not far, according to Sowislo and Orth (2013). Sam’s opinion
25 reflected the findings of Clerkin, Smith and Hames (2013) and Van Orden et al.

1 (2010) when she said ‘I keep on flicking back to that suicide because I know that
2 actually has been the part of bullying and has been the part of cyberbullying’. Jenny
3 suspected that it was the lack of meaningful relationships between young people
4 and that they ‘got no-one to talk to. Yes, they are lost. That’s a term they would use.
5 I’m a lost boy. It’s really heartbreaking’.

6

7 Some online public posts that were read out to me by my key informants, on the
8 other hand, pleaded to be left alone: ‘Everyone is making everything worst it makes
9 me not wanna live anymore so everyone should just mind their own business youse
10 ain't helping at all just Fuck off everyone’ while others threatened to end their lives:
11 ‘Hopefully, I will be resting in peace goodbye everyone if I won’t be online
12 tomorrow that means I’m dead if I go online tomorrow that means I have good
13 news’. Calls and cries for reassurance and attention as public status updates on
14 Facebook, as relationship porn Bluetoothed to unintended audiences, as videos of
15 fights on YouTube from teenagers and young adults lying on their bare mattresses
16 and trying to drown the noise of an overcrowded house with few resources and little
17 opportunity was a tragic state of life, it confused me and contradicted the
18 mainstream imagination of egalitarian societies.

19

20 Unlike other young people, they don’t have pictures of family holidays, photos of
21 their childhood, riding their first bike, framed photos of siblings and cousins on the
22 wall, family videos of their first steps or graduating from high school. In this chaos,
23 the technology kept improvising, refining its hook on young people, preying on
24 their vulnerability during a state of identity and sexuality exploration. The social
25 networking sites improved, it became faster, and easier to access via simple phones

1 (not smartphones), and created more opportunities for escape for marginalised
2 young people with challenges of low self-esteem and social isolation.

3

4 **7.11 DISCUSSION**

5 Kral (2010) opined that remote Indigenous youth encountered a greater plurality of
6 lifestyles than generally perceived by policymakers and the broader Australian
7 society (Carlson et al. 2015). Based on the findings of my study, young people
8 actively resisted the cultural conservatism and social inequality in their localities.

9 As exemplified by the opportunities to break kinship rules such as talking to poison
10 cousins and engaging with relationships online that are not sanctioned by traditional
11 law. Such acts of dissent have been accounted for in studies conducted by
12 Aboriginal researchers in social media to signify the ability of young people to
13 reflect and critique through the performative avenues awarded by mobile
14 technology and social media in ways that are non-confronting (Carlson et al. 2015).
15 The young generation in Yirrkala was on a social innovation project that was
16 temporal, where reality was moulded and re-shaped, no specific end goal in mind
17 but an unfolding journey towards solidarity and subsidiarity. Action in cyberspace
18 appeared to be a performative discourse through the use of videos, likes, comments
19 and shares with Yolngu values being the centre of reflection and reconsideration.

20

21 Young people redefined their value systems as a result of globalisation by using
22 visual references of such practices as alcohol consumption and peer reactions to this
23 on Facebook, to turn behaviours that were culturally unacceptable into positive
24 behaviours (Buellens & Schepers 2013). Continued reference to alcohol use among
25 young people and the positive messages they associated with it, such as being

1 sociable and having fun overturned previous messages about the inappropriateness
2 of young people drinking (Chenhall and Senior 2017). The re-defining of
3 Aboriginal youth practices in the context of socialisation associated with drinking
4 alcohol and posting images on Facebook can be quite inspirational to the general
5 Aboriginal sociality who have struggled with stereotypes of alcoholism and the
6 inability to drink in moderation. Facebook, according to Moreno et al. (2013) was
7 a website considered to be an influencer of user attitudes, intentions and behaviours
8 and therefore contradicted the argument of Deger's (2006) that culture acted as a
9 guide for online communications. Youth in Yirkala were reshaping and
10 remoulding past stereotypes and creating a new meaning for their behaviours
11 without culture acting as a guide.

12

13 In addition to the community ties reinforcing and negative stereotypes challenging
14 capabilities of social media, Facebook also became accepted by Indigenous youth
15 in remote communities in North East Arnhem Land as a platform for monitoring
16 and surveillance. It could be seen that the use of mobile technology and social media
17 supplemented the surveillance activities that were usual in small communities,
18 where individuality and antisocial behaviour were often considered as suspect
19 (Senior and Chenhall 2008). Frequent monitoring and surveillance have brought
20 with it emotions of jealousy, anger, a schism within the families and as a result,
21 brought a lot of stress to the already marginalised community. Unlike the situation
22 for non-Indigenous youth, self-esteem did not significantly predict daily Facebook
23 partner monitoring activities, but from observation and consultation with interview
24 participants, it was the general community consensus that online public fighting and

1 'jealousing' between romantic partners and friends were part of normative
2 behaviour (Senior, Helmer and Chenhall 2016).

3

4 From this discussion, it becomes evident that social media can be seen as cultural
5 appropriation that accentuated past practices of lateral violence (Langton 2008)
6 whilst simultaneously providing the means for the escape of young people from
7 their relative poverty, gerontocracy and the lack of opportunities and resources. The
8 reassurance-seeking and 'jealousing' via social media was a precursor to social
9 isolation that young people struggled with. In the next chapter, I will discuss why
10 and how, despite the known troubles and challenges that stem from mobile phone
11 and social media use, these tools continued to be adopted and appropriated with
12 speed, confidence and hope for a renewed Yolngu community.

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21 **CHAPTER 8 - YOLNGU'S 'OVERCOAT'**

22

23 *'We all came out from Gogol's Overcoat'* – Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)

24

25 **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

1 I took my usual route in Yirrkala that allowed me to experience community life
2 without creating suspicion. I drove past the Laynhapuy Homelands Office, the
3 Yamuna Workshop and the Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation Office on my left.
4 On my right were the Yirrkala Arts Centre and the supermarket. The houses of
5 traditional owners were interspersed between ‘unknown’ houses and homes of
6 Yolngu I never met and had no idea of their story. In Yirrkala, there were traditional
7 owners, ‘bungguwa’ (leaders), and commoners. The ruling class and the community
8 members shared the land with little social mobility.

9

10 I may have noticed a subtle pattern of affluence amongst a few members of the
11 Yolngu community and much poverty in the majority. There were, for example,
12 some young people who were supported by their parents to attend private colleges
13 in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. These were students from influential, educated
14 and financially stable families, while others orbited around the Yirrkala primary
15 and Nhulunbuy high school. The artificiality of Yirrkala was manufactured when
16 Yolngu clans were manipulated and persuaded to reside in one geographic location;
17 away from their original homelands under Missionary strategies and had always
18 created tension in the community (Thomson & Petersen 1983). Since the homelands
19 movement, Yolngu have used Yirrkala as a place of respite; with a hospital, a court,
20 a supermarket, a few shops for buying toys and clothing, take away stores and two
21 hotels for live music. Yirrkala was the busy capital of North East Arnhem Land,
22 conveniently located close to the airport and remained politically significant, as the
23 home of the Land Rights movement.

24

1 As life in Yirrkala was in proximity to ‘nganitji’ (alcohol), access to new
2 technology, Internet and the ‘disorder’ of the western culture, the young people
3 were in a position where they could become easily influenced to forget about
4 Yolngu culture (Marika & Isaacs 1995), and consequently succumb to White
5 Australian temptations. The sophistication in which this lifestyle was achieved was
6 astounding; to covertly embrace and appropriate change without a sound theoretical
7 argument between Yolngu academics even while the elders and leaders were
8 constantly putting out fires and organising funerals from youth suicides. This
9 unfortunate circumstance merely contributed to the normalisation of repression in
10 the community. The discussion of the ‘Bayini’ in a previous chapter with the help
11 of McIntosh (2013) and the enlightened theoretical discourse from Mr Burrumarra
12 MBE on the subject of the pre-Macassan legacy and the story behind Yolngu
13 suffering and oppression, was steeped in poetry and myth which I believed the
14 English language was inept to interpret.

15

16 In an attempt to draw parallels to human oppression for discernment, I used the
17 story of Gogol’s Overcoat to illustrate my understanding of the Bayini philosophy
18 (McIntosh 2013). Our understanding of the Theory of the Bayini is crucial in having
19 an accurate even though blurred view (caused by challenges of language and
20 interpretation), of the phenomena of new technology in the lives of a remote
21 traditional Aboriginal community, who retained their culture, language and have
22 successfully, negotiated the Land Rights and continued to fight for their Law to co-
23 exist with Australian law. Burrumarra in McIntosh (2013, p. 102) recalled;

24 With the arrival of the Bayini child (with light brown skin and golden-haired)
25 colour came to take on a new meaning for Yolngu. Yolngu ancestors began to think

1 that perhaps in the distant past all people had been the colour of this baby (with
2 light brown skin and golden hair) and that some cataclysm had brought about the
3 change. In the 1980s, this was a foundational belief of all Bayini-inspired clans.

4
5 The Bayini philosophy was a foundational theory held by Bayini-inspired clans who
6 predicted that the downfall of Yolngu depended on their negotiation of change,
7 progress and the avoidance of non-traditional material culture (McIntosh 2013). It
8 is here that my thoughts were drawn to Gogol and his use of his novel entitled, *The*
9 *Overcoat*, to describe the discourse between material artefacts and class
10 suppression. McIntosh (2013) clarified that even though Bayini herself represented
11 new technology, her law opposed the use of technology that drew Yolngu away
12 from their culture, causing them to lose their identity and place in the Yolngu
13 cosmology (McIntosh 2013).

14

15 **8.2 THE PARALLEL OF THE BAYINI AND THE OVERCOAT**

16 I was transported back to ‘Sankt Peterburg’ of 1842 when I drove into the
17 boundaries of Yirrkala. According to Gogol’s description in *The Overcoat*, Nevsky
18 Prospect in St. Petersburg of the 19th Century contained the houses of aristocrats
19 arranged neatly along the same street as the homes of the working class. Yirrkala’s
20 main street that led towards the Arts Centre and the clinic was no different. I waved
21 back at the ‘Akakiy Akakievichs’, Gogol’s famous protagonist who represented the
22 working class. They were young men from Yirrkala who walked across the street
23 towards the IGA store, recognised my car and waved to me with flicks of their wrist.

24

1 In the hands of young people transitioning into adolescence was the new message
2 stick, the new metal harpoon, the new dugout canoe, the new bark painting and the
3 new tobacco, all fitted into one device, namely the mobile phone and social media.
4 There were at least two hundred years of innovation for the Yolngu, now summed
5 into mobile phones and social media. However, there was no Djungaya (estate
6 executive) in charge of this handheld technology. Keesing (1987) in Lock and
7 Nguyen (2010) proposed that culture should not be understood as static or
8 conclusive. Culture and the privilege of arguing its values and settling the disputes
9 it created have never been distributed equally in a community, giving rise to the
10 exploitation of the working class in power relations, moral structures and the
11 maintenance of social inequalities (Keesing 1987).

12

13 In this chapter, I will use the narrative of Gogol's discussion of class, inequality,
14 the acquisition of new possessions that defined the self and provided the transport
15 for social mobility and self-expression. The cultural conservatism described in my
16 ethnography is challenged by Appadurai (1990) in Lock and Nguyen (2010) who
17 argued that a significant problem for ethnographers today was the tension between
18 the homogenization and heterogenization of a particular cultural group. By
19 homogenization I mean, the 'Indigenisation' of new technology; a process of
20 deciding what is included and excluded after new ideas, knowledge, behaviours,
21 technologies and material goods were appropriated and transformed into the
22 Yolngu context (Appadurai 1990). I took up this challenge after a further study of
23 Appadurai (1996, p. 65) where he argued that;

24 Anthropology can undoubtedly contribute its special purchase on lived experience
25 to a wider, transdisciplinary study of the global cultural process. However, to do

1 this, anthropology must first come in from the cold and face the challenge of
2 making a contribution to cultural studies without the benefit of its previous
3 principle source of leverage – sightings of the savage.

4

5 I must clarify here that the word 'savage' used by Appadurai (1996) did not reflect
6 a simplistic, primitive viewpoint of Yolngu, but that of a basic unit of what it is to
7 be a consumer and that Yolngu have long developed a complex web of
8 consumerism since the dawn of trade with Macassan seafarers.

9

10 Warner (1958) opined that social structures were responsible for the regulation of
11 the technology and helped disciplined the distribution and consumption of its
12 productivity outputs. Deger's ethnography also supported the assertion (2006) of
13 Warner (1958). Does Warner's idea hold the same gravitas in today's cultural
14 appropriation of mobile technology and social media? The cultural appropriation
15 by Yolngu cannot ignore the 'appropriation of Yolngu' by technology from a
16 mutual encounter as the mobile phone, although an inanimate object was alive with
17 the ideas and behavioural manipulation driven by principles of freedom of
18 information, a capitalist agenda, but also easy access to an unlimited consumer base
19 for marketing. The Yirritja clans, who owned the rights to new technology
20 introduced by the Macassans of a bygone era, may have had an advantage over the
21 Dhuwa Clans although the traditional interlocking ties of Yothu Yindi Mari
22 Gutharra (Marika, Ngurruwuthun & White 2009) supposedly created a universally
23 unchallenged equilibrium.

24

1 The leader of the Djapu clan from the Dhuwa moiety, Wonggu Mununggur,
2 interviewed by Thomson in the 1930s (Thomson & Petersen 1983), forced
3 equilibrium to this imbalance of power by taking 25 Yirritja wives. His children
4 according to one of his descendants, Sam during an interview mentioned that, they
5 provided Wonggu with a unique 'visa' into the lands and ceremonies of their Yirritja
6 mothers. The special rights gave Wonggu and his descendants' access and a degree
7 of power which indirectly empowered the Djapu clan. Wonggu's descendants were
8 comparable to visas that provided rights into the territory of his wives fathers' clans
9 and mother's clan. This was explained to me by Sam in the presence of a senior
10 male elder and Traditional Owner from Elcho Island, my 'uncle'. All these and
11 many more accomplishments were the reason why Wonggu was proudly admired
12 by young men in Yirrkala, even today.

13

14 **8.3 OWNERSHIP OF MATERIAL**

15 Warner in *A Black Civilisation* (1958) identified several premises of ownership in
16 the Yolngu culture:

- 17 • The object of technology was personally owned, but brothers, fathers and
18 sons have a feeling of collective ownership.
- 19 • Mutual use of land was encouraged between two friendly clans instead of
20 exclusion.

21

22 A totemic design is owned by clans and is impossible for other clans or moieties to
23 use these designs unless permission was given under exceptional circumstances.

24

1 According to Warner (1958), Yolngu were not particularly interested in the
2 acquisition of material culture and would instead not be burdened by its ownership
3 and responsibilities. The exotic dugout canoe with its mast and sail could not
4 entirely replace the bark canoe even though it enabled the practicality of hunting
5 the much-desired flesh of turtles and dugong (Warner 1958). All objects of new
6 technology, except the Macassan tobacco pipe (Lungin), were appropriated with
7 modifications and given a Yolngu identity. Even the collection of trepang, a joint
8 task (gathering) performed by women in the Yolngu culture was modified into a
9 turtle and dugong hunting activity. With the use of the new bark canoe (lipa lipa or
10 dugout canoe), harvesting trepang was performed enthusiastically by men and
11 discussed by Warner (1958) as the only way the Macassans were able to use Yolngu
12 labour and created a profitable industry.

13

14 The need to own material possessions was not equally distributed in Yolngu society,
15 and its burdens were also handled differently. Instead of looking at this as a deficit,
16 a lacking feature of a European model (Williams 1986), Gogol in *The Overcoat*
17 suggested that the desire to be an individual and be noticed was a natural human
18 desire, and confirmed by Dostoyevsky in the words, 'We all came out of Gogol's
19 *Overcoat*'. A feature of the Yolngu life that aimed to counter internal
20 marginalisation through the adoption of new technology was not only to appropriate
21 but also to be noticed. I am here. I exist.

22 Contrary to Williams' (1986) discussion that this approach proposed an artificially
23 circumscribed object of analysis while displacing the concepts, intentions and
24 behaviours of the actors; Cindy, a mother having observed mobile phones in her
25 community confirmed that young adopters of technology:

1 See it as participating in the current trend. As if any young person wants to be
2 considered a part of the contemporary society” and their use of technology is
3 defined by “... looking for accolade within their peer group. They are not
4 necessarily looking for accolade within the higher Gurrutu (kinship system).

5

6 I wondered, however, if some young people had given up hope and their reliance
7 on the current kinship system for social equality. Akakiy Akakievich in Gogol’s
8 masterpiece looked for accolade within his peer group through the acquisition of an
9 expensive overcoat and was ready to be persuaded by a one-eyed, former convict
10 turned tailor to give away every single penny he owned for this elusive Overcoat.
11 The oppressed serf, ex-convict and tailor convinced Akakiy to change his routine,
12 his beliefs and actions to gain possession of a new overcoat. As young people within
13 Yolngu society, unnoticed, roamed the community at night (Senior & Chenhall
14 2008b), persuaded and convinced their peers to obtain a mobile phone, their focus
15 shifted from the traditional and cultural routine of living in community to escape
16 with the ‘shiny object’ prophesied by Thomson in the 1930s (Thomson & Petersen
17 1983) to become the downfall of Yolngu. As discussed earlier, Daisy confirmed
18 that the mobile phone might take centre stage in the life of an individual when she
19 said: ‘So once they got money and the kids crying for a phone they might take that
20 as a priority over a baby at home needing nappies’.

21

22 The acquisition of new technology by Yolngu youth did not equal cultural
23 appropriation or the ‘indigenisation’ of technology, as mentioned by Appadurai
24 (1996). The use of Facebook and mobile phones struggled to be led by cultural law

1 as per Deger's (2006) and Kral's (2010) hope of an Indigenous globalised youth
2 culture as evidenced by this quote from Jason:

3 You've got a lot of youth, and you got even younger than that. Not sort of going to
4 their parents for advice, they're looking at the internet (instead). I guess it makes
5 them ignore the important things and so they're more interested in what their
6 friends are doing and saying and keeping up with whatever is "IN" at the time.

7

8

9 **8.4 NEGOTIATING BICULTURAL IDENTITIES WITH NEW** 10 **TECHNOLOGY**

11 The bicultural identities I referred to were not formed through the adoption of
12 European values. The Yolngu identity remained within its Yolngu boundaries, but
13 the modification of Yolngu customs and tradition had enabled the use of new
14 technology. The individualisation of Yolngu was what had emerged from the use
15 of technology and therefore resulted in the formation of bicultural identities within
16 the Yolngu structure. At the level of an individual, it was possible that the European
17 autonomy was desired, and complemented the philosophy of the Bayini child. The
18 fixation of the literature on Yolngu, as an ancient romantic culture, idealised their
19 traditional laws and had stereotyped Yolngu as non-negotiating subjects of their
20 reality. I recorded an example of cultural negotiation and mobile phones when a
21 senior woman showed me a photo of her grandchild:

22 Janet's grandson was taken by a croc a month or two after we arrived here. She had
23 a picture of him on her mobile phone. She waved her hand dismissively when I
24 reminded her that photos of dead people were taboo in Yolngu culture. (Field notes
25 12th April, Arnhem Club 10 pm).

1
2 Traditional owners and elders, including board members of a primary health care
3 provider, had been observed to show fear in regards to new technology. Jodie said:
4 ‘Board members and elders were concerned about technology and social media
5 because it eroded their culture. I think it is fear of the unknown’. Was, this the safe
6 fear that led to several centuries of trade and travel with Macassans? I urge the
7 reader to ponder on this question and find the author's perception that there may be
8 more to this than preserving of culture but development of Yolngu modernity. The
9 statement of the female board member was a reflection of an unacknowledged
10 acceptance that a new Yolngu way of being had been co-created by a younger
11 generation unwilling to continue to be different from mainstream society.

12

13 The redrawing of the borders between Yolngu youth and globalised youth culture,
14 the appropriation of hip-hop and rock with the Yidaki (Didgeridoo), and the desire
15 to use the same tools as their non-Indigenous peers, did not include the erosion of
16 culture as feared by elders and traditional owners. The mobile phone and social
17 media refused to be governed by a gerontocracy, and the young adopters did not
18 yield autonomy to the instructions of their elders on the use of mobile technology,
19 which is the source of their liberation from the confines of cultural conservatism.

20

21 **8.5 YOLNGU IMPROVISATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGY**

22 Akakiy was transformed by his new overcoat and was subsequently invited to a
23 party, which signified his entrance into the world of existence in Sankt Peterburg.
24 He emerged from the obscurity of his working-class position in society. He felt his
25 presence as he walked the streets of the city and desired the company of women,

1 which he had never thought of before. He noticed and appreciated the beauty and
2 even felt beautiful himself from the effect of wearing a new overcoat. Yolngu youth
3 who experienced the owning of their mobile phones, created media and stories that
4 belonged to them, accentuated a new level of individuality and independence that
5 invoked a challenge to the communal structure in Yirrkala. According to Janet: 'I
6 guess it's made them more independent. What I would say is probably not a positive
7 thing because Yolngu and Yolngu culture, things are done as a family'.

8

9 The song 'Treaty' from Yothu Yindi was a narrative detailing the broken promises
10 made by a stronger power to a less powerful minority, even though seen on the
11 television and heard on the radio (is, therefore 'Yuwalk' or truth) can still disappear
12 'like writing in the sand'. The paternal grandson or Gutjuk was called to keep on
13 dancing the 'djatpangarri', singing 'you improvise, you improvise (Nhima
14 gayakaya, nhe gaya' nhe) and to 'keep improvising, keep going, you're better' (Nhe
15 gaya'nhe marrtjini walangwalang nhe ya). The new individuality and independence
16 were transformational. Being an individual was culturally inappropriate and
17 seeking to have one's space was taboo, as understood in the words of Sam here:

18 There's never any privacy. I felt that there's no such thing within a Yolngu context
19 of privacy, cause you just never get a minute on your own. Someone always wants
20 to sit with you. And if you did want to be on your own, well it's considered
21 abnormal – "why would you want to be alone, sit by yourself.

22

23 Through mobile phones, you can explore individual interests, personal relationships
24 and consume media under one's control. With Facebook profiles and friend requests
25 from boys and girls, the youth were engaged beyond the realities of their remote

1 public housing; cramped, unfurnished and lacked in privacy, which was necessary
2 features for appropriate adolescent development (Senior 2003; Senior & Chenhall
3 2012). As the predicament of marginalised Yolngu remained unchanged for
4 decades, mobile phones and social media was appropriated to improvise, and
5 opportunities were sought to control or obtain resources to beat the overwhelming
6 state of inequality. The young people fluctuated between their traditional lifestyles
7 surrounded by family and the frustration and having so little to live with, fewer
8 opportunities, resources and entertainment. Josephine explained to me that; ‘there's
9 not a whole lot for youth to be doing [here]. In the cities and stuff, unless they feel
10 unsafe, there are plenty of things for people to be doing’ unlike in this region. The
11 following words of young people cited by my interview participants explained their
12 predicament:

- 13 • Can't wait to go Gove for courts haha gone Fuck shit up and move on in life
14 wanna better life all u Gove mob that are two-faced cunts can get fucked.
- 15 • This year I feel really empty inside me. I know it's not me someone help me
16 find me a better home to spend time away from Yolngu people – away from
17 NT.
- 18 • Gove is full of fake lying dogs really need to get out of this shit hole man
19 hate everyone in this town fuckin dumb idiots
- 20 • Yirrkala is getting more boring, I don't even know this place for staying too
21 long ... and it's making me sick right?
- 22 • Need some1 to make company with me Cause I'm Fucken Bored Bored
23 Bored Fucken hell :(

- 1 • Can some1 inbox me your number so I could call you Cause I'm Bored ☺
 2 lolz
- 3 • Can anyone call me cause I'm bored ?!!!!Anyone??
- 4 • Boring I wanna go back to home. Yirrkala.

5

6 'Boredom', as noted from the countless discussions and online interactions I held
 7 with family and friends in the region was a symptom of deprivation, loss,
 8 hopelessness and a dependency to be engaged, entertained and the failure of
 9 Indigenous leaders to recognise the signs of chronic societal inequality (Scheper-
 10 Hughes 1993) not only from without but especially from within the Yolngu society.

11

12 **8.6 THE ONLINE DISINHIBITION EFFECT AS METHOD OF COPING** 13 **WITH STRESS**

14 A young man in his early thirties said in an interview: 'there are fights, a normal
 15 part of community life, even though [over] distance if it wasn't through Facebook
 16 it would be through phones. So yeah! Its youth culture and how they communicate'.
 17 He was a son of a renowned Aboriginal leader and was often seen online
 18 communicating with the community of Yolngu from different age groups. There
 19 were parents and grandparents, non-Yolngu followers and commenters, and likers
 20 who agreed with his statement.

21

22 He reminded me of an omnipresent online champion who posted his advice and
 23 commandments as status updates. He implored and advised his listeners to attain a
 24 higher level of spirituality, improved interpersonal relationships for Yolngu to live
 25 up to the cultural standards of his elders before his father. After a quiet week of

1 online invisibility, he emerged with a prophet-like tone of admonition to warn
2 everyone that ‘now the crime committed by youth in the community is extreme. So
3 people know what you and your post, and where they end up’. His advice was
4 important to his listeners in that crime was something that must remain hidden. It
5 was as though youth crime was inevitable and posting criminal activity online was
6 a manipulation of the ‘system’ that sought to bring down or incriminate Yolngu
7 youth. He said, ‘be smart, be cyber safe!!!’

8

9 Youth culture had been defined as synonymous with anti-social behaviour in the
10 remote Aboriginal context by a young Aboriginal man on Facebook. Being safe
11 online was exercising caution in both their offline and online worlds, so far as to
12 circumvent the consequences of the traditional and secular law. An interview
13 participant in her late twenties said that anti-social behaviour had also involved
14 people stealing sim cards. She said, ‘They steal it and use it to abuse other people
15 with text messages and stuff’. The communal life of the Yolngu was threatened by
16 abuse, theft, relationship, jealousy porn, and in this situation, the prophet-like
17 advice from concerned young adults targeting teenagers online, was to: ‘be careful
18 what you say in social media, because no matter what, we live in a hypersensitive
19 society in which people are just looking for any reason to be offended and make a
20 huge deal about nothing’.

21

22 The victim of abuse, the families that suffered from online abuse was labelled
23 hypersensitive and that the young people have to apply sophistication to their youth
24 culture and to be careful with their online exchanges. According to Suler (2004),
25 The Online Disinhibition Effect is a phenomenon whereby some young people,

1 either self-disclose or act out more frequently or intensely abuse, threaten and bully
2 others online than they would in person. Not all disinhibitions are harmful; there
3 are ample examples of altruistic behaviour, displays of empathy, unusual acts of
4 kindness and support during a funeral and standing up against injustice meted out
5 by organisations and institutions on the ordinary Yolngu who were unable to speak
6 out. Secret emotions, fears, and wishes in addition to the online behaviours of acts
7 of kindness were described by Suler (2004) as benign disinhibition.

8

9 Toxic disinhibition was the display of rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred
10 even threats used synonymously with swearing, was a 'blind catharsis, a fruitless
11 repetition compulsion, and an acting out of unsavoury needs without any personal
12 growth at all' according to Suler (2004, p. 321). Suler (2004) categorised online
13 behaviour and the online disinhibition effect into the following:

- 14 • Dissociative anonymity
- 15 • Invisibility
- 16 • Asynchronicity
- 17 • Solipsistic introjection and
- 18 • Dissociative imagination.

19

20 Anonymity and invisibility were some of the fundamental features of social media
21 use that created the disinhibition effect (Suler 2004). Young people felt less
22 vulnerable about self-disclosing and acting-out when they have the opportunity to
23 separate their actions online from their offline in-person lifestyle and identity. In
24 the context of overcrowded housing, restraint and the repression of the self through

1 kinship ties and submission to higher authorities within family circles, generational
2 envy and jealousy were embedded within the traditional structures of Yolngu life.
3 Here a young person can now disown their anti-social behaviour by integrating their
4 online and offline identities. According to Suler (2004, p. 322), the online self-
5 becomes compartmentalised, 'almost as if superego restrictions and moral,
6 cognitive processes have been temporarily suspended from the online psyche'.

7

8 Asynchronicity was evident in the lives of young people's use of Facebook when
9 they 'experience asynchronous communication as 'running away' after posting a
10 message that was personal, emotional, or hostile' according to Suler (2004, p. 323).

11 The asynchronous communication style offered by social media allowed young
12 people to feel safe to enter into conflict, create conflict or disclose happiness,
13 boredom and disappointment by putting it 'out there'. This imagined captive
14 audience on social media was where everyone could 'see' a receptive audience, but
15 still according to Sandy 'got no one to talk to' and despite being surrounded by
16 cousins and family 'could still feel isolated'.

17

18 Without a continuous feedback loop of a live discussion or solipsistic introjection,
19 social norms in the Yolngu community could not be reinforced and resulted in self-
20 disclosure and behavioural expressions that strayed from the cultural protocol
21 which resulted in conflict and ended with fights. Joe had always been aware of toxic
22 disinhibition because she had 'seen a lot of that on Facebook and also on Diva
23 Chat', behaviours from young people she called 'negative stuff', had explained that
24 it included 'arguments' that were posted online or 'they swear' (Burbank 1994).
25 Young people, Joe explained used anonymity by making 'fake profiles, like using

1 a fake name, fake photo, to say bad stuff to you” so that you inevitably “feel upset
2 about what they’re saying’.

3

4 Young people who read text messages on mobile phones and status updates on
5 Facebook or Divas Chat, according to Suler (2004, p.323) ‘experienced as a voice
6 within one’s head, as if that person’s psychological presence and influence have
7 been assimilated or introjected into one’s psyche’. Cindy was saddened by the
8 thought of the young person who took her own life in Yirrkala after a phone had
9 come into her possession. She kept bringing the discussion back to young people
10 reacting so tragically. She said, ‘I keep flicking back to that suicide because I know
11 that actually has been the part of bullying and have been the part of cyberbullying’.
12 Here Cindy specifically included the bullying that happened online, which targeted
13 this vulnerable young person and had possibly driven them to take their life. Social
14 media traditionally proposed that every user be equal, and its utilisation was solely
15 to share ideas and resources among peers (Suler 2004). There was no centralised
16 control, and its authority minimising effect amplified anonymity and dissociated
17 the individual from the offline reality of traditional culture and law. According to
18 Suler (2004, p. 324), this resulted in a dissociative imagination because of which a
19 young person attempted “an invisible non-identity, resulting in a reduced,
20 simplified, or compartmentalised of self-expression”.

21

22 A fantasy environment that was created online was an environment void of
23 surveillance and law (Suler 2004), in which exploration by independent-minded
24 teenagers and pioneers contributed to the effects of both benign and toxic
25 disinhibition (Suler 2004). According to Jones, a middle-aged Yolngu interviewee,

1 a Yolngu Facebook user who ‘friend your poison cousin but not your miyalk
2 (female) poison cousin’ was an example of traditional laws gone online. This
3 convenience through which it has become easier ‘to keep in touch with families,
4 easy to chat with’ but also caused mobile technology to ‘destroy our tradition’.

5

6 I was tempted to agree with Suler, when I considered that the “disinhibition effect
7 released deeper aspects of intrapsychic structure, that it unlocked true needs,
8 emotions, and self-attributes that dwell beneath surface personality presentations”
9 (Suler 2004, p. 324) similar to the after-effects of chronic lateral violence (Langton
10 2008; Gonzalez et al. 2013; boyd 2013). The complexity of what was the ‘true’ self
11 of Yolngu young adults and teenagers required a psychoanalytic methodology to
12 understand the process of inhibiting and disinhibiting (Suler 2004). However,
13 according to a young female worker in public health, ‘A lot of elders think these
14 young people shouldn’t be on the Internet, they think it’s wrong’. A young man
15 observed his peers online ‘Saying things that they think are funny but disrespecting
16 older people’ and ‘Things that affected the community’ was a testament that the
17 problem of anti-social behaviour on social media, ‘Does not exist separate from the
18 environment in which that self is expressed’ as theorised by Suler (2004).

19

20 **8.7 DISCLOSURE AND SURVEILLANCE**

21 In the context of mobile phone numbers, social media profiles and individual
22 activities throughout the day, a subsection of young people online was compelled
23 to disclose a great deal of personal information, according to Petronio (2002) and
24 Christofides et al. (2009). I could not find appropriate answers to such an abstract
25 question amongst the young people I lived, played and worked with over the three

1 years in the Gove Peninsula. Some young people were extremely private about their
2 daily activities, while others would disclose details of their movements throughout
3 the day and sometimes by the hour. According to Poyntz and Kennelly (2015, p.
4 2) globalization referred to ‘a system through which individual lifeworlds are
5 structured in particular ways; Most profoundly today, this has included a de-
6 structuring of older lifeworlds, the result of which is the development of processes’
7 and has created a new appetite for aspirations, experience and expectation. What
8 drew my attention to the dichotomy was the possibility that these young people who
9 disclosed their private lives online were compelled to do so by a more powerful
10 section of the community. A band of thinkers, who determined who amongst the
11 less powerful, was getting up to trouble, stirring up Galka incidents or having an
12 affair with someone else’s partner.

13

14 Christofides et al. (2009) support my speculation of an existence of a group of
15 controllers over another group, that information disclosure and information control
16 were not “two ends of the same spectrum” as proposed earlier by Westin (2003).
17 Christofides et al. (2009) suggest that these behaviours were influenced by different
18 aspects of personality and were utterly independent behaviours. It holds true to an
19 ever-changing non-Indigenous society in an urban environment, whereas the
20 pinnacle of Yolngu life was the sustenance and maintenance of Gurrutu (kinship)
21 and therefore deserved control and disclosure. A Yolngu teenager, in the phase of
22 identity construction, chose not to show their overcrowded houses, front yards
23 without a lawn and pets, resource deficit playtimes, absent vacation photos and
24 Christmas gifts, to show their family and extended networks what everyone already
25 knows but ‘tell’ others about themselves. By telling others what they are doing and

1 feeling, by disclosing the ups and downs of their romantic relationships, their
2 identity was constructed through an exchange of information that simultaneously
3 warded off any speculation of negative behaviour mentioned earlier.

4

5 From the perspective of Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008, p. 1831) (modified for
6 the Yolngu context), 'identity is not an individual characteristic, it is not an
7 expression of something innate in a person, it is rather a social a social product the
8 outcome of a given social environment and hence performed differently in varying
9 contexts'. In this context, disclosure and surveillance became an aspect of identity
10 construction. The risks of limiting access to personal information and daily
11 movements in the community appeared to become more significant than the risk of
12 disclosure, due to the effects of community-based interpersonal surveillance. The
13 individual limits the potential for identity construction by opening up the
14 opportunity for speculation of harmful behaviour, creating gossips that potentially
15 reduced his or her rapport with their peers. Goldner (2008) suggests that adolescents
16 who disclosed more information on their social media profiles received more
17 significant support from their same-sex friends and in the Yolngu context it can
18 solicit support and ward off any negative gossip about the young person.

19

20 Facebook was designed to engage users, but also enabled the surveillance of
21 activities and lives in a community stricken with a lack of resources and
22 opportunity. During an interview, a participant spoke anonymously about his friend,
23 one who posted his discontent with people in the community who conducted online
24 shopping and talked about it on social media as an example of a localised social
25 segregation. He quoted the text that said; 'biggest show off people who do shopping

1 online then posting on wall or putting it one status, what a fucking show off?' The
2 perception that an online Facebook user was not adhering to cultural norms was a
3 testament to the conflict in a communal society where resources were often shared,
4 and modesty observed to keep others happy.

5 People on my Facebook friends list or Divas Chat list tracked the beliefs, actions
6 and interests of their peers, which according to Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield
7 (2006) was common in a community of tensions surrounding affiliations, clan
8 loyalties, and romantic partner infidelity and football clubs. Kennedy (2009)
9 suggested that social networking sites provided a suitable medium for monitoring,
10 investigating and even stalking behaviour or panopticism and was accepted as
11 normal and necessary to maintain order and evaluate gossip.

12

13 The ability of Facebook to enable and encourage such behaviours of monitoring,
14 surveillance and panopticism among romantic partners has been inadequately
15 explored, according to Darvell, Walsh and White (2011), and this is especially the
16 case in a community in which individual ownership of resources was a fleeting
17 moment and property demanded to be shared or given up to reinforce kinship
18 relationships. Sean talked to me at the Walkabout Hotel about girls and how some
19 were better than others, how relationships were so difficult to maintain because of
20 jealousy and lack of mutual trust. We both noticed a recent Facebook post by a
21 familiar friend who wrote '\$\$\$talkz bullshit walkz...then what she said 2 me gives
22 me ur password then I'll let u know how much I luv u'.

23

24 We both knew that exchanging Facebook passwords would not guarantee a
25 relationship free of jealousy and infidelity. Sean laughed when he recalled his

1 failure at not being caught. ‘Hacked by B!!’ a status update said on my wall that
2 referred to Sean. ‘You’re a fucking big slut, and I hate you did you forget that I
3 know your password ya fuck face, go fuck them little sluts cause I don't want you
4 near me’. Several weeks after my friendly catch up with Sean, I was told that the
5 police force escorted him for having breached a court order filed by his partner who
6 was in the car with him crying as he was taken away.

7

8 Despite the conflict in Yolngu communities between teenagers in love, there was a
9 lack of discourse on demand for monogamous relationships amongst female
10 teenagers. Stern and Taylor (2007) and Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009)
11 discussed what I observed was the accepted activity of Facebook users. The study
12 participants described their observations of a common practice where partners use
13 mobile phones and social media accounts to ascertain whether their romantic
14 partner's online activities also include any evidence of unfaithfulness. Anything
15 from inappropriate messages, from flirtatious to showing signs of interest through
16 ‘Likes’ and comments may result in suspicion, jealousy and conflict.

17

18 ‘If a younger girl was hitting her male partner and being jealous of him, that means
19 that she loves him and he has gone with somebody else’ recalled Susan in a
20 discussion about the role of social media in the tensions of relationship maintenance
21 and relationship porn. She said that family would often succumb to the gendered
22 power differentials young women were beginning to question, which showed signs
23 of the emancipation of Yolngu feminist rights. According to Susan, the family’s
24 reaction to such a show of affection would be to protect and defend the male partner.
25 She said, ‘You would often find that his sisters and his family would say “just leave

1 it, it's just what men do''', and expect that the female partner accepts her partner's
2 infidelity as normative behaviour. Susan went further in her analysis of the past two
3 decades of counselling young people and said that this act of infidelity was a value
4 upheld by men from a traditional rights-based approach. She said, 'for Yolngu, it's
5 the right of the man. They come from a culture with more than one wife'.

6

7 One of my interview participants, Carla, used to work for a not-for-profit supporting
8 Yolngu with financial counselling. We sat in the library of the Nhulunbuy Library,
9 and caught up now and then, where I was a regular fixture around the back, next to
10 the children's playroom. One day we sat down on mini chairs, and I took notes on
11 a mini table when I learnt that Yolngu had gone through a phase when they were
12 signing up for mobile phone plans since 'everybody (non-Indigenous people) had
13 one'. Nobody considered the financial commitments because according to Carla,
14 'talking to Yolngu families was the thing to do. So that was the start of the
15 technology pressures. Everyone needed to have a mobile phone. But it was also,
16 definitely a status thing'. She confidently drew examples from her seven years of
17 experience solving problems of young people with mobile phone issues.

18

19 Contrary to the opinion of Carla, for a Yolngu man in his early thirties, who
20 travelled nationally as a performer, the mobile phone was not a 'status thing'
21 because according to him 'everything is disposable! Cars are disposable!' Hence
22 the notion that objects as status symbols that are disposable were not contradictory
23 positions. Status symbols and disposable objects as a binary in the Yolngu world
24 alluded me to the feature of renewability. Through the discussion with interview
25 participants and observations, it was noted that there is a perception and belief that

1 things and life events were renewable. The relational attitude of renewability
2 dispelled the urgent need for challenges and barriers in the community to be
3 addressed promptly. Here the relationship was prioritised over the problem-solving
4 process of discourse, negotiation and agreement.

5

6 Joe agreed with my observation that some young people preferred not to have a
7 phone than to deal with humbug. The interaction between young people in a Yolngu
8 community, almost required that they own a mobile phone for it reflected a young
9 person's self evaluation and their ability to rely on their parents and uncles (mother's
10 brothers) for financial and emotional support, thereby increasing self-esteem.
11 According to Rosenberg, Schooler and Schoenbach (1989) self-esteem was a
12 reflection of a young person's perception and feelings about themselves.

13

14 Young people engaged in a romantic relationship with high self-esteem are more
15 comfortable and confident in the ability of their partner to be faithful, according to
16 Clark and Lemay (2010). They are also able to be more secure in the relationship
17 due to a lack of feeling of suspicion and jealousy according to Hutsinger (2004) and
18 Senior, Helmer and Chenhall (2016). The problem of low self-esteem, suspicion
19 and jealousy had led to "a few suicides from people" according to Susan, after she
20 recalled giving a talk at the Batchelor Institute about "just how difficult in women's
21 groups, how difficult as a woman here".

22

23 Opinion remains divided on the relationship between self-esteem and Facebook-
24 related partner surveillance. Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009) disagreed
25 that there was a connection between self-esteem and Facebook-related partner

1 surveillance and jealousy. Partner trust according to the authors referred to an
2 individual's perception of their partner's ability to be trustworthy and not their self-
3 esteem.

4

5 Therefore Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009) argued that trust in one's
6 romantic partner significantly predicted feelings of jealousy on Facebook and
7 further created suspicion about their partner's activities online resulting on constant
8 checking of their Facebook profiles. Before the age of social media and mainstream
9 use of mobile phones, Buss et al. (1998) in Muise, Christofides and Desmarais
10 (2009) showed that distrust towards a partner enabled surveillance behaviours such
11 as spying. Self-esteem was not a significant predictor of intentions, according to the
12 findings from Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009). A romantic partner's plan
13 to check on their lover's activities frequently or 'Facebook partner monitoring' was
14 a reflection of the low level of trust accorded to their lover. Muise, Christofides and
15 Desmarais (2009) stressed that the role of trust, not self-esteem in couple's
16 jealousy-related behaviours on Facebook was also consistent with a more recent
17 study by Darvell, Walsh and White (2011).

18

19 Scheper-Hughes (1993, p. 213) claimed that researchers must strip away the ragged
20 metaphors of which in this Aboriginal context would be examples of fights,
21 jealousy and boredom until we find the bare skeleton of hunger. Scheper-Hughes
22 is using starvation as a metaphor for a more systemic problem in society. It is not
23 just the hunger for physical nourishment, but an unfulfilled desire for opportunity,
24 the end of familial and intergenerational competition for resources, and a need for
25 stability love justice and equality. The bottom line is a hunger for social justice as

1 argued by Rowse (2012). This chapter attempted to ‘not just describe youth lives,
2 then, but to interpret what they simultaneously conceal about the machinations of
3 global life’ (Poyntz & Kennelly 2015, p. 3).

4

5 **8.8 CRITICAL SOCIAL INEQUALITY**

6 Research in the area of the intersection of ethnicity, gender and other dimensions
7 of identity, which included socio-economic status was, according to Manuel and
8 Zambrana (2015,) a relatively new approach to studying inequality. Inequality was
9 defined as institutionalised patterns of ‘unequal control over and distribution of
10 society’s valued good”, resources and opportunities (Manuel & Zambrana 2015, p.
11 2), which in the context of Yirrkala were resources such as land, property,
12 employment and housing.

13

14 As this thesis strived to contribute to intersectional analysis, the results conveyed
15 the ‘experiences of groups that occupied multiple social locations and finds
16 approaches that focus on the complexity rather than the singularity of human
17 experience’ (Ferguson 2012, p 141). Positive identities of young people were
18 created by the opinion of individuals themselves and others (Christofides, Muise &
19 Desmarais 2009), where the viewpoints of others have become mirrors in which we
20 evaluate ourselves and our own identity (Ferguson 2012).

21

22 Young people who explored the mesmerising market in cyberspace, or even offline,
23 twenty kilometres away in Nhulunbuy where capitalist economies reflected
24 affluence, wealth and opportunity, of which little existed within the grasp of a
25 young person growing up in Yirrkala created seemingly insurmountable barriers.

1 These challenges were implicated in the distortion of teenage development into
2 adults (Senior & Chenhall 2008), which led to feelings of inadequacy and mental
3 health issues. According to Ferguson (2012, p. 181,

4 Sometimes others affirm a person's identity sometimes they ignore or deny it.
5 Identities of self not only depend on how a person viewed them self and how others
6 perceive them but are also formed by the contexts from which they emerge; they
7 are dynamic and evolving.

8

9 Yirrkala was under-resourced in infrastructure and economic development. The
10 remote community lacked an Olympic-sized swimming pool although there was
11 more youth in Yirrkala than in Nhulunbuy. It required a skate park, a great-
12 maintained playground, a bike path, and a drop-in youth centre. There was an
13 indirect social categorisation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, or between
14 those employed by the mining company and the Yolngu who were the traditional
15 owners. According to Ferguson (2012, p. 183) 'if a social category matters in a
16 given community, and if a person claims an association with this category, or if
17 others associate her with this category, that category will have some impact on her
18 behaviour'. This separation was discussed in the chapters previously, as
19 interpersonal conflict, jealousy and surveillance, a reflection of this internalised
20 identity (Ferguson 2012), a result of the social inequality between Yirrkala and
21 Nhulunbuy.

22

23 How could a young person in Yirrkala formulate a positive identity of themselves
24 when their identity depended on their experiences of the world (Ferguson 2012)?
25 The dominant role of identity tells us what to pay attention to, and the explosion of

1 online self-disclosure and reassurance seeking on Facebook in the remote
2 communities in North East Arnhem Land tells us how young people think, feel and
3 act. Their online behaviour suggested that 'identities can provide clues for
4 predicting behaviour' and vice-versa (Ferguson 2012, p. 185). Through the analysis
5 and consultations discussed in this thesis, we could hypothesise a young person's
6 'interpretative schema' and what 'threatens a person's identity – made her feel
7 anxious, incapable, humiliated or ashamed' (Ferguson 2012, p. 185). The identity
8 of young people that was reflected in their behaviour similar to lateral oppression
9 (Langton 2008; Gonzalez et al. 2013) i.e. interpersonal conflict, jealousy,
10 surveillance and public online shaming was a result of the internalization of vertical
11 oppression and negative social categorization (Ferguson 2012; Bailey, Williams &
12 Favors 2014; Manuel & Zambrana 2015).

13

14 Their resistance to cultural norms, the challenging of influential individuals and
15 family with access to social economic resources and opportunities even to the extent
16 of challenging traditional power structures may have created the beginnings of an
17 Aboriginal Arab Spring (Lotan et al. 2011; Eltantawy & Wiest 2011; Gerbaudo
18 2012) but was stifled by their inability to create an inclusive identity of solidarity
19 between alliances and clans where instead of a youth 'population' they must emerge
20 as a 'people' as discussed by Rowse (2012). They were young people who,
21 according to Rowse (2012, p. 57) still experienced the aftermath of 'satisfied
22 wants', without 'compelling sacrifice and subordination to elders' when the
23 colonial power had effectively called 'the insurgent energies of youth' in the past
24 through 'food, clothing, freedom from hunger and want' and welfare payments.

25

1 According to Scheper-Hughes (1993, p. 171) ‘at the heart of all critical theories and
2 methods is a critique of ideology and power. Ideologies (whether political,
3 economic or religious) could mystify reality, obscure relationships of power and
4 domination, and prevent people from grasping their situation in the world’. A new
5 form of consciousness must arise from the prevalent ideology in Yirrkala, which
6 seemed to thrive unchallenged and stabilised by particular institutions and social
7 practices. The critical theory applied in this study was not to look down upon culture
8 and social tradition but to recognise what is emancipatory in understanding how
9 current structures and corporations in remote North East Arnhem Land re-create
10 social inequality, domination over the less fortunate and perpetuate human suffering
11 in the words of (Scheper-Hughes 1993).

12

13 Pierre Bourdieu (1977, p. 173) in Scheper-Hughes (1993, p. 120) argued that ‘the
14 best kept and the worst kept secret is (one that everyone must keep) [so as not to
15 break] the law of silence which guarantees the complicity of collective bad faith’.
16 The best kept and worst kept secret in Yirrkala was that their family and culture had
17 the potential to betray teenagers and young adults. Despite learning everything
18 about it and preserving their culture, they were unable to finish schooling and have
19 the same opportunity for employment, even as they were coaxed, persuaded and
20 rewarded for attending school and training programs. These strategies were
21 reproduced as miracle solutions to the problems of inequality both from within and
22 external to their community.

23

24 There existed a refusal to recognise the signs of persistent inequality and lack of
25 opportunity, reflected as collective bad faith as discussed by Scheper-Hughes

1 (1993) in Yirrkala. The process of liberation was ‘complicated, but possible through
2 reflexivity on the complicity and psychological identification of people with the
3 very ideologies and practices’ (Scheper-Hughes 1993, p. 171) that ‘the ‘traditional’
4 intellectuals, the bourgeois agents of the social consensus, are pivotal in
5 maintaining hegemonic ideas and practices’ (Scheper-Hughes 1993, p. 171).
6 Scheper-Hughes (1993, p. 172) argued; ‘for the anthropologist to deny because it
7 implied a privileged position (i.e. the power of the outsider to name an ill or a
8 wrong) and because it is not pretty, the extent to which dominated people come to
9 play the role, finally of their own executioners is to collaborate with those in the
10 relationships of power and silence that allow the destruction to continue’.

11

12 I hope that the theoretical arguments put forward in this chapter with the help of
13 Yolngu philosophy and the Bayini Theory, Gogol’s classic tale of the oppressed
14 and their desire for social mobility that disables social inequality has made a strong
15 case for the new globalised Aboriginal youth culture with its opportunities and
16 challenges. The double-edged spear of new technology, as theorised by Burrumara
17 was a social trap that has been exacerbated by the capitalist structure of Indigenous
18 corporatisation, and created a class-conscious Yolngu society with impact on the
19 development of relationships, individual self-esteem and de-collectivisation of
20 power and resources.

21

22

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4

CHAPTER 9 - CONCLUSION

5

6 Studies of digital technologies in Indigenous Australia, according to Kral (2014 p.
7 172) 'have tended to address issues of access, affordability and usage rather than
8 the changing social practice in relation to communication technologies'. Such
9 studies have also been conducted by Brady & Dyson (2009) and Rennie et al.
10 (2010). After three years of fieldwork and a continuous cycle of analysis and
11 reflection on the contribution of the interview participants and predicament of
12 young people in Yirrkala, I re-examined the hypothesis, that new technology was
13 capable and instrumental in supporting Indigenous agency and its emancipation
14 against external power structures (Gerbaudo 2012; Eltantawy & Wiest 2011; Lotan
15 et al. 2011).

16

17 The Indigenous youth I engaged with, lived in a strong gerontocracy where power
18 and access to knowledge and resources were controlled by older men (and
19 sometimes women), which may have, under these circumstances, caused some level
20 of inherent disadvantage and marginalisation. The use of mobile technology,
21 Facebook and Divas Chat by remote Aboriginal youth, which allowed glimpses of
22 other ways of being (Senior & Chenhall 2012) and youth intersubjectivity (Poyntz
23 & Kennelly 2015), may have also contributed to a degree of frustration and stress
24 and as a result of the palpable social inequality between Indigenous and non-
25 Indigenous Australians. The lack of opportunity and resources, the lack of self-

1 esteem and collective trust within the community (Langton 2008) could be seen as
2 a result of the long-standing oppression that had internalised the outward struggle
3 for social equality (Ferguson 2012; Manuel & Zambrana 2015; Schofield 2015) and
4 caused citizens to turn against one another.

5

6 From my analysis of the in-depth interviews and informal discussions, two distinct
7 groups, the proletariat (working class or Yolngu with no access to paid
8 employment) and the bourgeoisie (elite, ruling, traditional owners) was produced
9 in this remote community. A potential emergence as a result of the forced
10 dependency formed between Yolngu and the Church administration, during the
11 several decades of engagement with the Methodist Mission (Williams 1986;
12 Morphy 2009), the Commonwealth Government and multinational mining
13 companies (Williams 1986; Blakeman 2015). The internalisation of the oppressive
14 qualities of the capitalist economy (Langton 2008; Bailey, Williams & Favors
15 2014), as I observed and consulted with key informants and interview participants
16 was reflected in the orchestrated conflict within the community and the intent to
17 oppress others, as clearly argued by Langton (2008) only now, through the use of
18 emergent technology (Bailey, Williams & Favors 2014).

19

20 Schofield (2015) used Marxist theory when he theorised on oppressed communities,
21 which I considered applicable in the context of Yirrkala today. He argued that class
22 conflict, through insufficient access to resources, had created inequality, crisis and
23 instability. Yolngu youth today used and improvised new technology to draw
24 different boundaries between clans and extended kin based on socio-economic
25 status instead of the law of kinship. Lack of faith in Yolngu corporations and land

1 rights movement which resulted in Yolngu becoming asset-rich, but cash-poor was
2 another implicit contributing factor to finding new and improvised means for
3 securing resources and tangible economic outcomes. The new Yolngu agency,
4 evident in the individual's social media and mobile phone use, was to challenge the
5 social domain of hierarchy and inequality (Schofield 2015) and created distinction
6 from and between a personal and clan-centric perspective. The changing priorities
7 and values of Yolngu youth meant that battles to uphold culture and traditional law
8 were less critical than their efforts to join a globalised youth culture and achieve
9 economic sustainability.

10

11 The struggle for individuality and resources was now directed within a particular
12 clan as well as between clan circles in North East Arnhem Land. The Gove
13 Disagreement of 2011 was just one meso example where the use of technology for
14 interpersonal conflict, jealousy, surveillance, caused the individual to compete for
15 resources. Conflict, jealousy and surveillance were a representation of youth
16 expression, a channel to communicate their thoughts, feelings and understandings
17 that was intrinsic to the making and interpreting of meaning (Schofield 2015). In
18 the practice of making and interpreting meaning, the Yolngu youth brought their
19 world into being through material things, as per Foucault's (1980) discourse in
20 Schofield (2015) in which power was inherent and organic. Young people struggled
21 with gerontocratic methods of power and control between clans and families,
22 primarily since the Corporatisation of Yolngu traditional systems of power (Rowse
23 2012).

24

1 Young people without influential uncles and family members as material providers
2 became socially and emotionally isolated, an example of the modern-day version
3 of Gogol's Overcoat. These young people internalised their oppression (Ferguson
4 2012), and this was reflected through online self-disclosures and reassurance
5 seeking. They were unable to challenge the social order in which they were trapped
6 in. Some were observed to experiment with relationships and jealousy porn as a
7 means of increasing self-esteem and interpersonal power, while others exhibited
8 destructive behaviours that involved drug and alcohol (Ferguson 2012). The
9 restriction of the lives of other members in the community and romantic partners
10 through surveillance and jealousy occurred possibly because the community had
11 internalised the negative views and limitation imposed by another dominant and
12 economically well-off group as a result of colonisation (Ferguson 2012). Youth
13 who were able to resist, became part of an internal conflict symbolising their
14 dissatisfaction between those who have living twenty kilometres away in town and
15 in the global Internet they now can examine through their smartphones.

16

17 Resistance at a meso and interpersonal level (Ferguson 2012; Senior, Helmer &
18 Chenhall 2016) required the development of alternative consciousness. The
19 alternative consciousness insisted on a new self-definition, or self-evaluation and
20 refused to reflect the negative images of their groups (Ferguson 2012). This
21 resistance was achieved through online interactions with the local and broader
22 community (Ferguson 2012), with the technological abilities of social media and
23 mobile phones (Kral 2014; Carlson et al. 2015). When young people publicly
24 resisted online oppression, the individual that practiced the development of a
25 positive definition of self in the face of dominant culture oppression (Ferguson

1 2012) and interpersonal conflict coming from within the community, they deleted
2 their online accounts and started fresh personal accounts on Facebook or Divas Chat
3 through either social media suicide or the acquisition of new mobile phone numbers
4 as a final act self-destruction.

5

6 The process of oppression, resistance and empowerment according to Ferguson
7 (2012) existed in an interdependent relationship with one another as a continuous
8 process of adaptation to the more powerful individuals and community groups
9 (Ferguson 2012). Interpersonal and inter-clan conflict as a discourse (Schofield
10 2015) of resistance, in which exploited community members publicly confronted
11 their exploiters or the family members of their exploiters was a “crucial form of
12 power reflected in the complex counterstrategies that exploiting classes were forced
13 to adopt through the elaboration of instruments of supervision, surveillance,
14 monitoring and sanctioning” (Ferguson 2012, p. 112).

15

16 My own experiences inevitably influenced the learning from this study as a member
17 of an oppressed minority. The personal exposure during my childhood in Malaysia
18 to racial discrimination, violence and hatred in the name of equitable economic
19 policies that favoured the Malays, resonated with the experiences I had with youth
20 in Yirrkala. Malaysians from Indian background were distrustful of each other and
21 antagonistic towards their cultural heritage as they were forced to compete with
22 each other without questions the special privileges afforded to the Malay majority.
23 Therefore, I propose that it is crucial that health and social policy be directed at
24 preventing the creation of a power imbalance that threatened to destroy the
25 solidarity and unity of a nation. Without sufficient resources and opportunity,

1 competition, clanship and alliances may become impediments to self-determination
2 and human flourishing (Ryan, Curren & Deci 2013).

3

4 Under such conditions, mobile phones cannot merely be considered as useful
5 instruments of communication or novel aids to capture people's attention in a health
6 promotion campaign. They are inherently political, symbolising unequal access to
7 material goods, power and facilitating people's attempts to exert control over each
8 other. At the same time, in the hands of a young person, mobile phones and social
9 media may provide significantly enhanced opportunities to build networks and
10 alliances that may have been previously inconceivable.

11

12 **9.1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

13 I recommend that public health discourse should focus on social innovation
14 programs that support and encourage offline (Portes 2014) and online (Ellison et al.
15 2014) solidarity in the community of Yirrkala, through the practice of cultural
16 reflexivity (Jafari & Goulding 2013; Gordon & Gurierra 2014). The objective of
17 cultural reflexivity was to 'take stock of the study of culture and make the case that
18 the judicious, theoretically informed, empirically grounded study of culture can and
19 should be a permanent component of the poverty research agenda' (Lamont et al.
20 2010, p. 3).

21

22 Despite resistance from scholars to discuss and study a culture's internal
23 relationship with social inequality and competition (Kowal 2015), 'invoking
24 cultural explanations selectively, only undermines the ability of social science
25 research to inform policy discussion' (Lamont et al. 2010, p. 13). This further drives

1 our responsibility as cultural anthropologists in public health to ask empirical
2 questions in the best interest of the unheard voices which in the words of Lamont
3 et al. (2010, p. 8) are ‘whether, when and how cultural tools and cultural constraints
4 matter is ultimately an empirical, not a political question’.

5

6 As part of my study in Arnhem Land, I partnered with Miwatj Health Aboriginal
7 Corporation to direct and produce an ethnographic documentary (**Appendix 3**) on
8 the socio-economic influence of high tobacco rates in the region (Robertson et al.
9 2013). I worked with Tobacco Action Workers and the community to capture the
10 unheard voices and ideas on tobacco consumption (Kariippanon et al. 2015). I used
11 ethnographic documentary film-making to draw on the Yolngu voice and
12 storytelling techniques, and especially visual ethnography, to engage Yolngu from
13 the standpoint of history, culture and kinship. The documentary was approved by
14 the Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation Board and clan leaders. The details of
15 the project as a framework for social marketing in a traditional remote Aboriginal
16 community are discussed in Appendix 3. The framework and the productions of
17 this project is an example of how collective reflexivity and the use of filmmaking
18 technology and social media can generate a common discourse for public health
19 practitioners to draw from in program design stages.

20

21 I would recommend that addressing an Aboriginal community in a specific
22 geographic location should include an analysis of clan affiliations as the critical
23 element in funding and supporting interventions. Not all clans can interact together
24 in one physical space, and therefore health programs must incorporate traditional
25 kinship structures in resource disbursement in order to avoid further social isolation

1 of non-participating clans and their members. Mobile phones and Facebook may
2 produce the means to engender significant social change – the Arab Spring of the
3 Indigenous world. However, this glimmering of opportunity simultaneously exists
4 within a device that has the potential to reinforce social division and create anomie
5 through an individual's self-assessment of their material worth.

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APPENDICES

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6 APPENDIX 1 - KINSHIP

7

8 **Gurrutu (kinship) and mälk (skin) relationships in North East Arnhem Land**

9 These notes are adapted from Study Notes – Yolngu Languages and Culture:

10 Gupapuyngu (Christie 2004).

11

12 Dhuwa and Yirritja

13 Firstly, there are two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja. Everyone and everything is

14 either Dhuwa or Yirritja. Yirritja people sing about Yirritja things, for examples,

15 Yirritja rocks, winds, fauna, ancestors, flora, clouds and creators, and many other

16 things. A Yirritja person must always marry a Dhuwa person, and Dhuwa must

17 marry Yirritja. You can't marry the same moiety. That's how the world works. It

18 has been there for thousands of years. We live by that.

19

20 If a man or woman is Dhuwa, their mother will be Yirritja. Dhuwa land can be

21 located nearby his mother's Yirritja land. For example, the Bawaka, which belongs

22 to the Yirritja clan, Gumatj is situated next to the Rirratjingu land called

23 Yalangbara, a Dhuwa land. The mother and child relationship beyond its human

24 symbol is found in the land and other animate and inanimate objects. This

25 relationship is referred to by Yolngu as Yothu-Yindi. In a Yothu Yindi partnership,

1 one person is always Dhuwa and the other is always Yirritja. The Yothu is always
 2 considered the child of the Yindi or mother regardless of gender, even in inanimate
 3 objects like land. Sometimes Yirritja is the mother of Dhuwa, sometimes Dhuwa is
 4 the mother for Yirritja.

5

6 **Notes from a talk by Raymattja Marika-Mununguritj in Nicholls (2009)**

7 **Gurrutu**

8 Gurrutu means kin or kinship. To understand Yolngu kinship, one needs to
 9 understand the relationship terms and the responsibilities which people hold
 10 towards their different kin. Yolngu kinship also places in positions of responsibility
 11 towards wanga (land), manikay (songs), bungul (ceremonies), and miny'tji
 12 (designs). This introduction shows how the kinship chart has been set out by
 13 Balanda.

14

15 Each clan or family group can be seen as passing down through the father, but the
 16 mother's line connects groups together with links (Yothu-Yindi), Märi-Gutharra)
 17 that cut diagonally across the male descent lines.

18

19 You are the same moiety as your father and the opposite from your mother.

20



If you are a man, your child (i.e. your gathu) will be the same moiety
 and same clan as yourself.

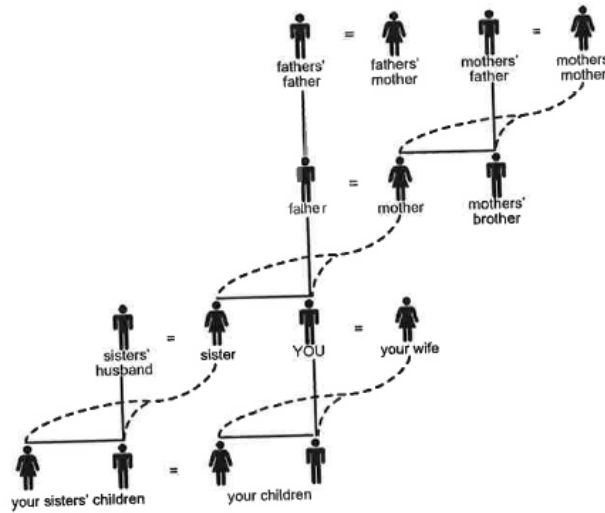


If you are a woman your children (i.e. your waku) will be the same as
 your husband, that is, the opposite moiety from yourself.

21

1

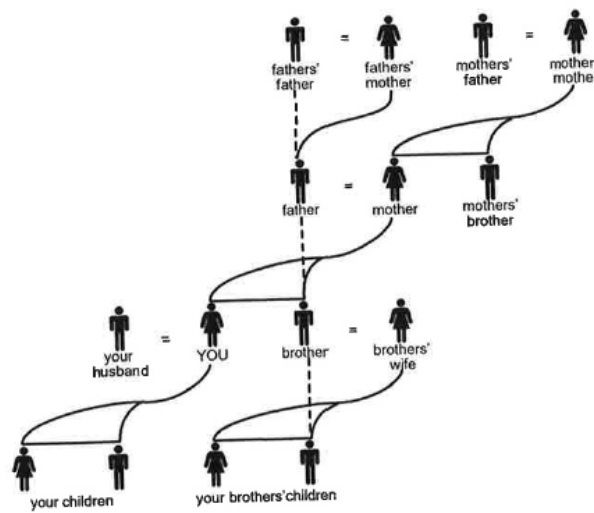
2 Kinship diagrams are normally laid out so that clan groups (that is, ancestral lines
 3 descending though the fathers) are arranged vertically.



4

5 **Appendix Figure 1.1: Gurrutu kinship chart from a male point of view**

6



7

8 **Appendix Figure 1.2: Gurrutu kinship chart from a female point of view**

9

10

11 Nicholls (2009 pp. 302)

1 Yolngu kinship charts

2 “Kinship diagrams reduce complex multidimensional reality to simplified two
3 dimensional representations. Every time something in the Yolngu world is put on
4 to paper, much of its richness and value is made invisible. These diagrams represent
5 nothing more than a Balanda attempt to reduce some particular aspect of Yolngu
6 life to a mathematical diagram.

7

8 They represent the idealised system which of course doesn’t actually exist
9 anywhere. Yolngu relationships have never worked exactly like this, but these
10 diagrams are a way of representing the principles at work in Yolngu gurrutu. There
11 is no Yolngu family anywhere with one husband or wife, and every couple has only
12 two children, a boy and a girl.

13

14 Every group and every community interprets their ancient principles to make them
15 applicable and workable to their present lives. People do not always marry strictly
16 according to this pattern, so there are gaps and bumps in the realisation of this
17 system”.

18

19 Nicholls (2009 pp. 303)

1 'mother' of the boys. The ngandipulu is often called yindipullu. The partners in a
2 Yothu Yindi relationship do not hold anything in common, because they are of
3 opposite moieties. Their land, totems, songs, names etc. will be quite different, yet
4 they have a crucial responsibility towards each other".

5

6 "Even though they have different land, songs, totems etc. they are always mother
7 and child; the child cares for its mother. This gives rise to an important political
8 reality in Yolngu life. The waku or yothu (from the Yothu-Yindi pairing) is the
9 caretaker, or manager (in many Yolngu languages, the djungaya) of the ngandi's
10 land, ceremonies, paintings etc. The waku always has the right to be consulted about
11 the use of the ngandi's land, ceremonial items etc. This is one reason why Yothu-
12 Yindi is such an important political idea in Yolngu life".

13

14 "Yothu-Yindi is the system whereby people of opposite moieties, (with no land,
15 totems, songs, ceremonies or anything in common), develop ongoing relationships,
16 where agreements for marriage, ceremonies, hunting, trade etc. can be worked out.
17 It is a system which encourages opposites to respect and depend upon each other.
18 It is a system in which everything (every person, piece of land, animate and
19 inanimate objects) has (from the opposite moiety) a 'Ngandi' to care for it, and a
20 'Waku' to help manage its business".

21

22 "The well-known rock band Yothu-Yindi was originally made up of Gumatj brother
23 who called themselves "Wawa mala" – "the brothers". When their nephew joined
24 the band (their sister's son) they had to change their name. They decided upon

1 Yothu-Yindi – a name which reflected not only their constitution as a group but
2 also a key concept from Yolngu culture”.

3

4 **Nicholls (2009 pp. 304).**

5 **Rumaru and Mirriri**

6 “People who are in particular kinship relation to yourself, need to be treated with
7 great respect, and often complete avoidance. These kin are called rumaru or
8 wukindi. The verb rum’rum’dhun means to practice respectful kinship avoidance.
9 There are many different names and ways of speaking which people use when
10 dealing with their rumaru gurrutu, but all of this richness has been condensed in the
11 English translation, as ‘poison cousin’”.

12

13 **Nicholls (2009 pp. 304)**

14 **The Mälk system**

15 “Mälk and gurrutu are two systems which Yolngu use to fit everyone, including
16 newcomers, into a social network. Both systems sustain the division between the
17 two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja and while they are actually independent systems,
18 they often fit together, and one does not contradict the other”.

19

20 “The mälk system is a system of names which are used as personal names for
21 Yolngu, especially children. There are sixteen mälk names, four male and four
22 female in each of 2 moieties”.

23

1 “It is important to remember that when Yolngu identify how they are related to
2 other Yolngu, they very seldom use mälk. Gurrutu is always the important rom for
3 people who can trace ancestral connections”.

4

5 “Your mälk is determined from the mälk of your mother (who is the opposite moiety
6 and always different mälk from yourself). All the brothers and all the sisters from
7 the same mother will have the same mälk. If a woman’s mälk is Bulanydjan, all her
8 sons will be Wämüt and all her daughters will be Wämütjan. The mälk of the father
9 has nothing to do with the mälk of the children”.

10

11 Nicholls (2009 pp. 305)

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1 **APPENDIX 2 – AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE**
2 **PARTICIPATION AND OBSERVATION METHOD**

3

4 **The participation**

5 The beach was beautiful despite a few scatterings of what was once a battery
6 operated model car for a three-year-old child to sit on, a pram and a shoe in usable
7 condition only missing the other. The sealed road dividing the two rows of asbestos
8 shells provided a view of the forty-year-old smokestacks and the smell of fumes
9 from the mining ponds to the south was exciting and different.

10

11 The house was small and furnished with white goods, a dining table with four
12 chairs, a green couch, and a bunk bed for the kids and a queen bed for the parents,
13 it was sufficient for a family of four, as we were not expecting any visitors for a
14 long time. The four hundred and thirty dollar rent per week, however, came out of
15 her salary. The house was clean but there was more I could have done with a
16 pressure cleaner and bleach. The backyard was a public toilet for the five dogs that
17 shared the territory with Galpu and Rirratjingu families.

18

19 A neighbour joined us for frozen pizza while the kids slept in mattresses purchased
20 for non-clinical staff, but we managed to get our hands on a doctor's mattress for
21 our son as the other mattress was very thin but suitable for a four-year-old. My
22 neighbour was born to a Marika elder, who travelled the world and published a book
23 about himself and his culture. She was an important person in the community and
24 when she took two bites from her slice and packed the rest to share with her
25 daughter and grandchildren at home, I swallowed my last bite of pineapple and ham

1 with a taste of privilege but puzzled at the ‘social slide’ she had experienced since
2 the passing of her father.

3

4 The four and five-year-old Kariippanons’ went out to play on their first day in
5 Birritjimi and returned with ten other Yolngu children. It wasn’t the school holidays
6 yet but there were two other kids from the homelands visiting, probably for a
7 funeral. My children hurried home to ask for their share of skin names and if they
8 were ‘adopted’. The Yolngu kids Gutthunu and Mapilli asked: “Who adopt you?”
9 When I explained, the boys still in primary school quickly worked out what our
10 kids should call them and went home to tell their parents.

11

12 The children were served fresh fruit from Woolworths for the rest of the week, to
13 aid in the ‘getting to know us’ phase. It seemed like a natural thing to do, provide
14 free food and it was also expected of us when one or two kids came over at random
15 times asking for fruit. Their parents would have to either own a car or spend twenty
16 dollars each way for a taxi if they had to head into town to buy fruit. But now they
17 can hitch a ride with us.

18

19 After a couple of weeks the children Birritjimi visited us when they felt like it even
20 though we stopped serving them fruits. They taught us Yolngu words and explained
21 how everyone was related to each other. They tried the curries and rice, sitting
22 around a table together and having their own plate, not having to share it with
23 anyone else. On some occasions, we played board games. Gutthunu and Mapilli
24 taught our kids how to look for and eat oysters on the rocks at the beach and how
25 to throw a spear. There was so much affection between the children, and we felt

1 happy in Birritjimi, aware that soon the honeymoon phase will come to an end and
2 what will the future look like. I began to plan ahead and cautiously positioned us
3 appropriately, without offence and too much assumption.

4

5 When I went outside the house to find out why Mark was going to Lombuy by
6 himself, I found 'Wulman' and his wife were both about a hundred metres ahead
7 with an axe and a bottle of ice water. It was one o'clock in the afternoon, the heat
8 was directly above my head, the brightness was blinding and the discomfort made
9 me turn around and go back inside. I couldn't ignore the conditions in which this
10 beautiful family had to work in to create art for sale to supplement their incomes.
11 So I took the car and dropped them off and assured them that they will be most
12 welcome to request a lift anytime from us. These eventful exchanges gradually
13 transferred my passive participation (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010) into a more active
14 participation.

15

16 Wulman and I regularly talked about young people and how he raised his sons to
17 do 'djama' (work) and to perform 'djama' as part of their Yolngu identity. We
18 formed reciprocal relationships with our children as they looked out for each other
19 in Birritjimi. Careful listening (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010) were followed by
20 questions, and sometimes my nodding and agreement transcended the level of
21 moderate participation in active participation (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010). My
22 informal interviews were used in this way to verify and gather as many views as
23 possible on the subject under study. There were also boundaries that as a researcher
24 and neighbour, we honoured and respected, particularly during in the events of a
25 conflict. There weren't many but about three times during our fourteen months in

1 Birritjimi, we heard, witnessed and masked the disputes and negotiations from our
2 little children. We retreated to the house not wanting to compromise the privacy of
3 my neighbours although the public display of emotion by women was normal
4 (Burbank 1994).

5

6 There were two distinct events that broke out between two and three o'clock in the
7 morning in Birritjimi. One was a dispute that occurred after a few men came back
8 home after the pub and their wives who waited for them, I assumed started the
9 discussion. The whole community was involved and both verbal and physical blows
10 were thrown at each other whilst the children observed. On another occasion, a
11 popular hip-hop song's chorus was played over and over for about half an hour. The
12 song said "... so what we smoke weed, we just having fun..." I had the impression
13 that the words of the song were like a message to the neighbours.

14 I seldom travelled by an empty car between Birritjimi, town and Yirrkala. Every
15 Yolngu hitchhiker was an interesting person whether they used a mobile phone or
16 not. As we conversed informally about clan, family and ancestors, I shared my own
17 opinions and feeling about life in Birritjimi and asked many 'why' questions using
18 the word 'how'. For example, 'how did a young person die in Yirrkala last month
19 because of texting? How was there a fight last night at the Walkabout?'

20

21 One afternoon my neighbour, one of the daughters of Wandjuk Marika, who as a
22 young health worker connected to a Tamil student many decades ago came
23 knocking at my door. She had the look of panic on her face and slightly short of
24 breath having walked very fast only twenty metres to my house. I wanted to ask her

1 about her diabetes and blood pressure noticing how she breathed but was stopped
2 with a ghastly story of a leaking gas bottle.

3

4 I ran to back to her veranda to turn off the leaking gas bottle. Never having
5 encountered such a problem before, I was unsure of what exactly to do as I pictured
6 turning off a valve and not getting blown up in the process. I fumbled with the cords
7 and turned to ask my neighbour a question when I found here several metres away,
8 safe from a possible fatal mishap. Behind her, ten metres away was a Yolngu man
9 sitting on a green plastic chair in the middle of his empty carport, smoking a
10 cigarette. I wondered why she didn't ask him for help! I felt honoured and hurt at
11 the same time and eventually confused about the identity and role I was conferred
12 by my dear community members. Hence my participation was diverse, dangerous,
13 mentally exhausting but exhilarating, and as a student of the Yolngu community, I
14 learnt a lot from them for a small price.

15

16 **The observation**

17 I left no stone of unturned in my quest for discernment. Even the most uneventful
18 day, filled with routine school drop-offs, and running the household as a 'stay at
19 home husband', I kept an eye out for the subtleties that so easily evaded the gaze of
20 the outsider. A typical day began with getting the kids into the car for school, giving
21 George a lift to work whenever he sat in front on his veranda, four houses away
22 from ours waiting to hitch a ride into town.

23

24 Between nine in the morning until about an hour past noon, I sat in the library in
25 town, reading and writing up field notes. I initially waited outside from nine to ten

1 until the library officially opened its doors but to my luck, I was offered access as
2 early as eight, when the staff became friendly with me. The head librarian and wife
3 of the former town administrator were well acquainted with the life of a doctoral
4 student having helped her husband many years ago before the advent of personal
5 computers to catalogue his literature. Naturally, I engaged with the librarian who
6 had spent a decade or two in Nhulunbuy, on the subject of teenagers, school and the
7 infiltration of mobile technology and Facebook in the general non Indigenous
8 community.

9

10 After doing some work at the library, I made my way towards Woollies and parked
11 in the carpark between the offices of the Federal Government, the Northern Land
12 Council and the East Arnhem Shire Council. On my way to the post office, there
13 was life inside and outside Woollies, around the Westpac ATM, the takeaways and
14 the courthouse. I observed and made mental notes, sometimes typed into my iPhone
15 the general happenings and greetings offered and ignored sporadically. I eventually
16 learnt to differentiate the sombre mood of the people during funerals and behaved
17 accordingly avoiding jokes and lively greetings of “Nhamirri?” (How are you?).

18

19 On the first week of every month, I allocated time until the lunch break to observe
20 the court proceedings and the exchanges between Yolngu, sergeant, lawyers and
21 judges. I sat on the left side of the courtroom, slightly out of sight. I followed two
22 particular cases over a period of three months and discussed the feelings of the
23 people involved when they were comfortable to talk about it.

24

1 The observations at the practice oval and during footy matches became saturated
2 very early into the year. I switched my gaze from the green oval to the dim lighted
3 smoky pub scene where Yolngu were living out their day to day experiences, where
4 they talked about their recent adventure or journey, shared in the sadness of a recent
5 funeral and sometimes just having a plain good time. With a glass and cigarette
6 softening my presence as the observer, I noticed the phones came out to entertain
7 the bored and the lonely person amongst a group of mates, and while others
8 surveyed the activities and actors for friend and Facebook.

9

10 At four in the morning, on one random Friday night, I was in my car in the Arnhem
11 Club car park, when I saw a drama unfold at the taxi stand opposite the pool before
12 the police drove past, to circumambulate the town square to confirm that the brawl
13 was 'family' related before they left. On that night, I saw L with his shirt in his
14 hands talking to another Yolngu while his cousin screamed at a group from
15 Gunyangara. I tried hard not to get involved but I was moved when I saw tears from
16 L's cousin. I carefully walked over to him and noticed him speaking into a brand
17 new iPhone 5. He saw me approach him and passed his new iPhone 5 to me. On the
18 other side of the phone was the voice of his grandmother, in clear English, who
19 directed me to drop her grandson home at Gunyangara. The young man in his
20 twenties used the phone to be in touch with his grandmother as he fought the gossip
21 and blames that were hurled against him for a 'crime' his father or relative had
22 committed.

23 On another occasion, it must have been a full moon that night when I woke up to
24 the sounds of a large group of people talking with aggressive tones. I sneaked out
25 the front door and crawled into my car to observe a fight that involved several

1 people in Birritjimi at three in the morning. I learnt that messy conflicts involved
2 everyone regardless of age and even a woman in the fifties could throw a punch at
3 a young man. No one was seriously hurt, but the physical expressions seemed
4 violent for the outsider. The next day, everything seemed calm but tense.

5

6 Difficult ethical issues around the impact of violent relationships in the community
7 were a huge dilemma for me. My affiliation and loyalty to my clan sometimes
8 meant that I was loyal to the perpetrator and would strive not to be seen empathising
9 with the victim. Even football was not spared from conflict and living in Birritjimi
10 forced me to play down my support for Djarrak when a senior elder from Birritjimi
11 slapped a Djarrak player during a match in town. As an outsider, I observed that
12 Yolngu were concerned about how I may judge them, especially those with a strong
13 affinity with the church. Even though I have been an eyewitness to a few events, I
14 endeavoured to put my assumptions and judgments aside when interacting with
15 individuals lest they suspect me of blaming them for their actions.

16

17 My relationship took off from the offline reality of community life into the cyber
18 world of Facebook and Diva Chat. As my presence grew from stranger to ‘Djarrak’
19 to Wayne and John’s brother, requests to become ‘friends’ on Facebook starting
20 appearing on my iPhone at least once a week for two months. I was surprised at the
21 number of Yolngu teenagers and adults using Facebook. Yolngu teenagers and
22 adults, those I knew offline and interacted with daily if not fortnightly was joined
23 in my Facebook friend’s list by young people from Millingimbi, Elcho Island and
24 Groote Eylandt and may from Gapuwiyak but the transient movements of young

1 people although sporadic still made their full circle to Yirrkala, the capital of North
2 East Arnhem Land.

3

4 My observations of Yolngu over a long period allowed me to practice appropriate
5 behaviour in some settings. Being a careful listener and a willingness to reciprocate
6 was crucial to building rapport as mentioned by DeWalt and DeWalt (2010). My
7 own value systems eventually were put aside in order to observe Yolngu values –
8 Gurrutu and reciprocal relationships. I bought many beers for those in the right
9 kinship ties who demanded from me and provided them ‘ngarali’ (cigarettes) when
10 they asked for it with their index finger and thumb clenched together and swiped
11 across their teeth.

12

13 The Honda was overloaded like any other Yolngu bush car when the situation
14 demanded that I transport my ‘family’ back to Birritjimi or Yirrkala. The cash that
15 I take with me to the Walkabout was always stretched without getting too offended
16 when my ‘gathu’ (sons) and ‘ngapipi’ (uncles) demanded another drink from me in
17 a convincing tone and body language that seemed aggressive.

18

19 I accepted the show of arrogance from some Yolngu who sat the table in a meeting
20 or at the pub in town and noticed their expression of power and self-confidence
21 directed at my unwelcomed presence. I learnt that this engagement was temporary
22 and would change as often as the circumstances allowed. I slowly learnt to develop
23 immunity to these changes and pretended that I did not notice their body language.

24

25

1 **The Professional “Stranger Handler”**

2 The clinic in this Aboriginal community looked similar from the outside of the
3 Bairo Pite Clinic in Timor Leste during the 2006 civil crises. In this Aboriginal
4 community, however, there were no Internally Displaced People (Hampton 2014,
5 p. 3). The waiting room had only three clients compared to the two hundred
6 Timorese people, many of whom had walked for at least two hours to see a doctor.

7

8 ‘One Disease At A Time’ was an organization founded by a medical doctor and
9 successful entrepreneur of Sri Lankan background. His goal was to eradicate
10 scabies in Australia starting with North East Arnhem Land. The operations manager
11 of ‘One Disease’ walked me into the clinic for an informal introduction. I was
12 invited to be their new volunteer in 2012 after they had read about me on the
13 Croakey Blog and watched my TED Talk that discussed the use of mobile
14 technology for social marketing.

15

16 The dry season was not too far away in May of 2012 and the Aboriginal staff in the
17 clinic were comfortable in the cool office, powered by a relatively new split system
18 air conditioner, in front of their work computers reading emails and looked at
19 photos on Facebook, undeterred by common workplace policies around social
20 media use during work hours.

21

22 I was led to initiate a process of ‘going deep’ (Agar 1998; 2004) and over time, I
23 formed relationships that would assist my work with One Disease to ‘denormalize’
24 scabies and increase health-seeking behaviour and treatment adherence. The
25 kitchen in the clinic seemed like an informal venue where I could make contact with

1 staff on their breaks. It was just before noon when a man in his fifties with a ponytail
2 and a cap, a long sleeve white shirt unbuttoned at the top, dress pants neatly ironed
3 with a perfect crease, a pair of black clean boots and a chain that attached his wallet
4 to his pants. He walked with a gait that differed from a few of the men who walked
5 around the community and in town.

6

7 He was slim and his skin was youthful and shiny as I thought about scabies. Andrew
8 introduced me to Wayne and I recognized his name from a Google search I did on
9 ‘Yirrkala’, ‘traditional owners’ and ‘land rights’ as keywords. He was aware of the
10 several Arts Council web pages that featured the famous artists from Yirrkala and
11 the galleries that have purchased their precious artwork. As he resisted a smile of
12 pride by dropping his gaze to the floor, he approached the kitchen sink to make
13 himself a cup of tea and ‘handle’ the new stranger (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010).

14

15 “You look like me”, Wayne said, while rubbing the skin of the inside of his left
16 forearm with the first phalanges of his right hand. He asked about my ethnicity and
17 family and my country of origin. My knowledge of the Malay language and recital
18 of words that I found similar to Yolngu Matha from Macassan origin prompted him
19 to ask me for my skin name.

20

21 He stood by the sink and sipped his cup of tea with Andrew sitting between us. It
22 had only been ten minutes since we met when he declared his intention to adopt me
23 as his younger brother or ‘Gutha’. He said, “You call me Wawa”. I was caught by
24 surprise and hesitated. I chose to delay the acceptance of such an unexpected
25 decision when Andrew kicked me under the table and ‘encouraged’ my confused

1 acceptance. With a light sense of humour, Andrew asked Wayne, what rights to
2 land and property I have as his new ‘gutha’ to which he pointed to the floor
3 symbolising Yirrkala and in the direction of Nhulunbuy, saying ‘town’.

4

5 **The Arnhem Club and the other Wawas’**

6 Wayne, a driver and traditional owner of Yirrkala was the son of a former
7 Rirratjingu elder, the man who took the Australian government and a mining
8 company to court, after whose passing was succeeded by his younger brother, Roy
9 Marika. Wayne’s mother was a church minister and a Gumana, belonging to a
10 family of renowned artists from GanGan.

11

12 As the eldest son of the brother of Mawalan Marika, a custodian of Rirratjingu
13 knowledge and law, and a clinic driver, I considered myself fortunate to make such
14 a connection. During the weeks of getting to know Yirrkala and One Disease, I
15 drafted a proposal with a goal to understand how mobile phones and social media
16 could be used to denormalize scabies, increase health-seeking behaviour and
17 treatment adherence in the community.

18

19 On Thursday evening, four days after my arrival in the town, I walked to the local
20 pub to encounter and meet more Yolngu people. The Arnhem Club carpark looked
21 empty with only two four-wheel drives until I walked in to find at least 25 Yolngu
22 men sitting close to the bar and many more sitting outside and smoked in the beer
23 garden. Wayne noticed the ‘new stranger’ first. He sat at a table with six other
24 Yolngu men who were his peers in age. He stood up and beckoned me to the table.
25 I was not ready for the engagement and looked for an escape but my research plans

1 forced my step that led me to the table. They weren't youth and they weren't on
2 their mobile phones and the chances that they know anything about Facebook were
3 slim, so I thought.

4

5 Instead of learning from the youth about mobile phone and social media
6 engagement, here I was approaching the table and knew that I would end up buying
7 a couple of rounds of drinks. Wayne introduced me to his family, saying their
8 Yolngu name and how they were related to me; 'this is your waku, this is your
9 ngapipi' using hand signs as accompaniment. It was impossible to remember all
10 their names and the clans they belonged to and how they were connected to me via
11 kinship. However, I paid close attention to the interaction at the table, filled empty
12 schooners on demand, and proceeded to consider the possibility of being labelled
13 as a 'happy to spend money buying drinks for Yolngu' stranger. When I stepped
14 into the restroom, iPhone in my right hand, I typed this sentence:

- 15 • 'Was I being 'humbled' or am I having an amazing cultural experience
16 and being accepted as part of the community'Field Notes, June 2012, The
17 Arnhem Club.
- 18 • I struggled to say 'no' to 'humbled'. I wanted to ease into the
19 community before I was comfortable in saying 'no' as the word 'no' in my
20 own culture in the context of any request is rude and arrogant.

21

22 After my second round of drinks for six men, the bartender took the liberty of
23 advising me not to continue buying, but to simply say 'no humbug' and that I would
24 not offend anyone. He was a self-proclaimed cultural advisor protecting me from
25 Aboriginal people. He used the term humbug and I was not entirely sure what

1 qualified the use of the word humbug yet. With a tray of full schooners, I turned
2 around and found Wayne and Barry sitting at a separate table. Barry said; “Gutha
3 (younger brother), they have no manners, humbugging you like that”.

4

5 Barry, from my impression, became a close friend to me from that evening. We
6 connected as brothers and he would remind me of our connection every time we
7 met. He was in his fifties but like many Yolngu men his age, although physically
8 they were older, they maintained a youthful attitude towards life within the
9 traditional law, kinship and ceremony.

10

11 On my second field trip to Yirrkala, July 2015, during a consultative process for
12 One Disease, I toured the community to seek permission from clan elders to use
13 mobile phone text messaging as a tool for health communication. As Rose and
14 Betty, two health workers for One Disease led me to an open construction site and
15 called for a clan elder to meet me. There across the site was Barry. The same Barry
16 that I met at the Club, I learnt was a humble leader who gave me his permission to
17 try different ways to engage the community.

18

19 On the last day of my second field trip with One Disease, I bumped into Barry at
20 the Walkabout Hotel. He was at a table surrounded by young people and he asked
21 for a drink. I sat down next to him while he passed his unfinished drink to a family
22 member and moved onto the fresh schooner that I brought him. “Wawa, ngarali
23 ga!” I said.

24

1 He looked straight into my eyes and said nothing for three seconds, which gave me
2 enough time to imagine this to be my last conversation with him and that I had
3 offended a clan elder. He then reached into his pocket and pulled out a cigarette and
4 thought me the importance of relationship and kin in the Yolngu world when he
5 said, “I will give you one, [but only] because you are my brother”. He said it in such
6 a way that I thanked him as though he for conferred upon me a great honour.

7

8 Barry and Wayne became my referees in the community. People came to know of
9 me through them and friendships were found based on my association with them.
10 We often met at the pub from about nine at night until the security guards ushered
11 us out at three in the morning. Our conversations revisited Yolngu and Tamil
12 cultural similarities, family dynamics, sibling rivalries and the politics of
13 leadership.

14

15 **Wayne comes to Darwin**

16 When Wayne visited me during the dry season of 2012, he brought his wife with
17 him who had an active restraining order against him. The first thing he bought was
18 an iPhone 3 for \$650 dollars and a prepaid sim card with Telstra. He got me his
19 phone connected to the Internet through Wi-Fi and spent many hours with
20 earphones and looked at his screen.

21

22 My home was in visual range of an Aboriginal hostel and when Wayne and I would
23 step outside the gates to talk and smoke, he would be guarded of any Aboriginal
24 people looking at him. “Galka?” I asked. He nodded his head in agreement and
25 urged me to go back inside. After a Queens’s birthday celebration at the residence

1 of the Administrator of the Northern Territory, Wayne changed from his suit into
2 less formal clothing and tried to be unnoticeable as he walked along narrow lanes
3 of the Mindil Beach Markets. Again he gestured to me that some other ‘Yolngu’
4 might do galka at him. Balanda, however (non-Aboriginal) do not practice black
5 magic.

6

7 Wayne was fluent in ‘Google’. He used it to show his family members who are
8 accomplished artists, including his wife’s artworks that have made the galleries in
9 Sydney. He also used his smartphone for Internet Banking and watching YouTube
10 videos. At this stage based on Wayne’s stories of the mobile phone in Aboriginal
11 hands, I was convinced that a social marketing campaign via text messaging and
12 short videos shared via Bluetooth was an interesting way to engage the Yolngu
13 community to denormalize and reduce the stigma associated with scabies. With
14 these preliminary interactions, consultation and observations, a draft proposal was
15 written and sent to the senior management of One Disease.

16

17 **One Disease, one question.**

18 The proposal to use mobile phones and social media to engage, denormalize and
19 destigmatise scabies, inspired by the founder of One Disease ‘to eliminate scabies
20 one tweet at a time’ was swept under the carpet in favour of improving the clinical
21 treatment protocol for scabies and providing access and support for functioning
22 washing machines in each household. Less than a year ago, on April 2, 2011, the
23 Sydney Morning Herald featured an article about the plans of One Disease to
24 “...create a social marketing campaign directed at the most important group: the
25 young, often teenage, parents in remote communities, most of whom have mobile

1 *phones that could be used in Twitter style campaign message*²⁹. The social
2 marketing campaign was meant to destigmatize scabies and increase health-seeking
3 behaviour in the community. In proposing a social marketing campaign, my initial
4 application of theory was centred on the Consumer Culture Theory by Arnould
5 (2005) and the Fogg Behaviour Model (Fogg 2010) which was combined together
6 to create online or digital products that used “online video, social networks and
7 metrics...to influence people’s behaviours via technology channels” (Fogg 2010
8 p.1).

9
10 Understanding the complexities of working in a cross-disciplinary team, the
11 argument for Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould 2005) and the use of the Fogg
12 Behaviour Model was perceived as inferior and inconclusive compared to the
13 physical bathing and application of medication by a nurse for a patient with scabies.
14 The plan to use Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould 2005) and the Fogg Behaviour
15 Model (Fogg 2010) to inform a social marketing campaign had already failed in its
16 planning stages due to the prevalent use of the biomedical model in public health
17 program design.

18
19 As more time was spent in the community, I began to see the complexity of running
20 a social marketing campaign in Yirrkala. The conversations and observations
21 created more questions than providing answers to why scabies was so difficult to
22 tackle. There was a dedicated clinic in Yirrkala, staffed by Yolngu staff, descendent
23 from the women and men who took the Commonwealth and a transnational

²⁹ <http://www.smh.com.au/national/healing-the-world-a-step-at-a-time-20110401-1crbh.html>

1 company to court and won and yet eradicating scabies was unsuccessful. Scabies
2 was attached to a lot of stigma and access to clinical care was insufficient. Stigma
3 was a sign that there were underlying factors and meaning which required an
4 understanding of Yolngu culture. Time was precious. The answers had to come fast
5 and unlike the efficacy of antibiotics in the medical world, the treatment of stigma
6 was complicated and maybe not yield results in time for the next annual report.

7

8 As One Disease drifted from an agenda of innovation into a biomedical model
9 grounded in one of the longest living cultures in the world, based on economic
10 sustainability and the avoidance of failure, I began to question my own exploitation
11 of this organisation. Was the purpose of my research to formulate the right question
12 to the answers that were determined by political, economic and social structures? I
13 realised that in the process of collaboration my own agency had been replaced by
14 One Diseases' own agency and the Yolngu merely a symbolical backdrop.

15

16 The process of planning, targeting, strategizing and implementation lacked in-depth
17 knowledge of the meaning of scabies, the technology used for communicating about
18 scabies and the language that could possibly destigmatize the infectious disease. As
19 a doctor myself, I found the complexity of behaviours, community life, language,
20 relationship to disease and the clinic, skin, agency and structure beyond what I had
21 theorized to think in clinical circles. But fortunately I was also trained in the former
22 Soviet Union and part of the medical program was a two-year course in Philosophy,
23 cultural studies, economics and Russian literature of the 19th and 20th Century. This
24 became instrumental in the shifting my work from a reductionist approach to
25 anthropological theory and ethnographic method.

1
2 How did I deconstruct the messy web of actors, their narratives and structures that
3 created this resistance to health care, sent to alleviate the disease burden in Yirrkala?
4 The One Disease focus became simplistic and reflected a clinic perspective of
5 causality, aetiology, diagnosis and treatment. As for scabies in Yirrkala, the
6 diagnosis was a given. Addressing the non-clinical challenges brought by scabies
7 (Currie 2000), was beyond the capability and capacity of One Disease as an
8 organization staffed by clinicians and by its clinical capabilities alone (Sen 1999).
9 I realised that we were both mistaken and that both a clinic and social marketing
10 approach using Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould 2005) and the Fogg Behaviour
11 Model (2010) was too simplistic in a context made up different and hidden social
12 categories, inequalities, severely impacted by globalisation and marginalisation.
13
14

1 **APPENDIX 3 - AN ETHNOGRAPHIC, CULTURALLY REFLEXIVE ANTI-**
2 **TOBACCO SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN.**

3

4 To the Yolngu, tobacco is a commodity that is owned by the Yirritja clans. The
5 Dhuwa clans, on the other hand, act as clan executives of tobacco and assist with
6 the management of tobacco within its traditional ceremonial function. The tobacco
7 dance is performed during funeral ceremonies and has a deep and meaningful
8 metaphor when followed by the “Djapana” dance at sunset. The smoke from the
9 tobacco rises into the sky and turns the sky red signifying the end of the earthly life
10 and the continuation of another life in a land called ‘Dhariny’ or paradise.

11

12 Tobacco or Ngarali was introduced to Yolngu before European settlement,
13 approximately 200 years ago by Macassan seafarers who arrived on the shores of
14 North East Arnhem Land in search of ‘trepan’ or sea cucumber. ‘No one smoked
15 Ngarali until Macassan came in and traded Ngarali. That’s how it started’ (Field
16 Notes). The Macassans traded with Yolngu in exchange for labour. Trade items like
17 Dugout canoes, metal hooks and harpoons included tobacco and tobacco pipes or
18 ‘Lunginy’ were adopted into the Yolngu cosmology and as the Macassan seafarers
19 became part of the Yolngu kinship system, so were the Macassan artefacts. Tobacco
20 became part of the kinship system (Robertson et al. 2013) and has been referred to
21 as part of the family for at least two centuries.

22

1

2

3 Understanding the Yolngu connection to Ngarali

4 Yolngu had incorporated Ngarali into the ritual ceremony, particularly during
5 funeral ceremonies. The Ngarali dance, sees the traditional performers on a lookout
6 for Macassans sailing on their 'praus' or boats from the West, with both hands over
7 their forehead creating a canopy over their brows, gazing far ahead into the horizon.

8

9 Then with outstretched hands, the dancers ask for Ngarali saying "ga" (give).
10 Afterwards, the dancers pick up the Ngarali and Lunginy (tobacco pipe) from the
11 ground, which today are usually cigarette sticks, then sat around the fire and
12 smoked. As they smoked their Ngarali, they thought of 'Warwu' referring to the
13 feeling of nostalgia for the land and the ancestors of the past in the Yolngu paradise
14 referred earlier as Dhariny.

15

16 The smoke from the Ngarali rose to the sky and at sunset, the sky would become
17 red. This is when the Ngarali dance is followed by the Djapana dance. The Djapana
18 dance at sunset and the metaphor of the smoke from the Ngarali is a deep and
19 meaningful metaphor to Yolngu. In the past, only senior men were allowed to
20 smoke Ngarali and use the Lunginy. "One the men smoked Ngarali because Ngarali
21 was their Gajala" (transcript) meaning precious" according to a senior elder from
22 the Rirratjingu clan (Field notes). The tobacco pipe would be painted with sacred
23 art and this meant that the pipe can only to be handled by the right leaders or elders.

24

1 The Macassans harvested sea cucumber for approximately 6 months in the year.
2 “Yolngu would stop smoking and only have a little buried in the ground for [next]
3 6 months. Get it out sometimes Ngalapal (elders), old people. Not young people,
4 not twelve-year-olds smoking” (Interview transcript).

5
6 From 1894 to 1903, a total of 2, 376 kg of tobacco were imported from Macassar
7 into the Northern Territory. These are substantial quantities when the relatively
8 small Aboriginal population is considered. According to Warner (1929) the
9 Indigenous people became quickly accustomed to smoking tobacco. Nevertheless,
10 it is unlikely that such native tobacco would have been available in quantities
11 comparable to that traded by the Macassans. So after the Macassans stopped
12 coming, it is likely the relationship between Yolngu and nicotine would have been
13 relatively subdued, for a few decades at least. The next wave of outsiders to arrive
14 in North East Arnhem Land was the Methodists, who established missions in
15 several communities in the region (Cole 1979).

16

17 **Post Macassan tobacco influence**

18 Methodist missions in North East Arnhem Land were established along the coast at
19 Goulburn Island (1916), Millingimbi 1923, Yirrkala (1934) and Elcho Island in
20 1942. They too brought tobacco with them, using it as payment to Yolngu for work
21 done around the mission stations and giving it to Yolngu in exchange for turtle shell
22 and crocodile skins. Tobacco was also used to pay wages for work that Yolngu
23 performed in agriculture, the timber sawmill and at the cattle farm.

24 According to Yolngu, the influence from the Christian Methodist Missionaries and
25 the military personnel based in North East Arnhem Land during World War 2 had

1 a profound impact in the smoking culture of the people (Cole 1979). During the
2 Methodist Mission management of Aboriginal reserves and Yolngu communities,
3 “they [the Missionaries] had an iron bell that went “ding, ding, ding, then the people
4 has to line up for ration sugar, Ngarali, flour, and they had to put then in a bowl,
5 billycan and then give it to the Ngalapalmirri (elders) (Interview transcript).

6

7 Some people protested, for example, a policeman on Groote Eylandt wrote in
8 protest to the Administrator:

9 It is expected by the Missionaries that by the lavish gifts of tobacco, flour,
10 tea, sugar and that they will win the confidence of the natives. The
11 Missionaries would not leave the sanctuary of their boat but invite the natives
12 out to them with the promise of gifts. To our minds the whole scheme is
13 wrong...It is really bribery (Quoted in Dewar M, The Black War in Arnhem
14 land - Missionaries and the Yolngu 1908-1940, North Australia Research
15 Unit (ANU) 1992, p.65)

16

17 Over the decades, more and more Yolngu came into contact with the missions. The
18 early sporadic access to the mission’s tobacco sticks became more regular by the
19 1950s. Of course, at that time, it may not have been reasonable to expect
20 missionaries to have been aware of the health effects of tobacco. For this reason
21 alone it is remarkable that some missionaries were actually aware of its addictive
22 effects.

23

24 In 1950 the controversial ‘tobacco question’ strained relationships between the
25 CMS and the Government, and brought division among the missionaries

1 themselves. In December the Government ordered the missions to issue tobacco to
2 the three CMS stations refused on the grounds that Aborigines were becoming
3 addicted to tobacco and using endowment and other monies to buy it, the
4 administrator of the Territory threatened to withdraw CMS licenses to work in the
5 (Arnhem Land) Reserve (Cole 1979)

6

7 Robertson et al. (2013) found that the smoking rate of 45.1% of the Australian
8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population despite increasing annually is
9 roughly three times the rates of the general Australian population rate at 15.1%.
10 This rate is similar to that of Indigenous people from developed countries like the
11 United States of America, New Zealand and Canada. In the past 20 years, Robertson
12 et al. (2013) argue that the smoking rates in remote Aboriginal communities in
13 North East Arnhem Land remain unchanged and as high as 82%. However,
14 according to Thomas 2012, there appears to be a consistent increase in quitting from
15 2002 to 2008 in men and women in remotes communities.

16

17 **Challenges to Indigenous smoking interventions**

18 Social marketing campaigns in the region have in the past utilised the Health Belief
19 Model (HBM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The campaigns
20 encouraged Yolngu to quit smoking in order to prevent cardiovascular disease. The
21 HBM suggest that a person's effectiveness of the recommended health behaviour
22 will predict the likelihood the person will adopt the behaviour (Green and Murphy
23 2002). For example, the association of cardiovascular disease and smoking in a
24 social marketing campaign will enable a person to quit smoking. The TPB states
25 that the achievement of a new healthy behaviour depended on an individual's level

1 of motivation and ability (Green and Murphy 2002). For example, by assuming that
2 Yolngu have the ability to quit smoking, they only require a motivational social
3 marketing campaign to trigger the behaviour of quitting.

4

5 Based on the discussion by Green and Murphy (2002) the limitations of using HBM
6 and TPB in the Yolngu context for tobacco control social marketing are:

- 7 • The assumption that a Yolngu individual has acquired the opportunities and
8 resources to achieve the desired behaviour regardless of intention (Burbank
9 2006).
- 10 • They do not take into account that tobacco is a highly addictive substance.
- 11 • The assumption that cues to action are successful in encouraging Indigenous
12 people to quit smoking (Burbank 2006).
- 13 • They do not acknowledge the cultural significance of tobacco in the
14 community and in ceremonial practice (Robertson et al. 2013).
- 15 • They do not take in consideration environment and economic factors that
16 influence a Yolngu person's smoking behaviour (Robertson et al. 2013).

17

18 In 2009, social media and mobile phones were adopted in North East Arnhem Land
19 by an Aboriginal primary health care provider to engage youth in an anti-tobacco
20 social marketing campaign called "Yaka Ngarali" meaning "No Tobacco
21 [smoking]". Video clips of young people singing, rapping and dancing with
22 traditional painting and colours were used to promote the risks of smoking. Joe said
23 'I think that there is excitement about ICT and it engages young people and
24 therefore within that excitement they're gonna listen'. Angelina said: 'Yaka

1 Ngarali: It well viral when it came out but yeah...like when I first saw the video clip
2 it was on my cousin's mobile and I asked her how did she get the video clip and she
3 said that one of her friends Bluetoothed it to her and the friend got it when she went
4 over to Elcho. So she went over got it over there and brought it over. It just went
5 everywhere. And it's gone as far as all the outstations like 3-4 hours from here'.

6

7 The health of adolescents and young adults were crucial (Senior 2002, Senior and
8 Chenhall 2008, Burbank 2012) not only because of the high rates of disease as a
9 result of smoking tobacco but the effect poor health outcomes have on the transition
10 of adolescents into adulthood (Senior 2002). The 'hook' in engaging young people
11 with mobile technology and social media was brilliant in achieving this goal as
12 confirmed by Jack: "Service providers. They worked with the kids and the kids
13 themselves created it and then they themselves sent it around to each other's phones.
14 So they were the ones in control where that information was going and they were
15 the ones who were in control of creating that information. I'm talking 17 year olds".

16

17 Jenny reflected on the 'Yaka Ngarali' campaign and said; 'Was the message
18 understood? I guess so because it was repeated throughout the song like the actions
19 that they used were Yolngu sign languages. When you listen to the song you can't
20 really get the picture, cause most of the video clip is actions and it's just fun because
21 they're using colour, song is different, it's what they like to use and it's like a catchy
22 song. The way they delivered it wasn't serious, it was fun, enjoying, and all the
23 little kids enjoy watching it as well and they've got that song in their head as they
24 sing it as well'.

25

1 Other interviewees mentioned that 'It will have to be catchy, with dance moves but
2 I won't know if it's having any impact on smokers, I just enjoyed the movie [music
3 video] anyway', and 'I've heard comments like "Oh that's a good funny clip, are
4 they gonna be doing any more?" But I haven't heard many comments about people
5 wanting to stop smoking'.

6

7 The lived experiences of Yolngu youth was a narrative of resilience and survival.
8 They used social media and mobile phones for communication and to strengthen
9 their relationships (Kral 2014). Young people were born into overcrowded housing,
10 with little to no furniture. There were very little opportunities and resources for
11 young people to escape the boredom of community life in contrast to the
12 opportunities and experiences urban youth were accustomed to. There were no
13 youth drop-in centres, no tennis courts but a dilapidated basketball court which
14 functioned as a late night disco for teenagers and their younger siblings.

15

16 The streets were littered with few rubbish bins; the houses were rustic and some
17 'beyond economical repair'. The three bedroom houses have not been repainted in
18 the last twenty years and the walls were adorned with dirt and dust instead of a
19 picture or a photograph. The young people had little space for their exploration of
20 identity (Senior and Chenhall 2012) and as they competed for resources within their
21 families and between clans, jealousy and animosity created conflicts that resulted
22 in broken windows now replaced by a simple wooden board (Senior and Chenhall
23 2016). As one parent said in an interview about young people who were excluded
24 from the experience of making an earlier music video clip on healthy foods:

1 Whether they actually took it on as information for healthy foods, I don't know.
2 Whether or not they took it on also as a jealousy thing; I wish I was able to make
3 song, I wish had gone to school so could have been involved in that workshop.

4

5 Young people, who enjoyed football, showed up to the oval often with old boots
6 while others, who cannot afford a pair of boots, stayed off the field or play barefoot.
7 Many young people were also raised by their grandparents or single mothers who
8 struggled to provide the necessary resources in a community plagued by alcohol
9 and drug abuse and the absence of a male figure, especially in the lives of young
10 men who still practised traditional law and culture. The cost of tools, sports
11 equipment, books and the basic lack of stores that stock and sell these items at an
12 affordable rate in remote communities left young people with little choice but to
13 turn to the online space for entertainment and identity exploration.

14

15 The use of the anti-tobacco social marketing video clips by a health service provider
16 to encourage 'empowerment' in this context was reinforced by its biomedical roots
17 of the 1970s (Moodie 1973, Senior and Chenhall 2012) and fabricated in the Ottawa
18 Charter (WHO 1986). According to a young person being groomed for a future
19 leadership position; 'I think the Miwatj smoking one was so popular that really
20 proved that there's definitely a base to promote health and all sorts of messages.
21 Absolutely.'

22

23 'Empowerment' became a conduit to promoting healthy behaviours and social
24 marketing was used to encourage Yolngu youth to take control (WHO 1986) of
25 their lives and smoking habit and enhance self-help and social support (WHO

1 1986). The social marketing campaign utilised visual and auditory messages in
2 Yolngu Matha (language) to empower and encourage self-help via social media and
3 mobile phones based on the assumption that new technology can breakthrough and
4 intervene directly with Indigenous youth or community (Lock and Nguyen 2010).
5 A young female health worker confirmed that the social marketing campaign had
6 good uptake and said; 'Most positive was everybody sending around the smoking
7 one that came out of Galiwin'ku'. Lea (2005) draws attention to the overlooked
8 social context of Indigenous youth and their lived experiences strived to minimize
9 their 'inherited structural dominance over the Indigenous populations' focused on
10 the 'facilitation and partnerships with health longevity, wellbeing and
11 independence' as a goal, whilst safeguarding superficial aspects of 'community
12 control' in their campaigns (Lea 2005 pp. 1310) through 'community consultation'
13 with select leaders and reference groups.

14

15 Cindy a young Indigenous health worker recalled the social marketing campaign
16 with its catchy tune and visuals said 'I think the people heard the message but didn't
17 really take it in. So yeah, if there was another health promotion, I would want [it]
18 to be catchy like that with good choreography and dancing, a lot of young kids
19 involved and they usually have the best ideas and it attracts attention in the
20 communities'. The idea of a tobacco-free Yolngu reality, to quit an old tradition in
21 exchange for a new and healthier Yolngu community and culture was interpreted at
22 the outset of the social marketing campaign as a way forward and at the end, a
23 success because of its wide acceptance. The use of Yolngu rappers and Hip Hop
24 was crucial in engaging the youth population but not their elders. This approach
25 essentially disengaged young people from the inter-relatedness and connection with

1 their traditional elders without acknowledging the authority that senior men and
2 women hold in the community. Similarly, an Aboriginal mother with four teenage
3 children acknowledged the community input into the video but commented that it
4 had a limited impact. She said: 'To be honest, we just released a report in [...] its
5 rising [the rates of smoking] and just have a video like that it's not gonna send [the]
6 message, its gonna take a lot more things to change. More innovative stuff'.

7

8 Sean who is a youth worker from Yirrkala, advocated for the 'old fashioned' no
9 technology approach to engagement of Yolngu participants and suggested the 'door
10 to door, sit down, sit in a group, have a cup of tea, talk to people, that's always been
11 the most effective' method which brings into our context the Indigenous value of
12 reflexivity and storytelling. The song lines with a posture of reflexivity and
13 nostalgia are values that appear to be constructed into Yolngu cultural continuity
14 and keeping to traditional law. The context of the Yolngu community has been
15 affected by a tumultuous century, the aftermath of which young people and their
16 elders to this day are still engaged in analysis and the reconstruction of their lives
17 now engaged with the dominant culture. Today's social marketing can be labelled
18 a 'dialectical opposite of the process of knowledge production and dissemination'
19 (Potter 2010 p. 135). Social marketing in the Indigenous context appears to be
20 conveying and disseminating new knowledge, where the Yolngu is assumed to be
21 unaware of disease causation and pathology, whilst at the same time ignoring
22 traditional beliefs and traditional medicine (Lee 2005).

23

24 In the Indigenous context, knowledge production has thus far been part of their
25 cosmology, not social, and therefore, the contradiction of Indigenous cultural

1 practice through social marketing campaigns can be considered a form of
2 discrimination against Indigenous knowledges and culture. Bhaskar in Potter (2010
3 p. 136) explained the difference of interest between the oppressor and oppressed in
4 relation to knowledge. The oppressor in this context, the ideology of the dominant
5 culture embedded in the anti-tobacco social marketing campaign (Lee 2005,
6 Petersen and Lupton 1996) as described by the quotes from Yolngu communities
7 members provided earlier appear 'as a necessary condition for rational self-
8 emancipation – whether what the agent seeks emancipation from the oppression of
9 individuals, groups, classes; of practices, institutions, organizations; of relations,
10 structures and systems' which results in 'compulsions or constraints on action'
11 (Potter 2010, p.136).

12

13 The oppressed, dominated and denied, Bhaskar argues in Potter (2010 p 136) 'have
14 an interest in the knowledge which their oppressors lack'. The social marketing
15 campaign, void of any cultural context but a pantomime of generic anti-tobacco
16 messages, divorced of historical and cultural context, facilitated the acquisition of
17 the Yolngu target group's wants and the satisfaction of their needs. 'The oppressing
18 agency, inasmuch as their (or its) interests are antagonistic to the oppressed,
19 possesses an interest in the ignorance of the oppressed. Thus the human sciences
20 (in this case the science of social marketing) and at a remove philosophy, cannot be
21 regarded equally 'a potential instrument of domination' or of 'the expansion of the
22 rational autonomy of action. The human sciences are not neutral in their
23 consequences in a non-neutral (unjust, asymmetrical) world' (Bhasker in Potter
24 2010, p. 136).

25

1

2 **Methodology**

3 The making of the Ngarali – Tobacco Story of Arnhem Land did not begin with a
4 script. With a rather ambitious goal to make an ethnographic film about Yolngu and
5 tobacco, in consultation with Yolngu stakeholders, it was agreed that the film would
6 serve multiple goals. The goals would be aligned according to implicit principles
7 of traditional Yolngu knowledge creation and dissemination practice.

8

9 Firstly the ethnographic film should document the historical arrival, incorporation
10 and enculturation of tobacco into Yolngu cosmology and culture. Secondly, it
11 should address the socio-economic influence tobacco has had in increasing tobacco
12 consumption in the Yolngu community since its use as payment for work done
13 around the mission stations. Thirdly, it should be a product that guides future social
14 marketing work in the region, from both a policy and practitioner standpoint.

15

16 As ethnographer-filmmakers, the goal was also to play the role of circumstantial
17 activists (Otto 2013), creating connections and comparing different points of views
18 and ideas across to local and international audiences but also organisers of social
19 marketing campaigns (Otto 2013). Yolngu stakeholders wanted a product that can
20 be used to promote and discuss their dilemma with tobacco as a local agenda but at
21 the same time allow for the researcher, the ethnographer-filmmaker to critique
22 Yolngu ‘perspectives that invite reflexive discussion about cultural change’ (Otto
23 2013 p. 203). The film was designed with the help of Yolngu senior elders from
24 Yirritja and Dhuwa clans to ‘contribute to a reflexive space that informs local
25 agency and action towards the future’ (Otto 2013 p. 203). Shelly advised that

1 Yolngu need local context to be able to connect to the information. She said in an
2 interview that ‘Yolngu see a white person on the side of the cigarette packet and it
3 just means nothing to them, you know. It’s the white person sickness. You know
4 what I mean. So I think there’s a lot of inequity from the governments’ messaging.
5 It’s sort of targets, one group. These packets only have white people. They don’t
6 have any cultural background at all. And of course, you’ve got the belief here that
7 smoking doesn’t kill’.

8

9 Yolngu agreed that today’s format of storytelling has become visualised and there
10 rigour of ‘film as a medium is that it, more easily than written products, can generate
11 this reflection across cultural differences’ (Otto 2013 p. 203). Yolngu were
12 inclusive of non-Indigenous audiences when they worked together with the
13 ethnographer-filmmaker in the interview and filmmaking process. Guided by
14 anthropology, the ethnographer-filmmaker used this opportunity to revitalise the
15 critical public role it has previously lost according to Otto (2013).

16

17 Using ethnographic methods (Agar 2004; 2006) and participant observations
18 (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010), the lived experience of Yolngu and their connection to
19 tobacco was discussed on a daily basis as events unfolded in the community.
20 Informal interviews were held over a period 18 months at different times of the day,
21 with smokers and non-smokers, youth, senior men and women, representing both
22 Yirritja and Dhuwa clans. The initial proposal was verbally discussed with the wide
23 variety stakeholders mentioned earlier in order to contribute to a more reflexive
24 moment on cultural change and the potential benefits as well as risks when
25 discussing the role of tobacco in Yolngu culture and tradition.

1

2 Preparations for the ethnographic film also included an in-depth study of the work
3 of Ian Dunlop and Yolngu clan leaders of the past and present in the Yirrkala Film
4 Project (Deveson 2011). The ethnographer in partnership with Yolngu community
5 members from different walks of life, focusing also on the unheard voices, members
6 of the community who had no explicit authority was also utilised and allowed the
7 ethnographer-filmmaker to be guided by a wider spread of ideas.

8

9 The Yolngu community was taken by surprise at the different voices requested to
10 take part in the film, generally, a role allocated exclusively to the ruling members
11 of the clans. From the beginning, Yolngu having watched the Yirrkala Film Project
12 by Dunlop (Deveson 2011), saw the value of it as an instrument for a Yolngu centric
13 education and through this, “political and legal persuasion” (Deveson 2011).

14

15 Secondly, Yolngu were encouraged to be filmed as the film was ‘taken up as a
16 means of recording their culture for future generations of Yolngu, and even of
17 directly addressing those generations’. Inspired by the comments of the late Roy
18 Dadaynga Marika, the adopted father (Malu) of the ethnographer-filmmaker, in
19 Deveson (2011), the general direction of the narrative of the film was conceived.

20 Mr Marika said in Deveson (2011 p. 155) that:

21

22 The first picture will be for the future, for our children and their children to see:
23 the aboriginal culture before the mission came... The second picture will show the
24 changes in the Aborigines’ way of life after the mission came, and the third picture
25 will show the results of the big changes caused by the mining company.

1

2 The 18 months of informal and formal interviews were instrumental in being able
3 to go into pre-production, production and post-production within four months. The
4 ethnographer-filmmaker was already made aware of the voluminous discussion and
5 historical and cultural information that need to be taken into context through the
6 words of Ian Dunlop in Deveson (2011 p. 156). He said:

7 My first shooting trip of three weeks was hopelessly inadequate. It was more
8 successful as a research, than as a shooting trip. About a month should be set aside
9 before this trip (for both an assistant and myself) for preliminary research, including
10 consolidating the notes.

11

12 The use of anthropology as a 'loose encompassing model of what can be classed as
13 data' which has not been limited 'in its objectives by the limitations of the methods
14 that it employs' was an enabling factor for the ethnographer-filmmaker to adapt 'to
15 the circumstances in which they find themselves' (Morphy 1994 p. 118). The
16 ethnographer-filmmaker became aware of the Yolngu association with tobacco and
17 its long history through casual conversations as a doctoral student in anthropology
18 where a limiting pre-fieldwork preparation could have encouraged the prospective
19 fieldworker "to pay too much attention to methods, in particular, quantitative
20 methods, that are likely to be of only limited interest" to some researchers and
21 bureaucrats (Morphy 1994).

22

23 The use of film as a method of triangulating and obtaining ethnographic data
24 (Morphy 1994) is also according to Morphy (1994), a means of interpreting
25 ethnographic events to an audience. Morphy (1994) argues that filmmaking is "part

1 of the ethnographic process, as a means of recording data, of ‘documenting’ events”
2 (P. 118) and useful medium agreed by Yolngu as “a medium for presenting
3 interpretations and representations of ‘other cultures’”. An anthropological
4 framework in ethnographic-filmmaking provides the necessary information
5 “necessary to enable the director to shoot the film” (Morphy 1994). Funding a film
6 crew over long periods of time is unsustainable and as far as possible, it is the role
7 of the anthropologist to guide the query and lead the discussion (Morphy 1994)
8 based on preliminary interviews, study and consultation with wide variety of
9 stakeholders and unheard voices.

10

11 “To have had to pretend that I actually knew what was going on would probably
12 have cost me all possibility of gaining an understanding”. (Morphy 1994)

13

14 Even in the process of filming, the ethnographer-filmmaker as depicted in the words
15 of Morphy, cannot be complacent with the discussion and consultation held with
16 stakeholders prior to the production of the film and miss opportunities to uncover
17 more critical dialogue and arguments, using different means of engaging the public
18 and especially the unheard voices of individuals who are bereft of power or status
19 in the community. Despite the wide discussion and variety of voices, the
20 ethnographer-filmmaker acknowledges the final product of the ethnographic film
21 as inevitably reductionist (Morphy 1994). Morphy (1994) argues that the finished
22 product is “literally a selection from a larger body of footage, organized in such a
23 way that the audience is able to follow the action and gain some understanding of
24 the significance of cultural events observed” and discussed by the camera (p. 124).

25

1 However, the ethnographer-filmmaker agrees with Morphy ((1994) in that the film
2 is not any more reductionist than ethnographic writing “at least not any more so
3 than ethnographic writing guided by a paradigm of cultural interpretation or
4 explanation – and that seems to cover most” (p. 124). The finished product, a 45
5 minute film, may be labelled ‘functionalist’ “not so much because they are informed
6 by the theoretical framework of functionalist anthropology by Banks (1988) but
7 because they are oriented towards the creation of a work which is complete in itself
8 and which for aesthetic reasons, ties everything together (Morphy 1994 p. 125).

9 Using the filming style of Ian Dunlop from the Yirrkala Film Project where the
10 “gap between finished ‘film’ and ethnographic footage has been narrower” as
11 argued by Morphy (1994), the Ngarali Tobacco Story of Arnhem Land used visual
12 images, natural sounds, aerial footage, traditional music, contemporary Yolngu
13 music, and pauses to create a story that resonated with Yolngu traditional styles of
14 meaning creation and knowledge dissemination.

15

16

17

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25

1

2 **APPENDIX 4 - A SNAPSHOT OF THEMES FROM BROWSER**3 **HISTORIES IN THE IMACS AT THE YIRRKALA ART CENTRE**

Date	YouTube
30 April	PI Boyz Aboriginal Justice Yolngu Land Hip Hop Track by Nathan B N.T. Nhulunbuy Fight 2 Pac found in Nhulunbuy Reality show fights Halls Creek fight Cabby & Jaden Kendrick vs Chris Mornington Island Girls Elcho Island Dancers Chooky Dancers Syd.29.05.06 Education Success Galiwin'ku Shepherdson College Kormilda College Kevin Swords vs Andy Loko
3 May	Cori B Mindless Behaviour Keke Palmer – The One You call One Direction
7 May	Borroloola New Years Fight 2012 Reality Show Fights
8 May	You Gotta Be Strong Don Dhalikany Burarrwanga playing yidaki Nelson Dhapan Yunupingu yidaki genius Yunupingu Geoffrey Gurrumul Mulkuy playing a yidaki Yothu Yindi

Date	YouTUBE
	Didgeridoo solo by Gapanbulu
9 May	World's most amazing photos Top 10 most shocking photos Funny Look Alikes 2 Pac California Love Bone Thugs n Harmony – crossroads 2 Pac – Dear Mama 2 Pac – Thugz Mansion AVNL LMFAO Michael Jackson
14 May	Heavyweight boxing interviews German fans attach David Haye Boxing Face Off Klitscho vs Haye Pacquiao Bradley 247 Crocodile Flo Rida – Wild Ones Usher Lady Gaga Rabbit Proof Fence Yolngu Boy – Warumpi Band My Island Home – Warumpi Band Noongah – Out da Front Yothu Yindi NEAL Boys from Yirrkala DJAYRUFF j Boog Ganja vs 2Pac Hell 4 a hustle UB40 Red red wine Reggae Chris Brown Skinny fish music

Date	YouTube
15 May	Free running stunts Free fun Monsterbike \Undisputed 2 Soundtrack Bukan empat mata 2012 UFC 140 Tony Jaa vs Fight Club 2000-2009 AFL Grand Finals 2012 AFL Ladder Progressions Ninja Baby Funny Cat, Funny baby, funny man and dog
16 May	World of Dance Vancouver Break Dance Battle Free run Bollywood Dr. Dre Kush Steven Seagal teacher Anderson Silva some moves Kimbo Slice vs. Houston Alexander Killing a Toyota part 1 Shoot guns Barrungar School East Journey

1

2

1 **Top 25 Most Played Media on the iMacs**

Title	Length	Total number of Plays
Yalangbara Opening	9:50	39
Chooky Dancers 1 - Superman	3:40	35
Wandawuy Fish Trap 2010	6:14	33
Red Flag Bunggul 2009 Final	1:27:12	30
Grand Final 2011	1:27:39	29
Datiwuy Garma 2010 Day 4	12:16	28
Chooky Wrong skin	3:48	26
Yolngu Strong	4:10	24
Djapana Film Clip	4:04	23
Baru at Bawaka	2:40	22
Wurrumula Final	4:00	22
Yirrkala Surf Club	2:33	22
World Turning	4:35	21
Bayini	16:44	21
Maymuru dhapi	33:29	21
About Buku Larrngay Mulka	6:40	20
Mungurru	3:52	20
Roy Marika Memorial	2:54	20
Ngarra2	2:44	19
AVM Millingimbi Sea Claim Celebration	2:39	18
Datiwuy Garma 2010 Day 5	12:6	18
Mayang	3:32	18
Ngarra3	1:03	18
Dhalinbuy Kids	3:24	17
R Anthony Home Movies	2:34	16

2

1 **APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

2



3

PO Box 41096, Casuarina NT 0811, Australia
 John Mathews Building (Bldg 58),
 Royal Darwin Hospital Campus, Rocklands Dve, Casuarina NT 0810
 Ph: 08 8922 8196 | Fax: 08 8927 5187 | Web: www.menzies.edu.au | ABN: 70 413 542 847

4

discovery for a healthy tomorrow

5

Consent Form

6 Youth health 2.0: The interplay of social media, mobile phones

7 and Yolngu youth and its impact on social marketing in

8 Yirrkala.

9 **This means you can say ‘no’**

10

11 I, (Please print name)

12 *First name*12 *Last name*13 consent to take part in the research project entitled: **Youth Health 2.0 - The**14 **interplay of social media, mobile phones and Yolngu youth and its impact on**15 **social marketing in Yirrkala.**

16

17 I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above research

18 study. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study may be

19 published, I will not be identified and my personal information will not be divulged.

20 I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and that this

21 will not affect medical advice in the management of my health and wellbeing, now

22 or in the future.

23

1 Please circle “yes” or “no”. I consent to:

2

Taking part in a maximum of 10 sessions of
(30-40 min per session over a 6 month period)

interviews involving the use of social media

and mobile phones by Yolngu youth:

YES

NO

Being observed during focus group discussions:

YES

NO

Having my interview audio recorded:

YES

NO

My phone being photographed:

YES

NO

To have photographs of my mobile phone used in posters

YES

NO

or presentations:

3

4 **Signed** _____

5

6 **Printed name:** _____

Date:

7 _____

8

9

10 **Witness**

11 **Signed** _____

12

1 **Printed name:** _____

Date:

2 _____

3

4 **Interpreter (if used)** *I have translated the above information explaining the nature*
5 *of the procedures to be carried out. _____ indicated that they*
6 *understood the explanation*

7

8 **Signed:** _____

9

10 **Printed name:** _____

Date:

11 _____

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

1 **APPENDIX 6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

2

3



PO Box 41096, Casuarina NT 0811, Australia
John Mathews Building (Bldg 58),
Royal Darwin Hospital Campus, Rocklands Dve, Casuarina NT 0810
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4

discovery for a healthy tomorrow

5

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

6

7 **PROJECT:** YOUTH HEALTH 2.0; THE INTERPLAY OF SOCIAL MEDIA,
8 MOBILE PHONES AND YOLNGU YOUTH AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL
9 MARKETING IN YIRRKALA.

10

11 **ADVICE STATEMENT: THIS IS FOR YOU TO KEEP**

12

13 **RESEARCHER:**

14 Dr. Kishan Kariippanon, PhD Student, Menzies School of Health Research
15 (DPHIAS).

16 Dr. Kate Senior, Senior Research Fellow, Menzies School of Health Research
17 (Supervisor)

18

19

20 **PROJECT AIM:**

21 You are invited to assist me by allowing me to interview you individually or in a
22 group to talk about the use of social media and mobile phones by Yolngu youth in
23 Yirrkala.

24

25

1 **BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT:**

2 This study will help in improving the way health messages are produced and
3 distributed for Yolngu Youth. It will also help in understanding how to partner and
4 collaborate with Yolngu youth to produce media content that is effective both
5 culturally and practically. The study wants to understand how media content can be
6 shared with Yolngu Youth via mobile phones to create behaviour change for
7 healthy lifestyle.

8

9 **PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT:**

10 If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to join a focus group
11 or an interview. The focus group and interviews will be conducted in an informal
12 manner and data will be collected via audio recorder and then later transcribed.
13 There will not be any photographs or video recorded of study participants.
14 Transcript will be provided to the participants for confirmation before the analysis
15 is finalized.

16

17 The research will take place in a community hall, or after sporting activities and
18 trainings. Each session will take 30 - 40 min and will focus only on one
19 question/topic. A total of 30-50 participants are invited to undergo an average of 10
20 sessions over a period of 6 months. Participants will be provided with a meal and
21 healthy drinks in the form of a sausage sizzle.

22

23 There are **no** specific risks associated with this study. It does not ask you to show
24 us your SMS, photos or videos. It also does not ask you to show us your social
25 media profiles.

1

2 We would be grateful if you did participate in this study but you are free to not
3 participate. You can say “**NO**” at any time of the study and after the interview and
4 focus group discussion.

5

6 **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

7 Access to the data will only be available to the chief investigator Kishan
8 Kariippanon. Associate researchers will have access to the analysis of the data
9 collected.

10

11 **ANONYMITY:**

12 If you decide to take part in this research, your ideas and information on the subject
13 will be recorded anonymously. Your name will **not** appear in any of the data that
14 will be collected. The chief investigator, Kishan Kariippanon will ensure the full
15 confidentiality of your participation and information.

16

17 **DATA STORAGE:**

18 The data that is collected will be stored on an external hard drive and kept in a
19 locked case during the analysis and preparation of results. A copy will also be kept
20 on Google Drive and Dropbox with complex and secure passwords that are updated
21 every month. After the completion of the study, the external hard drive will be
22 returned to Menzies School of Health Research for archiving.

23

24

25

1 **RESULTS OF THE STUDY:**

2 The results of the study will be available on the website [dis](#) and through a newsletter
3 that I will provide every quarter.

4

5 **CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS:**

6

7 If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical conduct of the study,
8 you are invited to contact the Ethics Administration, Human Research Ethics
9 Committee of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies School of
10 Health Research on (08) 89228196 or email ethics@menzies.edu.au”

11

12 **FURTHER INFORMATION:**

13

14 For further queries or information regarding this research please contact the
15 principle investigator, Kishan Kariippanon on 0422270458 or email:
16 kishan.kariippanon@menzies.edu

17

1 APPENDIX 7: LETTERS OF SUPPORT

2



THE MULKA PROJECT AT BUKU-LARRNGAY MULKA INC.

Yirkala NT 0880 Australia - phone (08) 8987 8015 - fax (08) 8987 2701
mulka@yirkala.com - www.yirkala.com - abn: 66 988 958 476

To Whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter in support of the proposed research to be undertaken in Yirkala by Kishan Kariippanon titled Youth Health 2.0.

After reviewing Kishan's PHD proposal I strongly believe the data he intends to obtain through his research to be of great value to the community and any organisation servicing the community. Furthermore I find the intended methodology of real time data dissemination proposed to be both instantly useful and community minded in spirit.

Whilst I can not make any comment on the methods used to obtain the data or it's main application by One Disease At A Time, I can certainly say that the data, once made available, would be of great use to The Mulka Project. Any future projects we undertake involving the dissemination of digital content throughout the wider Yolngu community would certainly draw upon, and stand on the shoulders of, the research undertaken by Kishan.

Feel free to contact me if there is anything further you would like to discuss in regards to this proposed research.

Sincerely yours.

Joseph Brady
 Programme Director
The Mulka Project

3

4



MIWATJ HEALTH

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION INC.

PO BOX 519, NHULUNBUY, NT 0881
 (08) 8987 1670 Indigenous Corporation # 1409
 ABN 96 843 428 729

Phone (08) 8939 1900 Fax

To whom it may concern

The collaborative work that Dr Kariippanon proposes to undertake is well-aligned with the goals of Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, specifically in regards to the notion of social marketing and mobile phone usage for the purpose of improved health promotion amongst Yolngu communities.

The collaboration will also assist One Disease at a Time in the creation of a social marketing strategy that is relevant and accurately targets community members and stakeholders so as to assist in the elimination of scabies as a health issue from Australia.

His work is mainly inspired by the Yaka Ngarali campaign that utilized social media and mobile phone technology to spread health messages in Yolngu Matha designed by the community.

The below points outline the importance of Dr Kariippanon's work:

This research is essential to understand the use of social media and mobile phones to improve on health communication for prevention and education.

Through a collaborative model of study, young people and community elders will be able to use the potential of these new technologies to strengthen Yolngu knowledge systems with Western model of health.

The results of the research will give voice to Yolngu communities on the use of social media and mobile phones to improve health education

Young people will be better equipped to collaborate with health services in designing appropriate health interventions using social media and mobile phones.

Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation looks forward to collaborating with Dr Kariippanon.

Yours sincerely
 Eddie Mulholland CEO
 Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation

1

2



Northern
Territory
Government

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Youth Services Branch
Office of Youth Affairs
Level 1, Darwin Central Office Suites
21 Knuckey Street, Darwin
Postal Address: PO Box 40596
CASUARINA NT 0810
Tel: 08 8999 3886
Fax: 08 8941 5291
eMail: oya@nt.gov.au

Our Ref: DCFD2012/2957
Your Ref:

Correspondence emailed: kishan.karu@gmail.com

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the Research Proposal composed by Mr Kishan Kariippanon titled "*Youth Health 2.0; the interplay between social media, mobile phones and Aboriginal youth in Yirrkala North East Arnhem Land and its impact on social marketing.*"

On Thursday 20 June, the Office of Youth Affairs (OYA) staff met with Mr Kariippanon to discuss his Research Proposal to date. The OYA is a central co-ordination agency within the Department of Children and Families. The office provides a whole of government approach to policy priorities for young people aged 12 to 25 years and develops effective communication links between young people, Government and the wider community.

Based on community consultations conducted during the Northern Territory Government Youth Policy Framework review, the feedback from regional and remote sessions indicated that young people are far more connected and tech savvy than often perceived by the wider community. The influence of social media and mobile phones on community dynamics has been of particular interest.

We look forward to being kept informed of the progress of the Research Proposal. If you have any questions in relation to this letter of support, please feel free to contact myself on 8999 3887.

Yours sincerely

Vicki Schultz
Manager, Office of Youth Affairs

10 July 2012

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