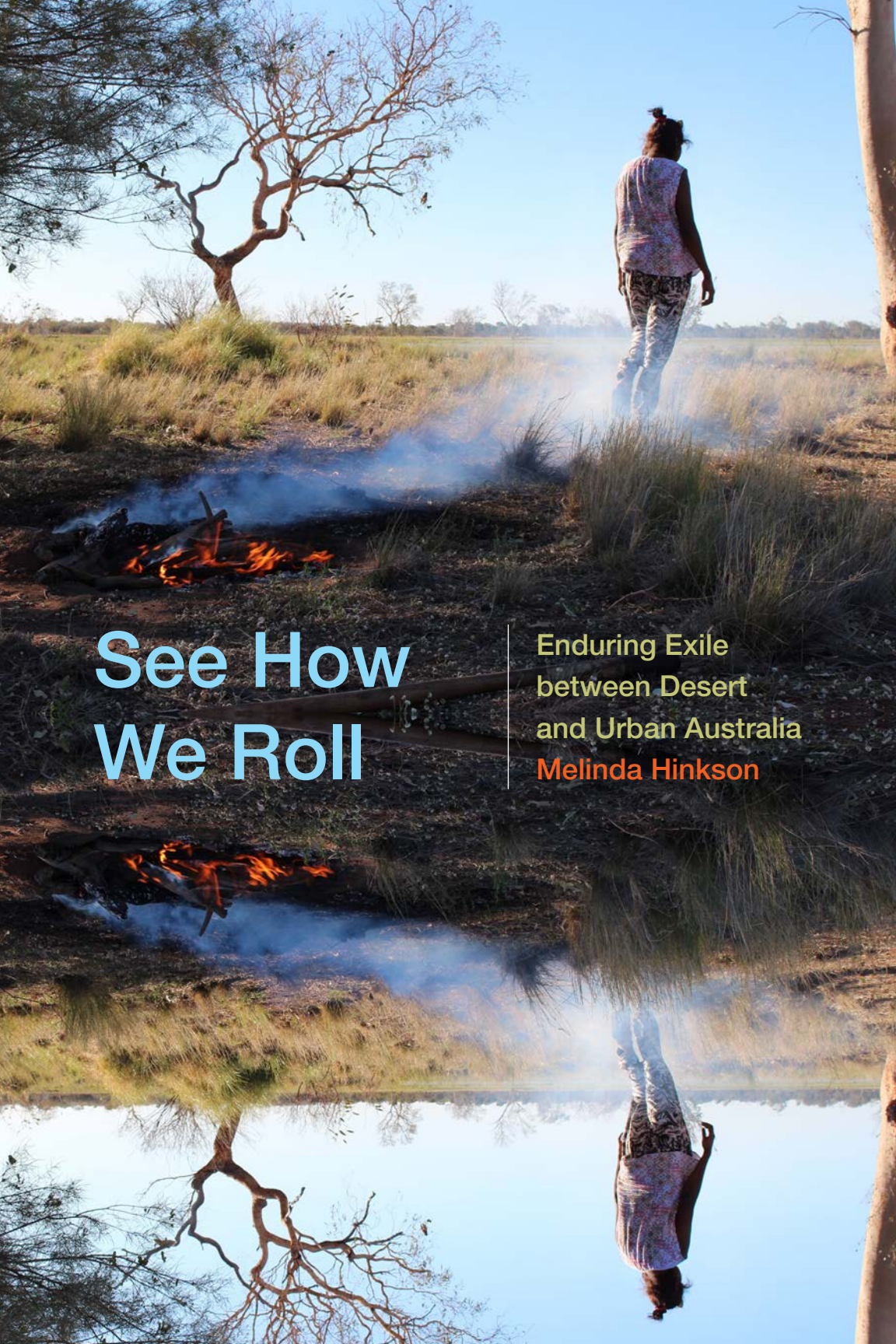

See How We Roll

Enduring Exile between Desert and Urban Australia

Melinda Hinkson

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GLOBAL INSECURITIES
A series edited by Catherine Besteman and Darryl Li

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Sections of this book draw on previously published work. Chapter 1 is a revised and expanded version of "In and Out of Place: Ethnography as 'Journeying With' between Central and South Australia," *Oceania* 88, no. 3 (2018). Ethnographic material and analysis throughout the book has appeared in "Locating a Zeitgeist: Displacement, Becoming and the End of Alterity," *Critique of Anthropology* 39, no. 3 (2019); "Turbulent Dislocations in Central Australia: Exile, Placemaking and the Promises of Elsewhere," *American Ethnologist* 45, no. 4 (2018); "Beyond Assimilation and Refusal: A Warlpiri Perspective on the Politics of Recognition," *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017); and "On the Edges of the Visual Culture of Exile: A View from South Australia," in *Refiguring Techniques in Digital Visual Research*, ed. S. Pink, S. Sumartojo, and E. Gómez Cruz (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

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Introduction

In and Out of Place

Unsettling Country

We have been driving for four hours when I suggest we pull off the road to light a fire and make a cup of tea. Nungarrayi looks at me as if I'm mad. "We can't stop, Nangala," she says. "That country gives me the creeps." In the wake of The Troubles—protracted feuding and related anxieties—the desert has become dangerous. Most people are disinclined to venture out of the town and into the desert to go hunting. Many are reluctant to break a journey for any purpose aside from the need to relieve full bladders, and on those brief stops keep as close as possible to the roadside. Two decades ago the situation could not have been more different. As a doctoral fieldworker in the mid-1990s,

FIGURE 1.1 Tanami Desert, the road between the Big Town and the Tiny Town (photo by author)

I observed bush roads abuzz with cars—cars funded by government grants and issued to community organizations, cars purchased by individuals with the proceeds of mining royalty payments, cars owned and driven by white friends—people would leap at any opportunity to get out bush. But now I cannot convince my friend to pause for a tea break as we drive the well-worn bush road between two Central Australian Warlpiri towns. Disheartened, I drive on, taking in, through the car window, fleeting glimpses of the abundant plant life that thrives in the wake of recent heavy rains.

My traveling companion, Nungarrayi, is a close friend of twenty-five years and a woman my age. She currently lives in the South Australian capital of Adelaide, two thousand kilometers (more than one thousand miles) south of the area through which we are driving, which is adjacent to her ancestral lands and the town in which she was born and lived for most of her life. She and I once wandered through the desert she now finds unsettling on hunting trips, chasing goannas and digging up bush potatoes in the company of several women she called mother, all since deceased. She is a "traditional owner" of Jukurrpa—ancestral dreaming tracks and places that traverse the desert—but is only at ease on her deceased father's and grandfather's country, another twenty kilometers (twelve miles) down the road. Three days later, Nungarrayi and I visit her coun-

try, where she walks confidently in the haze of midday heat, newly invigorated, a woman in her place, calling out to her ancestors with great emotion, announcing our presence. She bathes at the sacred water hole and guides me up the rock face to peer at and photograph faint traces of ocher-drawn pictures. But she dismisses my suggestion that we camp overnight. Several hours later, we are on the road again and heading toward the Big Town. We are visiting on her suggestion, but as we approach the outskirts of her hometown, she becomes increasingly agitated. As I slow down and pull the car up outside the house of one of her sister's sons, she has what appears to be a panic attack. She folds into herself in the passenger seat and screams, "No room! No room!" declaring the imminent presence of a person with whom she has an avoidance relationship. But to my eyes there is no such person, nor indeed any person, to be seen.

We had planned to spend the weekend here visiting her family but end up making the briefest of visits to one sister who resides in a house perched on the eastern edge of town. Nungarrayi instructs me to park our rental car behind the house, out of view of the road. We enter the house through the back door. Camila is lying in bed, watching television. She is a retired schoolteacher and daughter of the woman who was the most formidable ceremonial leader of her generation. She is also the grandmother of a renowned football player and has spent lengthy periods living in southern cities in support of his career. Her hair has recently been cut severely short in ritual mourning following the death of a close brother. Camila is diabetic and was forced to have one of her lower legs amputated the previous year, after an infection went untreated and turned gangrenous. Her Irish Australian partner, an "ex–stick man" (former intravenous drug user), as Nungarrayi describes him, is in the kitchen preparing to cook a large piece of meat. Two children are curled up asleep on a mattress on the lounge room floor. We join Camila on her bed and cursorily exchange news. After fifteen minutes of edgy chat, Nungarrayi gets up and announces that it is time for us to leave. Before I know it, we are back in the car and on the road, heading in fading light toward the regional center of Alice Springs. The more distance we put between the town and ourselves, the more the mood within the car thaws and then lifts.

FOR TWO AND A HALF DECADES I have watched Warlpiri friends perilously navigate the volatile circumstances of their lives. In a decisive move, Nungarrayi left the desert following a turbulent set of events and is pursuing a new life for herself in the city. It is a move with profound implications for herself, for her family, for the larger Warlpiri community, and ultimately for those

abstract assemblies we identify as Australian society and humanity at large. This book attempts to tease out and make partly visible the constellation of forces at work in her situation. It pays particular attention to the influences and pressures with which former hunter-gatherers, such as Central Australian Warlpiri, have had to contend over several decades as they ceaselessly adjust to shifting governmental and public attitudes to their place-based orientations and ways of life. *See How We Roll* tracks the creative and energetic work pursued by a determined woman who is highly competent and respected in one social world, as she tries to establish a new life for herself in another. It explores her attempt at upholding an appropriate exilic code of conduct, a "proper way" of being a Warlpiri woman at a distance from the places and intense sociality where such ways are shaped and adjudicated. My approach in telling this story emerges from a driving need to make sense of major ruptures in the life of a friend, with a sense that the singularity of her situation reveals related, dispersed stresses that traverse her community, and ultimately implicate national and international communities at large. I grapple with these circumstances through the prism of relationships—the evolving and attenuated relationships to country and kin that both confound and sustain life at a distance from the desert, as well as the new kinds of relationships that displacement and metropolitan life make possible and create an urgent need for. The mediating pivot point is the friendship between the two of us.

After much back-and-forth discussion, my primary interlocutor agrees with me that the best approach for the telling of this story is to refer to her by her Warlpiri "skin," or subsection, name, Nungarrayi. We could have settled on a pseudonym in order to more fully disguise her identity, but to adopt the name Nungarrayi enables a double move that speaks directly to this book's concerns. At birth, a Warlpiri person acquires one of eight possible "skin" names.[1] There is nothing arbitrary in one's skin name. Skin names pass patrilineally, via a father to his children; they repeat in alternate generations, so that in Nungarrayi's case she is born Nungarrayi on account of her father being a Japaljarri, and the female and male children of her Jungarrayi brothers will at birth inherit the names Napaljarri and Japaljarri, respectively. And so the mortal coil cycles around. The entire Warlpiri community of some five to six thousand people figure their close and distant relationships to each other through "skins" and the father-child patri-couples the terms instantiate. These terms ultimately denote a moral order that enfolds all such related people and places. One's "skin" indexes the places one owns and associated bodies of knowledge for which one may acquire responsibility; potential persons one might consider as marriage partners; those whom one calls mother, niece, daughter; those whom one must

avoid; and so on. This extended web radiates outward, across desert communities interlinked by ceremonial, marriage, and other exchange relationships, and ultimately, albeit at a more abstract level, across Aboriginal Australia at large. The centrality of this web is indicated in the pages that follow by interactions with numerous kin I describe as "extended." This extended relational order is at play when Nungarrayi addresses me as Nangala, my adoptive "skin," which establishes us as *jukana*, female cross-cousins, women who marry each other's brothers, or, in her more recent cosmopolitan mode of address, simply as "sis." Warlpiri attribute and use names and nicknames in highly dynamic and context-specific ways. But without a skin name one is literally no one. Nungarrayi is a highly meaningful identification in the desert, not so in the city. Away from the desert, Nungarrayi is a name out of place. To deploy Nungarrayi in the pages that follow is to invoke the social world marked by this name. In the city, Nungarrayi is a name that marks a difference that is dissolved in its conventional use in the desert. The name Nungarrayi is both distinctive resource *and* hindrance in her navigation of the turbulence of displacement. Where it makes sense to do so, other people who appear in the pages that follow are referred to by skin name. All other names are pseudonyms.

Significantly, Nungarrayi has moved away from the places that historically anchored her identity and pursues self-transformation at a time when the Australian government encourages Aboriginal people from "remote" areas to do exactly as she does. An ascendant discourse would see people from the bush loosen their place-based commitments to kin and country and move in order to seek improved employment and life prospects elsewhere. Such visions are deployed in support of arguments for reducing government funding for "unviable" small towns. Outstations, the smallest decentralized living areas on land under Aboriginal ownership that were encouraged and indeed acquired iconic significance in the previous policy era of "self-determination," have come to be disparaged as "cultural museums," places that lock their residents out of any prospect of engagement in the "real economy."[2] A renewed government push to "develop the north" coincides with heated public and political contestation over potential locations for planned nuclear waste dumps, and over active transnational and national interests in resource extraction and fracking across the Australian interior.[3] The most explicit state threats to Aboriginal residential living arrangements in the desert have come from the state of Western Australia, where a reform "road map" presents the idea of withdrawing government resourcing for small communities altogether.[4] The Western Australian government's strikingly literal Move to Town program has to date presided over the relocation of thirty-seven Aboriginal families to regional

centers.[5] Aboriginal residents of the mineral-rich Pilbara, the region at the heart of Australia's mining boom, battled long-standing government neglect only to watch in horror as their homes were classified as uninhabitable and demolished.[6] Newly profound challenges wrought by overextraction and climate change—water scarcity and record-breaking searing temperatures—now hover over any future-focused debates about the "viability" of desert inhabitation.[7] For the people who call these places home, questions of viability, such that they arise, are experienced in terms of profound threat. I avoid agitating a suite of pressing real-world matters by referring to Nungarrayi's hometown simply as the Big Town. Similarly, I disguise related significant places.

The mobility for improvement logic that sits at the heart of current government imaginaries aims to produce *placeless* Aboriginal subjects, people who will move to maximize their chances of finding employment and accessing resources, educational opportunities, and government services. This kind of mobile subjectivity reverses the vision for remote-living Aboriginal people of the previous policy era that implemented land rights legislation and "self-determination," where decentralized movement from government settlements to smaller kin-based residential arrangements on ancestral land was tolerated and indeed became a centerpiece of government reform.[8] Warlpiri and other desert people's distinctive place-based associations and their related cultural production figured in a national imaginary for that period that celebrated the relatively isolated small towns of Central and North Australia as locations that fostered and sustained "traditional" Aboriginal culture, language, art, and ceremony. In the transition from a mode of governance characterized by social welfare to security, the Australian state no longer couches such alterity in terms of positive value.[9] This shift in vision is not just decreed by governments. High-profile Aboriginal commentators have lent their voices in support of capital-led "orbiting" and the modes of cosmopolitan subjectivity that are anticipated will follow.[10] Anthropology is also implicated in these debates.[11] Peter Sutton sparked a vigorous debate among disciplinary colleagues with the publication of *The Politics of Suffering*, a book that excoriated a generation of anthropologists for their complicity in what he dubbed the "liberal consensus" of the self-determination era.[12] In Sutton's view the pervasive ideological force of self-determination delivered a more or less wholesale trade in positive, abstract depictions of Aboriginal "culture," at the expense of addressing the brutalities and traumas being endured by living persons. Sutton offered bleak judgments of Aboriginal cultural practice, kinship, and community life as inherently violent and ill-equipped for modern conditions. These judgments were seized upon and deployed by advocates of a newly punitive governmental regime.[13]

Meanwhile, Aboriginal people whose lives are subject to these debates and punitive social experiments long to break out of grinding poverty and constrained possibilities. "This is no way to live," one stressed friend tells me as she describes her struggle to provide for the needs of five grandchildren living in her care, as she navigates the punishing new demands to access family support payments. When the notion that there is no future in the desert gains traction, the idea of leaving—whether for a finite period or for good—has strong appeal. But what happens when desert people heed these calls and get up and move?

Mobility and Its Containment

See How We Roll tells the incongruous story of Warlpiri being newly encouraged to move amid ever-tightening control over their lives. Simultaneously, it tracks those same people's vigorous pursuit of lives beyond the terms of securitized governance regimes and beyond the lands over which they were recognized as "traditional owners" under land rights law. This is a process of displacement—forced *and* voluntary—the broad shape of which is not new but rather has been unfolding since Warlpiri people's earliest settler colonial encounters. Warlpiri felt the full intensity of colonial power as recently as the 1920s, as they were progressively driven from their arid desert lands and hunter-gatherer mode of life by encroaching pastoralists and prospectors.[14] As with elsewhere in Australia, the worst atrocities of this period involved mass killings, exploitation of Aboriginal bodies, malnutrition, and the spread of chronic disease, resulting in the devastation of entire residential groups.[15] By the 1940s, the great majority of Warlpiri had been relocated onto government settlements and subjected to a new sedentary existence. Part of this relocation occurred voluntarily, as Warlpiri assessed their situation pragmatically and were drawn to settlements as places offering respite from the grueling demands of hunter-gatherer subsistence.[16] But settlement would not bring to an end the vigorous reproduction of Warlpiri modes of authority and ways of relating. Across the subsequent decades, senior men and women led several remarkable episodes of creative dissent to collectively reorient large congregations of people to their new environments and living arrangements, on their own terms. In one significant mid-twentieth-century episode, overcrowding, "tribal fighting," and insufficient water supply in the southern Warlpiri settlement led the minister for native affairs to order the relocation of 130 Warlpiri to a new settlement, six hundred kilometers (almost four hundred miles) north on the lands of the Gurinji. In the months that followed, at a partially built settlement that was dangerously underequipped to cater to the basic needs of so many people and

amid the homesickness and mental and physical trauma of dislocation, senior men embarked upon an intensified period of ceremonial activity and ritual exchange with local landowners. Through this activity they acquired and activated symbolic resources and legitimacy with which to refocus the newly assembled group.[17]

While the superintendents of the mid-twentieth century exercised considerable control over the movement of people in and out of settlements, this control was by no means total.[18] Following the Hooker Creek relocation, a distressed mother, whose young baby had died, walked with her extended family hundreds of kilometers through the desert back to the southern settlement from which they had been removed. They would not be the last to do so. Sedentarization also involved new kinds of government-condoned mobility, all tied to emerging Warlpiri participation in the wider economy. From the 1930s, men walked into the desert on foot to shoot dingoes and collect their scalps; from the 1940s, they were deployed to pastoral stations to work in the cattle industry; from the 1960s, children were taken on interstate school excursions; and from the 1970s, Warlpiri traveled increasingly farther afield to attend boarding school and higher education institutions, to exhibit their art, to play football matches, to lobby politicians, and to visit city-based kin and friends.[19]

Prior to colonization, masterful navigation of the desert and its seasonal resources was a matter of life and death. The deep-time mythopoetic order of Jukurrpa—the body of ancestral law embodied in ceremony, song, and iconography through which the world-making endeavors of ancestral beings are narrated and reenacted—premises a distinctive form of mobility that made the desert both sentient and inhabitable. Nancy Munn has shown that movement is itself instantiated in the primary symbol of Warlpiri iconography: the coupling of circle and line, or site and path, figured in Warlpiri and broader Central Desert visual culture as ○=.[20] This icon enacts the spatiotemporal intersection between place and movement: most basically between *ngurra*/site/camp, as the place where vital activities of nurturance and reproduction occur; and *kuruwarri*/track/ancestral potency, as the dynamic movement forward and away from the camp in pursuit of sustenance and world-making adventure. The recursive relationship between camp and movement insists that any journeying outward is followed by a return to camp—by no means always to the same place, but to the same set of nurturing arrangements and practices a camp sustains. Events or happenings occur in specifically located places.[21] These are named and known places, places linked through eventful travel, ancestral places glossed in English as "country," owned by and associated collectively with intergenerational lineages of peoples. Places are inex-

tricably involved in the making of persons; places confer particular qualities and characteristics on people. In return, places demand to be looked after. This reciprocal conjuncture, signaled in the pages that follow by the concept of emplacement, is, as numerous anthropologists have observed, the primary medium of transgenerational inheritance.[22] Yet, the assured authority with which I can draw from an earlier generation of compelling and richly detailed anthropology to rehearse the lineaments of such a social order is cut across by more recent observations. These make clear that the symbolic order, practices, and processes through which intergenerational inheritance occurs are under extraordinary pressure.[23]

The force of movement, as people accede to the call of journeying kin and other needs and attractions, constitutes a primary dynamic of life in the desert. Older people's memories and modes of storytelling are stacked with rich details of travels made, the order of places visited, meals that were taken, all in the company of specific persons.[24] Such detailed recall continues to be a characteristic feature of Warlpiri attention, as is taking pleasure in journeying itself. The idea of "kinship riding" conjures the dense and dynamic assemblies of travelers who spontaneously fill a car as it departs one place for another.[25] Prior to the introduction of laws prohibiting such modes of transport, extended families would enthusiastically pile onto the open traybacks of trucks and utility vehicles in order to travel together. For as long as Warlpiri have had access to motorcars, senior men have orchestrated *jilkija* (initiation journeys), which bring together many hundreds of dispersed male kin traveling by vehicle across a vast area.[26] These large convoys mobilize and visibilize patrilineal authority; they enact the regional workings of Aboriginal law, following pathways laid down by ancestors, demonstrating knowledge of country, ritual status, and relationships of shared responsibility across space and time. Simultaneously, these journeys restrict the movement of others, especially women, in earlier times on threat of death. At the level of the everyday, desert towns experience constantly fluctuating populations as people flee boredom and the pressures and responsibilities of home for short periods of adventure, drinking, gambling, chasing love interests, and visiting family in other towns, regional centers, or farther afield.

If emplacement predicated on mobility is a primary force in Warlpiri life, another kind of movement occurs in long-term and permanent departures from the desert. Extended separations commonly occur as a result of chronic illness necessitating intensive medical care; the sending of children away to boarding school; incarceration; and removal of children by government authorities. Since the 1970s, it has been increasingly easy for individuals, especially

FIGURE 1.2 Tiny Town backyard workshop (photo by author)

women, to leave of their own volition, whether fleeing situations of physical abuse by domestic partners or for other reasons.[27] In his study of what he dubs the Warlpiri "diaspora," Paul Burke estimates 23 percent of the total Warlpiri population live outside the "homeland." Beyond those who leave are those who dream of leaving. Departure fantasies are fed by social media feeds, intimate relationships struck up with new "friends," and images promising that better lives can be lived elsewhere. Thus, the history of Warlpiri mobility is multifaceted and contradictory, at once enforced by settler colonial dispossession and more recent episodes of governmental fiat, and also vigorously pursued by Warlpiri themselves. Movement is distinctively inscribed in dynamics of the everyday, as well as being what many recognize is a deeply held cultural impetus.[28] As one senior man put it to me glibly, "We have always moved around." The pages that follow are attentive to the complex interpenetration of these competing cultural logics—to the need to differentiate *kinds* of movement and to understand the implications of acceleration and stasis.

It is a cunning paradox that against this picture of incessant movement the Australian nation-state recognition of Warlpiri ownership of one hundred thousand square kilometers of the Tanami Desert works to fix desert people in place and time. Through the lens of land rights and "traditional ownership," Warlpiri are recognized as having place-based "culture" but not future-focused

civilization. This recognition serves to legitimize the conditional nature of the legal title granted to Warlpiri: they are owners of land but not the valuable mineral deposits that lie beneath its surface. They can live on and adjacent to their ancestral places, they can "maintain" their "cultural practices," but in doing so they must forgo many of the resources and citizenship entitlements taken for granted by Australians living in metropolitan regions. Land rights legislation entitles those recognized as "traditional owners" to receive their share of mining royalty distributions paid as compensation for damage done to country and communities. These royalty payments translate into desperately needed income, but they also establish new tensions and highly charged politics for the public identification of entitled kin. This is the pincer movement in which Warlpiri are caught: intergenerational inheritance of country remains a primary ontological anchor, but that distinctive relationship is cut across by commodity capitalism's competing logic and the settler colonial state's governance of Indigenous difference. Four decades after the establishment of land rights and its associated regime of "traditional ownership," the generation of senior men and women who acquired place-based knowledge while living in the desert have passed on. The ever-voracious commodity-extraction regime compels Warlpiri to relate to their ancestral places not as sites of sustaining, taken-for-granted identity but as containing a different kind of transformative potency, one that might enable or force them to become different people. If they so choose, they can leverage their places in order to go elsewhere.

Displacement in the Time of The Troubles

The preceding discussion makes clear that from the perspective of Warlpiri history, Nungarrayi's displacement, per se, is by no means exceptional. But the historical moment and the character of her displacement are distinctive. At the heart of the more recent events with which this book is concerned sit ten years of protracted fighting and distress, which Nungarrayi and other Warlpiri would prefer to shield from public view. The Troubles, as I shall refer to them—and here I consciously borrow the term that invokes the pervasive and protracted political terror of Northern Ireland's extended period of conflict—are a cluster of volatile tensions that pervade the southern Warlpiri community, running along lines of kinship (rather than religion), erupting sporadically and with terrifying force.[29] Triggered initially by the death of a much-loved young man and the sorcery allegations that followed, The Troubles evolved as an extended period of intermittent and spontaneous large-scale fighting and episodes of arson, leading to injury, more deaths, banishments, displacements,

and many lives irreparably broken. The Troubles have become *the* causal narrative of the times—they are ceaselessly invoked and talked over and freshly ignited with news of every mishap, accident, diagnosis of chronic illness, and death that befalls this community. The Troubles have had dramatic spatial effects, at times enforcing new restrictions on the movement of residents in the largest Warlpiri town, igniting pervasive fear of the desert, and causing families to bury deceased loved ones three hundred kilometers (almost two hundred miles) away from home, outside of Warlpiri country, in the Alice Springs cemetery. This vigorously pursued, sorcery-fueled set of disputes galvanizes Warlpiri attention, constituting a dispersed space for wielding power and inflicting damage.

How to deal with these forces at the level of ethnographic writing is a challenge. In the context of such volatile eruptions, which are watched and reported on with voyeuristic fascination by mainstream media outlets and feed public perceptions of remote Aboriginal towns as places of violence and pathology, to produce a detailed account of The Troubles would be an exercise in doing violence by re-presentation.[30] In requesting that I not write directly about The Troubles, Nungarrayi flags one of anthropology's enduring neocolonial dilemmas. The revelatory narrative that was the hallmark of one kind of classical anthropological project resulted in the publication of finely grained description of intimacies, practices, and forms of knowledge that otherwise moved through restricted circuits. The anthropological endeavor thus became imbricated with colonial violence, secret stealing, and spying. As a community with nearly a century of experience as subjects of and participants in research, film, and media projects, many Warlpiri have a sophisticated understanding of the disconnects between their own circuits of exchange, their inwardly focused public sphere, and the complex politics of representation through which depictions of Warlpiri circulate more widely. Descriptive writing *about* life does not stand airily above our outside life. In eruptive circumstances writing can be hurled like petrol bombs.

In the pages that follow I do not seek to tell the "truth" about The Troubles, and I deliberately avoid the term Warlpiri use to invoke them. Rather, I attempt to understand something of their dispersed effects and the broader context in which they have been unleashed.[31] From one perspective my approach might be interpreted in terms of ethnographic refusal.[32] But there is also a basic analytic impulse at work here, a commitment to approaching life as lived through the myriad social forces that constrain and enable it. To approach life thus is to refuse parochialism, and relatedly the idea that Warlpiri circumstances can be "understood" by delving ever more deeply into a set of inwardly focused, ap-

parently locally ordered phenomena. As Daniel Goldstein argues, in the time of the security state there is a pressing task for anthropologists to analyze how a truly global reality is played out in local contexts.[33] Moreover, displacement occurs by way of dispersed, confusing, countervailing forces that can never be fully gotten hold of, let alone mastered.

While Warlpiri themselves do not make the connection, The Troubles were initially ignited a year after a dramatic federal governmental incursion, the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response, otherwise known as "the Intervention." The Intervention was delivered into the public domain spectacularly, on prime-time television, along with a new image-world that characterized bush towns as sites of pervasive child sexual abuse, domestic violence, dysfunction, and corrupt culture. The prime minister's initial deployment of the army and subsequent introduction of a plethora of new legislation, including a new income management regime, new land tenure arrangements, strict new housing tenancy agreements, and new school attendance strategies, were closely followed by the Northern Territory government's replacement of Aboriginal community government councils with spatially massive regional shires and the disbanding of bilingual education programs. From one angle, the Intervention was a textbook case of a security state deploying dispersed fear to "fill the ruptures that the crisis of neoliberalism has engendered."[34] The implementation of these policies was experienced by Warlpiri in the form of slow-moving misery rather than dramatic event, but also, unmistakably, as an outright attack on the slender vestiges of power they tenuously held over their own affairs.[35] Most keenly felt by community leaders and political activists was the decisive removal from the town of any structure through which they could exercise authority over the matters that most concerned them.[36] Moreover, every aspect of Warlpiri lives was now subject to government and police scrutiny.

As I watched The Troubles unfold in tandem with the implementation of this militarized, world-changing shift in governance, one possible interpretation of Warlpiri agency emerged as compelling. At a time when authority was comprehensively being taken from them, The Troubles appeared as a vigorous effort by Warlpiri to hold on to the one kind of power that arguably remains theirs: the power to tell stories, to constitute the order of things in their own narrative terms. The Troubles disrupt the dominant governmental representation of Aboriginal "dysfunction" and supplant a Warlpiri understanding of the workings of power and world (dis)order. At times, the forces that appear to swarm and congeal in The Troubles assume a magnetism and shadowy terror similar to the allegorical black caiman that stalks Lucas Bessire's stirring navigation of end-of-world violence in the Chaco, with its composite image

of Indigenous "senses of being in the world, ongoing destruction, and the reanimated legacies of colonial and ethnographic projects of all kinds."[37] If The Troubles constitute not simply a series of incursions and counterincursions but also the kind of storytelling that Michael Taussig writes of, where stories themselves constitute "the ether" in which violence operates, this storytelling occurs as a complex series of movements.[38] There is the story that circulates, the story told to the anthropologist, the story the anthropologist apprehends, and the story the anthropologist herself presents.

In the wake of the violent retribution unleashed by The Troubles, in late 2010, one hundred members of Nungarrayi's extended family fled two thousand kilometers (more than one thousand miles) to the South Australian capital of Adelaide. Their decision to leave was made after police intervened in the families' attempts to resolve the dispute locally, via customary punishment. It is telling that they felt they needed to go so far to reach a place of relative sanctuary. Ironically, on arrival in Adelaide the "refugees" were initially provided accommodations and sustenance by the local police academy. Leaving these orderly premises, a large number of people moved to the parklands on the edge of the city in an area frequented by itinerant Aboriginal drinkers, where they set up tents and camped for three weeks. By all accounts a great time was had by all, but the very public ways in which these Warlpiri live stirred the anxieties of local residents and precipitated the group's eventual repatriation to Central Australia the following March, in two buses funded by the Northern Territory government.[39] Nungarrayi returned home to face the customary punishment that awaited her as mother of a man implicated in the death of another man. This "payback" was finally carried out—a remarkable feat given that the practice of such customary authority had been outlawed by the new federal legislation. According to Warlpiri edicts, this should have been the end of the matter. But it wasn't. Four years later Nungarrayi tells me she feels like she has been sung, that she has been the subject of a sorcery attack. When she sets foot on the land of the town in which she was born and lived most of her life, *it pushes her back*.

Nungarrayi's banishment from her hometown could, from one angle, be explained as an outcome of protracted feuding between two extended families with primitivist commitments to arcane sorcery beliefs. "Rioters Seek Enemies' Exile," screamed the headline on the front page of Australia's only national newspaper, the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, on September 28, 2010. Attention to the feud and separately to "the Intervention" brings certain features into view but not others. As I draft this book, the twinned governmental forces of welfare and policing/incarceration bear down upon Aboriginal people in the

Northern Territory with exceptional punishing reach.[40] Premature deaths as a result of accident, chronic illness, and suicide generate pervasive grief and transform weekends into a relentless schedule of funeral attendance.[41] It is chillingly common for middle-aged friends to have lost siblings, children, and grandchildren as a result of premature death. Chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, acute rheumatic fever (eradicated decades ago for the wider Australian population), and obesity are widespread. The shrinkage of spaces in which Aboriginal authority can be meaningfully enacted constrains any future focused work of the imagination. Governments, meanwhile, proliferate all manner of inquiries, royal commissions, "Closing the Gap" targets, and interventions that entrench rather than shift these circumstances. Yet, on the ground, despite the constant presence of grief and trauma, and below the radar of statistical measurement, life is lived vigorously, with humor. Remarkably, as Achille Mbembe observes, "something in the principle of life defies all ideas of the end."[42]

In mid-2016, when Nungarrayi and I reunite in Adelaide, she is not only grieving the lost possibilities of her earlier life in Central Australia and much consumed by concern for the welfare of her beloved son who was incarcerated in Darwin prison. She is also rejoicing in her survival and in a new life she is making with Ram, a Bhutanese man who has been in Australia for just two years following the Australian government's acceptance of his family's application for asylum. The two met at the house of one of Nungarrayi's cousins, a place where diverse marginalized people come together to find company, to score and smoke marijuana. Ram is twenty years younger than Nungarrayi, the same age as her son. As she describes it to me, with a sparkle in her eye, he pursued a relationship with her with some determination. For a year they have lived together in the modest transitional housing provided to Nungarrayi after she accessed the South Australian government program in support of survivors of domestic assault.

Friendship on the Move

Displacement not only fractures a person's assured relationship to place. Relatedly, displaced persons confront unprecedented pressure on the social relations through which they know places. Under these conditions it is not surprising that friendship emerges as promise as well as problematic. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, reading Aristotle, provides a fleeting, intriguing sense of the resonances between friendship and at-homeness that bears directly upon the concerns of this book. True, complete friendship, Aristotle argues, turns upon

self-love: the state of effectively being a friend for oneself is the condition for all possible bonds with others. Friendship is closely linked with ideas of home and homeland. It derives from the ancient Greek term *oikeion*, variously defined in relation to ideas of affinity, familiarity, and endearment. The implication is that friendship involves a special state of connectedness, a taken-for-granted solidarity, genuine at-homeness.[43] Situations of displacement present an urgent existential need for genuine friendship, for relationships that foster and support a sense of being at home, enduring but flexible relationships, familiar anchor points in the midst of dislocation.

So, what then of cross-cultural friendship? What additional challenges of empathy and understanding are encountered by persons who pursue friendships across differences of language and ethnicity, place-based orientations, and social inequality? Zooming out, does friendship offer a potential ideal for relations at a distance, for transformative relations between stranger-citizens, passersby, at the level of neighborhoods, regions, and nations? Such questions are commonly posed in migration studies, and they become pressing as Nungarrayi and I travel around together and encounter others. Her shifts in demeanor reveal a great deal about the racialized expectations and presumptions that mark the ground of dislocated existence in contemporary Australia. I have become alert to the stark change in mood that often occurs as we leave the easy, open space of walking the streets together and climb into the back seat of a taxi, especially one driven by an Indian man. How, by what means, and in whose company we journey matters.

Axel Honneth, pressing further with Gadamer's ideas, observes that authentic friendship breaks down at a distance where the thinned-out attitude of respect (or disrespect) is the starting point of engagement between self and other.[44] In Honneth's reading, respect—whether in positive or negative modes—is a reflective attitude, a deficient form of intersubjectivity that requires no genuine engagement with or openness to a response from the other. Honneth, by way of social psychologist George Herbert Mead, reminds us that every person is dependent on the possibility of constant reassurance by the other. The experience of disrespect is a direct affront to expectations of such reassurance. Ultimately, the experience of disrespect "poses *the risk of an injury that can cause the identity of the entire person to collapse*."[45]

The specter of this risk hangs over the journeying that unfolds in this book, as Nungarrayi navigates her precarious situation: banished from her hometown, not fully accepted in her new place of residence. Undertaking research for this book, Nungarrayi and I travel together in and between all manner

of places and social assemblies. As we do, her vigorous wrestling between the terms and associations of the city and the desert comes into view, as do creative conjunctions she makes between the experience of dislocation and new placemaking practices, along with situations that trigger her differently geared and emergent subject positions. Getting stuck is as much a feature of these circumstances as is mobility itself. Free physical movement and rapid-paced mediated communication coexist with the containment, misery, and slow grind of poverty and oppressive governmental oversight. Myriad factors intervene in the pace of life. The larger framing of this project in terms of our journeying together foregrounds the two and a half decades in which Nungarrayi and I have known each other, and relatedly the shifts in governance, public attitudes, Warlpiri circumstances, and anthropological theory that have unfolded across that period. Our movement at times stimulates a dynamic back-and-forth engagement between the immediacy of a situation and older associations. Memory and nostalgia are often at work in our conversations. Journeying in this way is not a seamless flow of mobility, of immanence, but rather an uneven, volatile, and at times discordant mix of relational, temporal, and spatial elements. The conjunctions here resonate with dynamics Henrik Vigh describes as "motion squared," when he observes interactions on the streets of Bissau, Guinea, between marginalized men who are themselves undergoing transformation, in places marked by volatility, insecurity, and uncertainty.[46] Attention to moments of stasis and rupture, to a change of pace, provides a glimpse of what is at stake in distinctively ordered relationships between people and places at a time when such relationships are everywhere under unprecedented pressure.

Becoming, from Where?

The affective call of the desert and the relationships it indexes register strongly in the pages that follow. It thus strikes me as paradoxical that at a time when displacement is identified as a generalized human condition, and a matter of urgent concern for social movements and research, there is a corresponding waning of interest in difference. In much recent anthropology, place-based alterity is commonly a casualty of cultural critique, dismissed as the product of colonial imaginaries, more recent forms of governmental domination, or totalizing social theory. In one influential project that wholeheartedly embraces a Deleuzian orientation to "becoming," João Biehl and Peter Locke put forward a schema for contemporary ethnography that destabilizes the "primacy of being" and privileges the terms of open-ended movement, emergence, and immanence.[47] Biehl

and Locke's analysis attributes a normative status to mobile, future-focused, flexible subjectivities, against what are identified as coercive nativist imaginaries of unchanging difference. Such a line of argument has broad appeal in the present. Against the brutality of border protection regimes, passionate arguments are made in support of the hypermobile and future-focused migrant.[48] Yet, such a bifurcation of becoming from alterity has the effect of closing down attention to the distinctive place-based practices and orientations that are invariably a target of state interventions, and that displaced persons themselves actively draw upon as they push back against the terms of dislocation.[49]

Across the history of settler colonial Australia, as elsewhere, primitivist categories and imaginaries of fixed and reified Aboriginality have played and continue to play a crucial role in channeling logics for governance of, and public attitudes to, Aboriginal people.[50] Disentangling the recursive politics of Indigenous recognition and representation—the space where the terms of Indigeneity as well as self-recognition are produced and reproduced—is a complex exercise. A thread running through this book attempts to tease apart fetishized deployments of Aboriginality from the place-based practices that structure and sustain shared orientations between persons, their environments, and the world at large. The imperative to follow this line of inquiry does not derive from a romantic proclivity for keeping people fixed in time and place, but rather from observing Warlpiri friends formulate creative responses to the challenges they face. Strategic Warlpiri campaigns, whether personal or collective, inevitably seem to involve drawing concepts and practices from older social formations. Any Warlpiri politics of becoming turns upon the ability to reenact symbolic forms that are authorized as "proper," masterfully reproduced, or deliberately refashioned for new circumstances.

The recursive nature of this process calls to mind the dynamic structure of the self described by Mead. Mead figures the relationship between the "I" and the "me" that a person ceaselessly cycles through in the give-and-take of social interchange. A self, Mead eloquently writes, is "an eddy in the social current," actively engaged in registering and internalizing attitudes of specific and generalized others, taking on those ideas as one's own.[51] Social integration proceeds through this internal "conversation of gestures," the "me" absorbing social convention, a process that makes a coherent and organized self possible, just as the "I" calls out one's individualized distinction and the pursuit of innovative conduct. In this approach, "becoming" can only proceed through conscious awareness of where and what one has been. Mead's "conversation of gestures" offers an especially apt metaphor for Nungarrayi's negotiation of the

subjective possibilities that emerge in her new life in Adelaide, as well as the conversations I have with myself from time to time, as I wonder out loud on the page about the baggage and blinkers that attend to my observations.

Nungarrayi's exile and the possibilities and challenges it entails are distinguished from the forced displacement of her grandparents and great-grandparents in the 1940s and 1950s in several ways. To be *dis*placed, in the sense of being physically distant from a particular place or social assembly, no longer straightforwardly involves separation and certainly not isolation. Mobile phones, many times lost and replaced, enable Nungarrayi's exilic existence, sustaining spontaneous and intense interactions with kin, and especially daily conversations with her son during his lengthy periods of incarceration. The methods and means of communication afforded by mobile phones differ markedly from the dense bodily engaged sociality that is a requirement of human intimacy and vital to desert modes of interaction. In this sense, the widespread take-up of mobile phones and related social media by those who live in the desert might be identified as an uncanny generalized displacement, including of people from the physical environments they continue to inhabit.[52] If this is the case, elements of Nungarrayi's exile are closely shadowed by the transforming lives of her kin who stay at home. In one scene that conjures some of these distinctively contemporary cleavages of people from place, in early 2011, I visited the Big Town during an intense flare-up of The Troubles and was concerned for the well-being of a friend who was mourning the death of his father and worrying over the recent imprisonment of his son. I found him on more than one occasion in the back room of the community arts center, huddled over a computer monitor and peering hard at a Google Map image, trying to locate the place deep in the desert where his father was born.

While fiber-optic cable and digital communication provide the vital means by which Nungarrayi continues to participate in the sociality from which she is physically separated, the governance of Warlpiri lives in the present increasingly occurs via the networked databases and case files of government departments and CCTV footage. The same digital networks that Warlpiri enthusiastically plug into as mechanisms for keeping in contact with their hypermobile relatives and for entertainment are also conduits of their own surveillance. Digital circuits disgorge other kinds of information, including disparaging images of Warlpiri that circulate in the wider world. Mobile phones and social media apps are vehicles of jealous fights and sorcery accusations; they are mechanisms of profound agitation that reconstitute sensory and temporal orders of people-place relationships.[53]

The Cultural Politics of Writing Close to Life

I have written this book at a time when the politics of storytelling about Aboriginal life at large and Central Australian Aboriginal life in particular has become highly charged and newly divisive. There are many fault lines to these politics. A small number of Aboriginal voices, two of those belonging to Warlpiri women, mother and daughter, have the ear of national media and government. The stories told by these women support a vision for a radical transformation of desert life. Their voices are lauded in the public domain but create distress and anger among some of their own kin.[54] The two-decade arc of my friendship with Nungarrayi shadows the systematic disbandment of Aboriginal representational politics. Under the circumstances, there is a fresh onus on those of us who trade in forms of storytelling to give careful consideration to the narrative forms we adopt. In one innovative recent contribution, acclaimed Waanyi essayist and novelist Alexis Wright created a tribute to her close friend and comrade in arms, the late Bruce "Tracker" Tilmouth, a former director of Central Australian Aboriginal people's regional organization, the Central Land Council, by marshaling and assembling the voices of those who had worked alongside him.[55] In *Tracker*, Wright mobilizes a new cultural politics of storytelling, one that enacts an ethos of Aboriginal sociality, where everyone gets a voice, everyone speaks for themselves. Wright's collective memoir is diametrically opposed to a form of storytelling she identifies elsewhere as "the national narrative."[56]

By extension, Wright's approach is also opposed to the classical style of ethnographic writing that assumes all voice, all authority for the anthropologist as master author/authority. In the 1980s, when postmodernism made a strong claim on anthropology, dialogic ethnographies performed one kind of compelling response to postcolonial critique.[57] Yet to decenter the presumed authority of the anthropologist and the structured inequalities between those of us who write and those whose lives are written about is a challenge that continues to trouble and ultimately elude most cultural writing. One remarkable recent exception is the jewellike production *Phone and Spear: A Yuta Anthropology* by cross-cultural creators Miyarrka Media, which proposes the relationship-making possibilities of a revitalized anthropology.[58] In the terms of one influential Indigenous critique, decolonization is not a metaphor.[59] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's critical manifesto proposes what they call an ethic of incommensurability, a mode of Indigenous/non-Indigenous solidarity that is and always will be uneasy, unsettled, unresolved. These terms resonate strongly with one end of the plane of my friendship with Nungarrayi, but they entirely

miss the other end, the space where transformative interactions, responsibility, mutuality, love, and care enfold. Nevertheless, I have no wish to conjure this research venture in the terms of "collaboration." The prism of friendship insists upon a particular kind of relational vantage, but it does not dissolve the dilemmas of anthropology and its publishing forms. Ultimately, this book is an account told, with Nungarrayi's consent, through my eyes and words.

Journeying involves distinctive conjunctions of time and space. For Nungarrayi and me, our journeying is anchored in the present and charged by the challenges, tragedies, and hopes that swirl around her and sometimes catch me in their net, as well as the interpersonal encounters and knotty conundrums of Indigenous affairs policy and larger governmental processes that come to register in our midst. Journeying assumes a distinctive pace: the starts, stops, and forces of emotion and attitude that cause people to dawdle, cruise, or barrel along, whether on foot, or traveling in a car, on a bus or train, or by taxi. Journeying is punctuated by changes in pace, sparks of memory, shifts in emotional register, stark switches in mood. The journeying Nungarrayi and I have undertaken between 2016 and 2019 is shadowed by the longer tail of the time of our friendship, and especially the two years 1995 and 1996 when I lived in her hometown. We traveled together then, too, but our journeying then seemed much more contained and straightforward. Then, there was no question of where home was.

The ambiguous social distance between the lives of anthropologists and the lives of the people with whom we work is foundational for the discipline. Distance is a vital prerequisite for grappling with flows of experience and observation and for making something cogent of strands of life that attract our attention. But in its reflexive posture, the anthropological enterprise also creates a special kind of relational zone that can be mutually transformative. In the process of journeying around together doing research for this book, I have often been reminded of the particular social space Nungarrayi and I create when we come together. Traveling with Nungarrayi, I am drawn into all manner of densely social situations, immersed in the intensity of Warlpiri ways of noticing things, responding to circumstances, living with others. With her, I am exposed to a style of life that evades conventional expectations in ways that are at once exhilarating and distressing. Warlpiri live with a spontaneity and fervor that is starkly at odds with the relatively ordered, planned, law-abiding, and routinized style of the Anglo-Australian middle class. Traveling with me, she in turn is exposed to radically different attitudes and experiences to those she often encounters and indeed expects to encounter on her own or traveling with her own kin. In the respectable terms of white metropolitan sociality, she

is treated politely. Traveling with me, she enters places, spends money, and consumes in ways that she would never do if she were not in my company and supported by my income. The structured inequalities between us—my relative economic wealth, her poverty—intervene decisively at times, mirroring larger social forces at play, threatening to reduce our friendship to a thinned-out conduit of financial transaction. For each of us these terms can shift instantly, in a misplaced interaction with others, in a frustrated refusal to meet a demand, in circumstances of great stress, in the moment we part company.

The confidence and pride with which Nungarrayi carried herself, directed our work, and engaged with all manner of people as we traveled together around Alice Springs one afternoon in October 2016 were dramatically recast later that same evening. She and her extended daughter came to meet me at a community concert and were turned away by a security guard who judged them as being inebriated and thus potential public nuisances. Such thresholds of intercultural encounter are spaces where desert people routinely confront sedimented expectations of their unruliness. These racialized exclusions constitute volatile flash points where anything can happen. They expose the conditional nature of Warlpiri citizenship as well as vulnerabilities of our friendship. *See How We Roll* follows Nungarrayi's—and my—precarious navigation of these conditions.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

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1. JOURNEYING WITH

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