SECURITY AND BELONGING: RECONCEPTUALISING ABORIGINAL SPATIAL MOBILITIES IN YAMATJI COUNTRY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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A PhD thesis submitted to
Department of Human Geography
Division of Environmental and Life Sciences
Macquarie University

December 2006

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The Academic Senate on 13 July 2007 resolved that Sarah Margaret Prout had satisfied the requirements for admission to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This thesis represents a major part of the prescribed program of study.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores contemporary Aboriginal spatial practices in Yamatji country, Western Australia, within the context of rural service provision by the State government. The central themes with which it engages are a) historical and contemporary conceptualisations of Aboriginal spatialities; b) the lived experiences of Aboriginal mobilities in the region; and c) the dialectical, and often contentious, relationship between Aboriginal spatial practices and public health, housing, and education services. Drawing primarily on a range of field interviews, the thesis opens up a discursive space for examining the cultural content and hidden assumptions in constructions of 'appropriate' models of spatial mobility. In taking a policy-oriented focus, it argues that the appropriate provision of basic government services requires a shift away from overly simplistic assumptions and discourses of Aboriginal mobility. Until the often subtle practices of rendering particular Aboriginal mobilities as irrational, deviant, and/or mysterious are challenged and replaced, deep-colonising practices in rural and remote Australia will persist.

The thesis reconceptualises contemporary Aboriginal spatial practices in Yamatji country based upon an examination of dynamics and circumstances that undergird Aboriginal mobilities in the region. With this empirical focus, it argues that Aboriginal spatial practices are fashioned by the processes of procuring, cultivating and contesting a sense of security and belonging. Case study material presented suggests that two primary considerations inform these processes. A post-settlement history of contested alienation from family and country (both sources from which belonging and security were traditionally derived), and a changing engagement with mainstream social and economic institutions, have produced a context in which security and belonging are iteratively derived from a number of sources. Contemporary Aboriginal spatial practices therefore take a complex variety of forms. The thesis concludes that adopting the framework of security and belonging for interpreting contemporary Aboriginal mobilities provides a starting point for engaging more effectively and intentionally with dynamic Aboriginal spatial practices in service delivery policy and practice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people who deserve my thanks and gratitude for supporting and shaping my doctorate journey and the completion of this dissertation. My first thanks belong to my Heavenly Father. Thank you for shaping my heart and my mind to be captivated by your radical love for every human life and your unwavering defence of those at the margins. Thank you for relentlessly pursuing true reconciliation and for demonstrating this unequivocally in Jesus. You are my great Navigator, my refuge, and my salvation.

To the people of Meekatharra and others throughout Yamatji country who participated in this research. I am deeply indebted to you for allowing this thesis to come to fruition. Thank you for graciously giving of your time, energy and insights to contribute to this study. In sharing your stories and in some cases, your lives, you were wonderful and patient teachers. I was humbled by your generosity and grown personally through many conversation and experiences during my time in the Midwest. I hope that this work honours your voices, although I openly acknowledge that what follows are my representations of them.

To my supervisors Richie Howitt and Sandie-Suchet Pearson. You are such wonderful listeners, teachers and mentors, and have enriched this process in so many ways. You have challenged and stretched my thinking, and continually encouraged me to explore different knowledges and ideas. You have demonstrated great care, not just for the scholar, but for the person as a whole. I admire and appreciate your character(s), your passion for your work, your commitment to academic integrity and excellence, and your abundant professional generosity. I am also grateful to the Department of Human Geography at Macquarie University. It has been a privilege to study in an environment of such strong collegial support and such commitment to the discipline. In particular, I wish to thank Judy Davis who was of tremendous assistance in producing the maps and graphics for this thesis.

To my family, and in particular my parents, Pete and Phyl, who have always cared more about my character than my career. Thank you for your constant support and love even from afar. Dad, I'll never forget the day I was leaving Perth to begin this journey. You stood in the hallway of 6 Morgan St and told me that no matter how the PhD process unfolded, you were so proud of me. You said I was then, and always would be, a success to you. I have always known that assurance and love from both of you and it means more to me than I can say. You are precious gifts to me. Special thanks Mum for your wise editorial comments on One and Eight. I so enjoyed our word battles. Thank you for gently pushing me to greater grammatical heights at the uninspired end – no small accomplishment!

And to my Sydney family. Throughout my time in 'the centre of the universe,' I can recall specific instances, at pivotal times, when each of you has extended practical love and care to me in ways that I cannot repay. You have been His hands to me. Thank you. Specifically in relation to the thesis, my thanks go to Sarah Dowthwaite for her generous editorial support.

And finally to Diesel, who lay patiently at my feet through many hours of writing, and who embraced every moment of our 'break-walks' with great joy and enthusiasm. Thank you for keeping me company through the long silences, and for constantly reminding me of the goodness of the little things.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CDEP	Community Development and Employment Projects
CHIP	Community Housing and Infrastructure Program
CSHA	Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement
DCD	Department of Community Development
DHW	Department of Housing and Works
DIA	Department of Indigenous Affairs
EOC	Equal Opportunity Commission
GRAMS	Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service
HORSCATSIA	House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICHO	Indigenous Community Housing Organisation
IES	Indigenous Enumeration Strategy
MRAC	Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation
NAHS	National Aboriginal Health Strategy
PATS	Patient Assisted Transfer Scheme
RFDS	Royal Flying Doctor Service
SRA	Shared Responsibility Agreement
WACOSS	Western Australian Council of Social Service

DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted in accordance with the requirements for a Doctorate of Philosophy at Macquarie University.

I hereby certify that this work is my own and has not in part or in its entirety been previously submitted for a higher degree at any other institution. Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee HE26MAR2004-D02813.

Sarah Prout