

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

We always visit that place, don't get me wrong. That's our home. It's just that we don't live in that part of the country. Our home is the size, bigger than Great Britain. So we can't live all over. One time we - my ancestors could because they roamed the country. But these days we can't. We've got to live in one specific spot so we don't upset the white man. We couldn't be free to go and do this and that (Michelle Riley, 29 November 2004)¹.

This thesis tells a story of competing rationalities about the purpose and nature of rural 'settlement,' both past and present, and the implications of how these rationalities are expressed in Yamatji country, Western Australia. Ultimately, it is a story of the spatial struggles for security and belonging.

1.1 Upsetting the White Man

Since British colonisation of Australia, Aboriginal spatial mobility practices have been the subject of variously confused, disdainful, dismissive and accommodating Eurocentric discourses and practices. Incongruent conceptualisations of Aboriginal population movements and Aboriginal responses to them, have underwritten the fractious nature of co-existence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia and produced an oppressive spatial ordering where sedentarisation has been privileged and frequent movement has been rendered deviant or irrational. In the contemporary context, this spatial ordering is perpetuated through conventional, locationally-fixed government service delivery practices. Housing, health, and education services, for example, are chiefly delivered through significant sunk costs in permanent infrastructure such as hospital clinics and schools. These delivery methods assume, promote and ultimately require single-locale, sedentary lifestyles for effective engagement with services. Services and resources continue to be delivered and distributed according to models of efficiency and effectiveness that assume settled spatialities are normal and rational.

¹ Throughout the thesis, primary interview excerpts based on direct, tape-recorded transcription are indented and italicised. Interview excerpts based on notes rather than direct tape-recorded transcription are indented but not italicised. Interviewees are identified in accordance with the preference indicated on their interview consent form. In many instances, interviewees declined to be identified by their job title in addition to or in place of their name. Chapter Two section 2.4.2.3 explains these distinctions in greater detail and section 2.4.3 describes the nature and size of the interview sample.

Under recent conditions of neo-liberal economic rationalism, the criteria for evaluating service delivery have increasingly shifted towards user-pay and cost efficiency, reshaping government service delivery models into more pronounced 'hub and spoke' configurations where services are concentrated in larger urban centres and connected to smaller service outposts in more regional and rural areas. Such arrangements require that Aboriginal people conform to the sedentary spatial ordering they reinforce as a condition of access to services. As interviewee Michelle Riley succinctly and insightfully surmises in the introductory quotation: "*we've got to live in one specific spot so we don't upset the white man.*"

Consequently, Aboriginal people who fail to conform - who do not necessarily 'live in one specific spot' but rather engage in frequent mobilities - often have more sporadic and contested interactions with key government services (Arthur, 1994). Supposedly economically efficient service provision practices marginalise many Aboriginal Australians because they perpetuate a spatial order that privileges a dominant spatiality. This spatial disciplining both reflects and reinforces policies that continually fail to actively engage with or understand the alternate rationalities that undergird many Aboriginal spatial practices.

Throughout the thesis, a number of terms are used to describe spatial relationships. *Spatiality* is an overarching term that embraces both the movements and spatial distribution of a population. Under this broad notion of spatiality, there are two types of *mobility* that are referred to throughout the thesis. Johnston, Gregory and Smith (1994 p.382) define (spatial) mobility as encompassing "all types of territorial movements." They divide territorial movements into two basic categories: *migration* and *circulation*. Migration, they suggest, "implies a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence of an individual group of people" (1994 p. 380). To distinguish migration from circulation, they borrow from Zelinsky (1971) who defined circulation as:

... a great variety of movements usually short-term, repetitive, or cyclical in character, but all having in common the lack of any declared intention of a permanent or long lasting change in residence (p.226).

These basic definitions of migration and circulation have been subject to scholarly critique and revisions given that their distinction depends on a) the intention of the movers - a consideration which cannot always be pre-determined (Bedford, 1981), b) a subjective judgement of what constitutes a 'permanent' move, and c) some sort of arbitration regarding a minimum distance between origin and destination before a move is actually considered a 'migration' (Goldscheider, 1971). Generally, these terms and definitions have been altered and adapted by individual researchers to specifically describe the types of movement they are concerned with (see for example Gould and Prothero, 1975 for a catalogue of mobilities in tropical Africa). Throughout this thesis, Johnston et al.'s (1994) broad notion of mobility is referred to as either 'mobilities' (pluralised to indicate the variety of movements that such a term encompasses), spatial interactions, or spatial/mobility practices/behaviours. In addition, the discussion often refers to specific types of mobilities such as long-term migrations, and/or circulation².

This thesis explores the awkward juxtaposition of Aboriginal³ spatial practices and the delivery of basic government services to Aboriginal populations. Understanding Aboriginal spatial mobility is critical to redressing the inequitable and often ineffective nature of service delivery that has lingered in rural and remote Australia since colonisation began. While this is a matter of both the adequacy and accessibility of services, the interplay of policies and practices of service providers and the practices, perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal people has recently become a highly politicised topic of public debate. This thesis addresses some of the underlying themes of this debate on the basis of careful engagement with the lived experiences of a group of Aboriginal people and the public sector agencies with whose services they interact. Drawing on research in Yamatji country, (see Figure 1.1), the thesis explores the ways in which Aboriginal mobility processes work in

² Subsequent chapters explore these distinctions and their significance in greater detail.

³ Consistent with current usage, this thesis distinguishes between particular uses of the terms 'Indigenous,' 'Aboriginal,' 'aboriginal,' and 'indigenous.' The term 'Indigenous' refers to both 'Aboriginal' and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The term 'indigenous' refers inclusively to all Indigenous populations in Australia, Canada, The United States, and New Zealand. Finally, the term 'aboriginal' refers collectively to Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Metis populations. Since the focus of this thesis is not on Torres Strait Islander people, the term 'Aboriginal' is the most commonly used throughout this thesis.

practice and considers the challenges of servicing populations with multiple spatialities.



Figure 1.1 Yamatji country, Western Australia

As a case-study region, Yamatji country⁴ exemplifies the pressures of servicing remote and mobile populations. This vast land area coupled with low population densities, intensifies the economic pressures and logistical complexity of delivering fixed essential services to mobile or transient populations. For example, the town of Meekatharra, where most of the fieldwork was concentrated, is located 765km from Perth (Western Australia's capital city) and has a small, fluctuating population of between 400 and 800 residents. Although in the context of Western Australia, this region is not the most remote or sparsely populated, the significant policy implications of understanding Aboriginal mobility processes are no less pivotal in Yamatji country than elsewhere. Focussing on this case-study location, the thesis ultimately presents a narrative which suggests that government insistence on a particular spatial discipline is unlikely to increase the appropriateness, accessibility or efficiency of current service delivery practices.

Before outlining the specific objectives and arguments of the thesis, this chapter initially expands on the notion of 'upsetting the white man.' It examines the ways in which colonial interpretations of Aboriginal spatiality have shaped four policy eras of Aboriginal Affairs in Western Australia. It adopts this policy focus as the entry point to defining the 'research problem' addressed in the thesis, because the study's genesis is largely empirical. Taylor and Bell (2004a p. 266) noted in their recent seminal publication *Population Mobility and Indigenous Peoples in Australasia and North America*, that a policy focus is uniquely appropriate to research concerning Aboriginal mobility because of the historically fundamental role of administrative intervention in shaping Aboriginal spatiality. A critical exploration of the historical policy context within which the present mobility study is situated provides a framework for examining the somewhat cyclical relationships between Eurocentric assumptions of 'normal spatiality', government policy, and Aboriginal mobility practices. It also provides a platform for a more theoretical discussion of the notion of spatial control and how it has been enacted and reinforced throughout Australia's colonial history. This discussion begins to unsettle colonial assumptions of normal

⁴ 'Yamatji country' is geographically delineated throughout the thesis according to the governance region defined by the now defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ASTIC). Chapter Two provides a more detailed introduction to Yamatji country and the specific fieldwork locations. It also engages in a discussion about the challenges and subjective artificiality of delineating geographical boundaries for the purposes of spatially 'placing' the study.

spatial practices and points to the need for empirical interrogation of the spatial ordering these assumptions have produced.

Once this empirical research imperative is established, the chapter moves to a discussion of the significant scholarly contributions to this emerging field of study. It focuses in particular on the two broad approaches to indigenous mobility studies and the contributions each has made to both public policy and social theory. Given the relative infancy of the field of indigenous mobility studies, a survey of the sparse existing literature also emphasises the broad research mandate within which this study is situated.

Finally, having established the necessity for an empirical research orientation and having conceptually situated the study within the mobility literature, the chapter presents the specific objectives and arguments of the thesis. It concludes by explaining the thesis structure and how the conceptual threads that undergird the thesis objectives and arguments are woven through the dissertation.

1.2 The Policy Context

Due to potential ambiguity, some initial definitional clarifications are important for understanding the historical relationships between Aboriginal spatiality and government policy. Two types of *policy* are referred to throughout the thesis:

1. The broad policy context which is framed in terms of a series of shifts in policy orientation from one era to another over the period of colonisation.
2. More specific service delivery policies and the practices they engage which are framed in terms of Western Australian State Government policies.

Four broad policy eras have characterised Aboriginal administration in Western Australia since colonisation. In this thesis, they are termed 'Protection and Separation,' 'Assimilation,' 'Self-determination,' and most recently, 'Service Mainstreaming and Mutual Obligation.' These eras of broad policy orientation have both reflected and directed race relations in Australia and have been administered by the British Colonial Office (1829-1897), the Western Australian Government (1897-1967), and the Federal Government (1967-present) respectively (Milnes, 2005).

The following generalised historical overview of these four broad policy eras establishes three important contextual foundations upon which the thesis narrative is developed. First, it highlights the links between assumptions or ‘myths’ about Aboriginal spatiality, the policy responses that result, and the impacts of these policies on Aboriginal spatialities. The discussion emphasises that particular colonial assumptions about appropriate spatial practices have formed the justification for concerted attempts to reconfigure and redefine the spatiality of Aboriginal people across the geographical and temporal landscape. It also highlights the significant links between these policy eras and the changing overall patterns of Aboriginal population distribution (see also Smith, 1980). Second, an historical policy overview provides an essential context for understanding contemporary Aboriginal mobility processes. Chapter Five in particular returns to this theme as it describes Aboriginal mobility processes before and since British settlement. The third contextual foundation that this broad policy overview provides is a backdrop to the current climate of State Government service delivery policy (the second type of *policy*), that is the focus of analysis throughout the dissertation.

Although the Federal Government currently sets the broad administrative policy agenda regarding Australia’s Indigenous population, the States remain responsible for the development of policy which governs the delivery of many services to the Aboriginal populations within their borders. The Western Australian State Government for example, in partnership with the Federal Government (primarily through joint funding arrangements), is responsible for delivering health, housing, and education services to Aboriginal Western Australians. Chapter Four draws on this policy context as it explores the contemporary inter-relationship between service delivery and Aboriginal spatiality. So, whilst broad macro-scale policy eras form an important contextual foundation for the thesis, both conceptually and empirically, micro-level State Government service delivery policies are the focus of analysis.

1.2.1 A History of Control and Contestation

Nomadism, associated with chaos and rootlessness, is the perfect mirror image of modern law, which assumes and demands the ordering of populations within definite spatial and temporal boundaries. Nomadism becomes a deviance that modern law cannot attempt to correct. The basic sanction for nomadism is

exclusion from the social realm and the positioning of the nomad on the side of nature. Consequently, nomads acquire two important properties: First, they become invisible to the law - a property that allows the state to freely register lands as state-owned and to deny counter-claims of ownership. Second, they become moveable objects - a property that allows the state to freely move them in space (Shamir, 1996 p. 236-237).

In the above statement, Shamir (1996) reflects on the recent experiences of Bedouin pastoral nomads within the Israeli State. His argument, however, is strikingly applicable to the experience of Aboriginal Australians during the initial stages of the colonial encounter. From the earliest period of the colonial project, Aboriginal semi-nomadic lifestyles were interpreted by British settlers as evidence of their backward and uncivilised existence (Hamilton, 1987; Young and Doohan, 1989). The 'wandering' nature of the 'native peoples' and the consequent lack of visible signs of settlement in fact formed the justification for the British declaration and legal fiction of *terra nullius* or 'empty land' and subsequent colonial settlement (Hamilton, 1987). Reynolds (2003 p.16) explained that, in simple terms, the British justification of their declaration was that "... the Aborigines had never actually been in possession of the land. They ranged over it rather than resided on it." Having been relegated within the colonial conscience to the natural realm, what followed for Aboriginal Australians was an extended campaign of spatial dispossession and subjugation.

1.2.1.1 Protection and Separation

During the early period of colonial expansion, many Aboriginal people became increasingly confined to specific areas, unable to maintain their traditional semi-nomadic lifestyles. In order to assist the 'opening up' of the Australian 'wilderness' to European development and settlement and to 'civilise' and subdue Aboriginal populations (whom popular Social Darwinist discourses positioned as an inferior race which would eventually die out under European occupation of the continent), the British Colonial Office adopted separatist and paternalistic approaches to administering Aboriginal people (Milnes, 2005). This period was characterised by violent clashes between traditional Aboriginal inhabitants and non-Aboriginal settlers, indicative of persistent contestation regarding the new boundaries for spatial, social, cultural, and economic interaction which were being asserted (Toussaint, 1995). However, despite increasing contact with British culture and society, and a significantly diminished capacity to maintain traditional semi-nomadic lifestyles in

the face of rapid colonial expansion, Aboriginal populations continued to resist conformation to Eurocentric settlement expectations.

Colonial encounters with the Indigenous peoples of Australia reinforced a settler discourse that was damning of highly mobile lifestyles. Rowley (1970 p. 28) for example emphasised that in the early years of settlement in New South Wales, the independence of the 'nomad,' in comparison to the disciplined labour of the convict colony, seemed 'hopelessly irresponsible.' In a subsequent publication, Rowley quoted from the 1914 Annual Report of the Western Australian Aborigines Department (p. 1-2) which described Aboriginal townspeople of the State's south-west as having inherited "the nomadic instincts of the native race" and as "roam[ing] about the country making a precarious living" (cited in Rowley, 1971a p. 96-97).

These disapproving attitudes were due in no small part to pre-existing British prejudices towards nomadism, which had been informed by the fractious and antagonistic relationship between European nation states and the travelling nomads – gypsies and Roma – that traversed their borders (see for example Petrova, 2003). During the 1700s, European social etiquette demanded that travelling groups such as minstrels, monks, knights, acting troupes and Gypsies be granted hospitality, food, and shelter in the places they visited (Petrova, 2003). As the numbers of these travelling groups increased, so too did public discontent regarding obligations to care for them. Growing discontent culminated in the emergence of the protestant work ethic which diminished public patience for any lifestyles that seemed unproductive (Petrova, 2003 p. 125). As criminal activity was so often associated with travelling nomads such as the gypsies and Roma, they became the targets of much of the animosity that emerged from the rigorous adoption of the protestant work ethic. This emerging Eurocentric conscience positioned frequent movement as the by-product of unsavoury personal characteristics such as laziness, instability, vagrancy, poverty, and non-productivity.

In the colonial context therefore, Aboriginal resistance to wholesale sedentarisation prompted social concern and dramatic administrative intervention. Aboriginal mobility was interpreted as indicative of an inability to integrate into settler society and civilisation more generally, thus providing the justification for the

implementation of policies of protection and segregation (Hamilton 1987). In 1897 when the Western Australian Government took over from the British Colonial Office in administering Aboriginal Affairs, it focussed specifically on attempting to curtail and control Aboriginal mobilities (Gray, 2004).

The prevailing colonial discourse of spatial censorship was enacted in legislation and government policy which laid the foundation for the comprehensive legal segregation, physical dispossession, and repression of Aboriginal people at the hands of the government (Department of Indigenous Affairs [DIA], 2003; Fink, 1960; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997a; Toussaint, 1995). The 1905 *Aborigines Act* and the subsequent 1936 *Native Administration Act* gave the State Government power to comprehensively intervene in and control the lives of Aboriginal people, particularly with regard to their spatiality. Control was enacted in regulated exclusion from townships⁵, and, forced removal from homelands or place of residence to a purpose built government settlement or station for a breach of any number of oppressive legislative restrictions.

From this legislation flowed decades of intentional but contested physical dislocation of Aboriginal people from the people and places which held their sense of identity and belonging. In the process, the Government of Western Australia was engaged in direct confrontation with Aboriginal spatialities which privileged mobility as both a cultural expression and a survival mechanism. During this early period of 'protectionist' and 'separationist' policies, Eurocentric interpretations of Aboriginal semi-nomadic subsistence lifestyles resulted in government practices which sought to constrict, confine, and control them. Cowlshaw (1999b p. 143) used the term *cultural violence* to refer to "the whole gamut of conditions that made the maintenance and reproduction of Aboriginal social life difficult or impossible." She suggested that non-Aboriginal laws and practices, in attempting to re-engineer Aboriginal social relationships, rendered them irrational and inferior. In the same way, these laws and practices, which sought to re-orient Aboriginal spatiality,

⁵ Aboriginal 'townspeople' were relegated to live on specific reserves of land located on the fringes of towns and were also subject to curfews which excluded them from being in the town after a certain hour in the evening.

rendered their familiar spatial practices irrational and inferior – another form of cultural violence.

1.2.1.2 Assimilation

The 1940s marked a shift in Aboriginal administration from ‘separation and protection,’ to ‘assimilation.’ Two catalysts prompted this policy shift, and again, there were numerous consequences for Aboriginal spatiality. The first of these catalysts was the onset of World War II, which increased interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society as Aboriginal men served in the war and others filled labour shortages (Young, 1995). Social Darwinist theories were slowly beginning to dissipate. At the same time, Aboriginal voices were gathering momentum in protest of violations of their human rights which oppressive government legislation had instituted. This growing public protest was the second catalyst for policy change. In Western Australia, the colonial conscience was beginning to shift: Aboriginal people were being re-positioned from what Shamir (1996 p. 236) called the ‘side of nature’ where they had been conceptualised as merely ‘movable objects,’ to the ‘social’ or human realm. This policy shift was reflected in the 1954 *Native Welfare Act* which revoked many of the spatially discriminatory provisions of previous legislation. Towns and cities would no longer be off limits to Aboriginal people, and the grounds on which the government could remove and confine Aboriginal people were limited.

In 1967, a national referendum decided that the Federal Government would take over from the States as the chief administrator of Aboriginal Affairs (Attwood and Markus, 1997). And, in 1968, after many years of inconsistent, unequal and in some cases non-existent payment for station labour (Rowley, 1971b), Aboriginal protests and lobbying finally resulted in the extension of the Federal Pastoral Industry Award to Aboriginal pastoral workers in Western Australia. This concession theoretically ensured that Aboriginal station workers would now receive a wage equal to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Chesterman, 2001). However, the slump in wool prices and increasing affordability of more economical farming techniques such as fencing and motorised mustering made Aboriginal labour seemingly more expendable. Many station owners felt they could not afford to pay equal wages to their often large Aboriginal workforces (Toussaint, 1995; Palmer, 1982). Most of these displaced

workers relocated to the fringes of urban and rural towns and while some were still able to pick up station work sporadically, many others, without employment, had to resort to welfare payments⁶ to sustain them.

During the Assimilation era, Aboriginal people in pastoral areas were encouraged into mainstream Australia through a metaphorical opening of township doors and a displacement from remote areas. A series of push-pull factors engendered significant movement toward rural towns. Abolition of previous restrictive laws controlling spatiality and behaviour drew increasing numbers of Aboriginal people toward city and rural town reserves to pursue employment opportunities which had previously been unavailable to them (DIA, 2003). Simultaneously, many Aboriginal people who had previously secured a livelihood through station work, usually in the form of a basic ration, were pushed off the land.

1.2.1.3 Self Determination

Although the referendum transferred administration of Aboriginal affairs to the Federal Government in 1967, it would be seven years before the Federal Government would begin to actively engage in both the development and implementation of a strategic policy agenda concerning Indigenous Australians (Reynolds, 1984). In 1972, the newly elected Federal Government began to shift away from the policies of assimilation that various States had adopted, and embarked on a new, national policy agenda of 'self determination' (Milnes, 2005). This era, characterised by passive welfarism, supposedly supplanted previous policies of subjugation and repression with the ideal of self-management. It sought to produce cultural autonomy, economic advancement and equity (Arthur, 1994; Sutton, 2001).

One of the cornerstone government-funded initiatives to come from this era was the 'Homelands Movement.' As part of this 'movement' Aboriginal people were actively encouraged to move back to their traditional territories and form incorporated communities (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1987). This initiative resulted in the unquantified re-distribution of Aboriginal

⁶ Throughout the 1940s the Commonwealth Government had been slowly introducing a range of social benefits to Aboriginal people who could demonstrate their integration into mainstream Australian society. In a very real sense, the conditional granting of these payments powerfully embodied the ideology of the Assimilation era.

populations in the more sparsely populated areas of the country, but within changed territorial boundaries (Taylor and Bell, 1996b). Socio-spatial tribal boundaries had been physically interrupted and overlain by the insertion of colonial boundaries which carved the landscape into pastoral leases, private property, and Crown land. Therefore, a return to traditional socio-economic modes of survival was un-viable in most parts of the country and homeland communities became largely dependent on government-provided essential services. Lawrence (1991) described the counter-productive objectives of the Federal Government in initiating the homelands movement and simultaneously rationalising the expenditure of government services and restricting government expenditure. Ultimately, the aspirations of Aboriginal people to be self-determining in their spatiality remained stifled:

What ensues is a paradoxical and not very cost-effective arrangement whereby one tier of government spends considerable moneys on a program of decentralising an Aboriginal population while other tiers either purposively or through inaction, adopt policies that consolidate localised groups. The former offers vehicles to assist a return to country; the latter neglect or ignore the access routes required to get there (Lawrence, 1991 p. 64).

This era of self-determination was in many ways, a false veil. Governments advocated empowerment of Aboriginal people to oversee their own affairs, including their spatial practices, but failed to provide adequate resources and infrastructure to support these endeavours, forcing 'self-determination' to be enacted through alien spatial, economic, and political frameworks (Sackett, 1978). Although this policy era aimed to return autonomy to Aboriginal people, in reality, it continued to re-affirm colonial social and political centres of power, a process which Rose (1999) referred to as *deep colonising*. She explained:

While it is demonstrably the case that many formal relations between Indigenous people and the nation-states that encompass them have changed in recent decades, as have many of the institutions which regulate these relations, it is also the case that practices of colonisation are very much with us. In Australia, as in other settler societies, many of these practices are embedded in the institutions that are meant to reverse processes of colonisation. Colonising practices embedded within decolonising institutions must not be understood simply as negligible side effects of essentially benign endeavours. This embeddedness may conceal naturalise, or marginalise continuing colonising practices (Rose, 1999 p. 182).

There were a range of other progressions in Aboriginal administration that took place during the era of 'self-determination.' These developments included the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a nationally elected Indigenous representative body who would be responsible for setting policy and administering funding for basic government services to Indigenous Australians, as well as landmark Native Title cases and subsequent Native Title legislation (see for example Howitt, 2001b; Sharp, 1994; Sutherland and Muir, 2001). However, what remained most significant during this era in terms of the relationship between policy and Aboriginal spatiality, was intentional support for the decentralisation of Aboriginal populations initiated by the Federal Government through the Homelands Movement. This policy of decentralisation is particularly pertinent to the present discussion. The spatial population re-distribution that it fostered has contributed significantly to the contemporary context of highly mobile and spatially dispersed Aboriginal populations, over which the present Federal Government has expressed considerable concern about servicing.

1.2.1.4 Service Mainstreaming and Mutual Obligation

Responding in part to the failed legacy of passive-welfarism, as well as an exasperation with the lack of progress in tackling the 'Aboriginal problem,' the current policy era is concerned with 'service mainstreaming' and 'mutual obligation.' In 2004, ATSIC was abolished. Services to Aboriginal people would now be delivered through mainstream programs. Defending this policy shift, the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs declared:

There is no way to avoid it – different standards have short-changed Indigenous people. We must not accept poorer levels of service or poorer outcomes for Indigenous people. This is why the Australian Government decided last year, to end the practice of separate policy development and program delivery for Indigenous people (Vanstone, 2005 Section: Responsibilities, para. 1).

In addition to mainstreaming services, the Federal Government has employed a policy rhetoric of mutual obligation to shift its relationship with Indigenous Australians. Underlying this notion is the rationale that Indigenous Australians must be treated like all other Australians and begin to take a more proactive role in determining their pathways to a better future. This policy has been enacted in Shared

Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) with a range of Aboriginal communities. SRAs outline a range of steps that communities agree to take to improve living conditions within their settlements in exchange for additional services or resources from the Federal Government.

There has been considerable discussion and debate amongst public servants, social commentators, and scholars about the specificities and consequences of this new policy direction (see for example McCausland, 2005; Gray and Sanders, 2006). However, one of the general by-products of the policy shift has been a more firm articulation of the requirements facing Aboriginal communities to consolidate their reputation as responsible citizens. Therefore, the refusal of some Indigenous communities to remain permanently in one locale has been interpreted as a sign of belligerence and unwillingness to contribute productively to mainstream Australia. It is a perceived mindset to which the Federal Government rhetoric suggests it is no longer willing to pander.

1.2.2 Exercising Spatial Control

This historical overview demonstrates that fractured historical interpretations of Aboriginal mobilities have continually resulted in government policies designed to comprehensively alter and reform them. In each of these policy eras, government institutions have assumed the right and exercised power to control citizens' mobility where it disrupts the spatial ordering and social disciplining of conformity to the purpose of rural settlement: that of locational permanence and economic productivity. Here, as in the case of other minority groups living in rural areas (see for example Cloke and Little, 1997; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993; Philo, 1992; 1993), those who conform to dominant conceptualisations of the purpose and nature of rural settlement are affirmed, privileged and empowered, while those who do not are simultaneously marginalised and silenced. Sibley (1995) refers to this method of social control as *boundary maintenance*. He suggests that the power imbalances fed through dominant images of rurality are pivotal in both defining and policing the 'normal' and the 'deviant.' This process of control is exacted in the exclusion and marginalisation of those perceived to be deviant. Frequent spatial mobility is often constructed as a manifestation of such deviance. Bancroft (2001 p. 147-148) for example explains that the European ordering of space functions to exclude Gypsy-

travellers and Roma. Because of their failure to conform to European settlement expectations, these travelling nomads are constructed as deviant and 'out of place.' In fact, most historically 'nomadic' societies have been, and continue to be, constructed within their nation-states as deviant with common references to 'the Bedouin problem,' 'the Roma problem,' and 'the Aboriginal problem.'

This spatial ordering is one of a number of distinct forms of marginalisation that Aboriginal Australians, like indigenous peoples in other colonised countries, have endured within their post-colonial settler states. Geographers have been complicit in the colonial project, demarcating numerous boundaries, both cultural and geographical, which served to reinforce this alienating spatial order (Blunt and Wills, 2000; Crush, 1994; Howitt, 2001a; Howitt and Jackson, 1998; Jacobs, 1996; Peters, 2000; Power, 2003). More recently, however, Eurocentric demarcations and assumptions have themselves become the subject of considerable scholarly scrutiny, seeking to challenge continuing colonising epistemologies and practices within settler-states (see for example Hollinsworth, 1998; Howitt, 1993; Jackson, 1996; 1997; Jacobs and Mulvihill, 1995; Thompson, 2001). Ranging in their focus from environmental resource management to government planning practices, these scholars problematise the dominant frameworks through which indigenous social and cultural landscapes are 'read' (Duncan and Duncan, 1988) or interpreted and offer alternate epistemological vantage points from which to approach the geographies of indigenous peoples.

Brody (2000) for example, confronted the common Eurocentric characterisation of 'hunter-gatherer' societies which contrasts their highly mobile or 'nomadic' lifestyles with settled agriculturally-based societies. He suggested that over the course of history, agriculturally-based societies have in fact been far more prone to large and small-scale population movements than hunter-gatherer societies. The latter, he argued, have remained closely associated with particular geographical regions. Ultimately, Brody's simple inversion of the popular discourse of nomadism opens up a discursive space for rendering Aboriginal spatiality as 'normal' and rational. It presents an alternative vantage point on the notion of mobility. From a similar vantage point, one might challenge the notion of 'remoteness.' Whilst Perth bureaucrats might consider a small outstation on the central Western Australian

border 'remote,' to the outstation residents for whom that country forms part of their ancestral homelands, Perth may seem remote. Exploring these alternative epistemological vantage points in greater detail is central to redressing the deep colonising practices entrenched in many government institutions.

Thompson (2001) undertook an analysis of an 'Aboriginal housing problem' in the Northern Territory town of Katherine in the 1990s. In Thompson's case study, both planners and government service provision agencies conceptualised and ordered space in ways that were clearly underpinned by dominant constructions of 'normal' and 'deviant' spatial and social behaviour, and these conceptualisations directed the policy approaches implemented to address 'the problem.' The point of conflict in Katherine centred around two Aboriginal 'camps' on the border of the town and the perceived social problems emanating from them. On separate occasions, two very different approaches, based on divergent conceptualisations of Aboriginal living conditions, were taken in attempts to address 'the problem.' According to one conceptualisation, a limited choice of living arrangements was the fundamental cause of social problems in the camps. Forced sedentarisation and confined living areas had resulted in poor living conditions and encouraged 'anti-social' behaviours. The solution according to this conceptualisation, was better planning in the provision of housing, and increased capacity building for the local Aboriginal population. The competing conceptualisation was that 'anti-social' behaviour within the Aboriginal community was the result of government hand-outs which had provided too much residency choice for the Aboriginal population. Excessive choice had resulted in deliberate misbehaviour and consequently, poor living conditions. The solution according to this conceptualisation was greater government control and less choice of living arrangements for Aboriginal residents. Thompson suggested however that both of these conceptualisations were oversimplifications and policy responses ultimately went astray because they failed to adequately understand and incorporate Aboriginal conceptualisations of their own living conditions, life circumstances and the full range of mobility options.

What is most informative about Thompson's discussion of perceptions of Aboriginal living conditions is that not only are they often ill-informed, but they are also highly influential in the planning process. The same is true of Aboriginal mobility

processes. The historical overview presented above suggests that Aboriginal mobility practices have repeatedly been interpreted through Eurocentric lenses. In reference to early British observations of Aboriginal existences as 'unsettled', Hamilton noted:

The white Australian consciousness has elaborated on this theme, particularly in the popular concept of 'walkabout' as an innate Aboriginal characteristic used particularly to explain Aboriginal behaviour which fails to conform to non-Aboriginal expectations about work patterns and predictability of residence. Attempts to integrate Aboriginal people into non-Aboriginal Australian society have been informed by a set of expectation which link together stability of residence, 'civilisation,' productive labour, and a lifestyle focussed on the maintenance of a certain kind of domestic environment (Hamilton, 1987 p. 47).

Throughout colonial history, the Anglo-Australian consciousness has produced and reproduced various visions of the continents' first peoples as 'wandering nomads;' a people naturally oriented towards constant movement, a 'walkabout race'.⁷ Indeed, the term 'walkabout,' has been used pejoratively and knowingly to explain away all kinds of complex spatial interactions (Fink, 1960; Hamilton, 1987; Peterson, 2004), and to some degree, to reinforce conceptualisations of Aboriginal spatiality as somehow irrational, mysterious, even subversive. However, this simplistic notion of 'walkabout' as an innately Aboriginal characteristic is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, Aboriginal populations have not lived in a cultural vacuum and their contemporary spatialities cannot therefore satisfactorily be explained away as the result of a nomadic predisposition to 'wander.' Secondly, positioning frequent mobility as a marker of Indigeneity implies that Aboriginal people who live relatively settled existences are somehow less authentically 'Aboriginal.' The result of ill-conceived interpretations of Aboriginal spatiality has been generations of physical dispossession and alienation of Aboriginal people from country and kin, the primary sources from which they derived their security and belonging, as well as an acute marginalisation from many mainstream social and economic institutions.

1.3 The Mobility Literature

A fragmented comprehension of Aboriginal mobility practices is perpetuated by a lack of research that challenges dominant discourses and assumptions about

⁷ This phrase was coined by Anonymous Interviewee 12 (1 March, 2005) to describe and explain the movement of Aboriginal people generally.

'normalised' spatial practices, or seeks to understand and interpret contemporary Aboriginal movement processes more holistically. There remains a paucity of consolidated literature that intentionally and systematically examines indigenous mobility processes and their dialectical relationships with public service agencies (Taylor and Bell, 2004c). This research gap has impeded the development of robust social theory and sound policy, and obstructed equitable service delivery to Aboriginal people whose mobility practices fall outside of those constructed as normal and reasonable within the dominant policy arenas.

Within this context of limited research, a small but growing literature has been emerging which is concerned with the spatial interactions of indigenous peoples in post-colonial settler states such as Australia, Canada, America, and New Zealand (Australia: Hamilton, 1987; Martin and Taylor, 1995; Peterson, 2004; Taylor, 1996; Taylor and Bell, 2004b; Warchivker, Tjapangati and Wakerman, 2000; Young and Doohan, 1989; Young, 1990; America: Eschbach, 2004; Snipp, 2004; Canada: Cooke and Belanger, 2006; Frideres, Kalbach and Kalbach 2004; Norris and Clatworthy, 2003; New Zealand: Barcham, 2004; Nikora, Guerin, Rua and Awekotuku 2004). Indigenous populations in these countries have endured similar colonial pasts and exhibit a range of spatial similarities, making mobility processes amongst them uniquely comparable (Taylor and Bell, 2004c)⁸.

Irrespective of theoretical or methodological proclivity, one of the common themes that infuses this literature is recognition of a need to develop more detailed understandings and explanations of indigenous population mobilities for the appropriate and equitable delivery of basic services to indigenous populations *and* for the progression of social theory. Taylor and Bell (2004c p. 4) for example argue

⁸ There are of course important differences in indigenous experiences of colonisation and contemporary mobility experiences across these four countries. In the context of cross-national comparisons, Bedford and Pool (2004), for example, point out some of the unique historical and contemporary processes of Maori rural-urban migration. They also note, in comparison to indigenous peoples in other settler-states, a much greater tendency toward international migration amongst Maori. In North America, treaty negotiations and the establishment of 'Indian reserves' has had a number of unique spatial, legal, and servicing implications (see for example Peters, 1997). There are however striking similarities between Australian Aboriginal and Canadian aboriginal experiences of colonisation. In addition, comparisons of Taylor (2006b) and Peters (2001) suggest that contemporary indigenous population mobilities within these two nations are taking place within similar geographical and demographic contexts. Many of the international comparisons made throughout the thesis consequently draw from the Canadian context.

that “mobility is now the key determinant of regional and local population change, with implications for modes of service delivery, needs assessment, and governance structures.” They emphasise that research and literature addressing these issues to date has often been a by-product of some other, usually anthropological, study (see for example Cowlshaw, 1999a; Fink, 1960; Finlayson, 1991; Musharbash, 2003; Palmer, 1982; Smith, 2000b; Thompson, 2001; Tonkinson and Tonkinson, 1979), and is consequently cobbled together in a piecemeal fashion (Taylor and Bell, 2004c p. 1). They argue that the lack of research which takes indigenous mobility as its central focus has hindered the development of a robust theoretical framework into which future studies of indigenous mobility might be situated and from which enlightened research agendas might be set.

Research regarding indigenous mobility can be quite clearly divided according to conceptual and methodological approaches. Recent literature in Australia has been dominated by studies from population geographers and demographers. These studies are concerned primarily with the enumeration of Aboriginal populations, large scale demographic trends, and migration patterns. In particular, research has focussed on spatially and temporally broad-scaled population redistributions such as the increasing urbanisation of Aboriginal populations since colonisation began (Taylor and Bell, 1996b). A small collection of more ethnographically based qualitative studies augments this literature. Chapter Two scrutinises these distinctive approaches in greater detail, particularly in relation to the advantages and limitations of the methodological processes that each employs. However, the following section examines these approaches from a conceptual perspective in order to determine the key contributions they have made to the field of indigenous mobility research, and to situate the conceptual framework employed in this dissertation.

1.3.1 Conceptual Origins of Aboriginal Mobility Studies

Studies of mobility arising from the demographic tradition (see for example Martin and Taylor, 1996; Taylor, 1996; 1998; Taylor and Bell, 1999; Warchivker et al., 2000) seek to address the paucity of reliable quantitative data regarding the scale, direction and patterns of Aboriginal mobility in Australia. Recognising the significance of this task in pursuing principles of social justice, these studies identify demographic trends so that needs might be better identified and resources and

services better targeted to disadvantaged populations. Therefore, most of the contemporary literature concerned with Aboriginal mobility in the Australian context places greater emphasis on describing and recording patterns of mobility than on what Young and Doohan (1989) refer to as 'mobility process.'

1.3.1.1 Migration Models

One of the significant themes that emerges from these demographic studies is a recognition that Aboriginal populations exhibit demographic and spatial distribution characteristics which cannot be satisfactorily explained by traditional migration models (Taylor and Bell, 1996a; 2004b; Young and Doohan, 1989; Young, 1990). In generalised terms, traditional migration models used to conceptualise and predict population movements are inappropriate in Aboriginal contexts for two chief reasons. Firstly, they often privilege economic rationality as the primary movement predictor. Secondly, they exclude circulation (i.e. forms of movement that do not involve a permanent change in residence) or relegate it to a transitional status.

Many conventional migration models assume that a person's movements are based on an economic rationality (Stillwell and Congdon, 1991). That is, they predict spatial behaviour in terms of the economic costs and benefits of moving or remaining stationary, and the movers' adherence to these norms. These models assert employment opportunities and income status as core values which influence people's mobility decisions. However, Chapman and Prothero (1985b p. 24-25) noted that movement amongst populations in the Third World context is often motivated by considerations that pre-date the introduction of Western economic values. These considerations include kinship, ceremony, subsistence agriculture, and political asylum. Likewise, in the Australian Indigenous context, Young (1990) suggested that conventional economic models privilege particular lifestyle values which are not necessarily significant considerations influencing Aboriginal mobility decisions. Taylor and Bell (2004a, p. 263) also suggested that the inherent assumptions within classic economic-based models of movers as 'income maximisers' is inappropriate in the context of Aboriginal populations. Many Aboriginal people, for example, privilege responsibilities to family and ancestral 'country' above employment opportunities. Therefore mobility models that predict demographic distributions

based on an assumed set of values fail to adequately understand or account for Aboriginal mobilities (Young and Doohan, 1989).

In the Canadian context where the focus of mobility research has primarily been on rural-urban migration amongst First Nation communities, Cooke (1999) noted that economic cost/benefit models of migration are not appropriate. He explained that economic models posit return-migration as a result of re-evaluation of the economic considerations that prompted initial rural-urban moves. For many aboriginal people however, return-migration was always intended – it was not simply an after-thought when city life fell through (Cooke, 1999).

Some migration models do not necessarily privilege economic rationality as the primary benchmark for predicting movement (Cooke and Belanger, 2006). Migration theorist Goldscheider (1971), for example, argued that economic opportunity alone does not determine migration. Even for Goldscheider though, the emphasis was on understanding migration flows between two distinct locales. In other words, they still assume an intended permanent change of residency. Lee (1966) specifically excluded the movements of ‘nomads’ from his migration models since, he argued, they do not have a permanent residence. Models such as Lee’s refer to ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors between origins and destinations, and the personal characteristics of the mover, such as life-stage and marital status, which mediate their migration decisions. By their definitional limitations, such models exclude a variety of short-term, temporary mobility practices which might collectively be referred to as circulation processes. As following chapters will explain, these short-term, circular mobility processes, which so often fall outside of the parameters of traditional push-pull migration theories, are commonly characteristic of Australian Aboriginal populations.

Migration theorist Zelinsky (1971), in his grand *Hypothesis of the Mobility Transition*, proposed that circulation is a transitory form of movement accompanying the process of ‘modernisation’ across broad temporal scales. However, as Chapman and Prothero (1985a) have suggested:

Circulation, far from being transitional or ephemeral, is a time-honoured and enduring mode of behaviour, deeply rooted in a great variety of cultures and found at all stages of socio-economic change (p.6).

Taylor and Bell (1996b; 2004c) tentatively proposed an indigenous variant to Zelinsky's mobility transition. In so doing, they note, amongst other considerations, the persistence of circulation amongst indigenous populations through the various stages of modernisation that their settler-states have undergone.

Several studies from Canada and Australia have begun to specifically identify indigenous circulation processes as highly significant in the context of policy development. At a recent Aboriginal Policy Research Conference in Ottawa, Canada, Norris and Clatworthy (2006) argued that:

It appears that for now, the most important consideration of Aboriginal mobility and migration is not redistribution of the population, but more the high rate of movement or "churn" both "to and from" and within cities (p.3).

Norris and Clatworthy presented this agenda as a new challenge for both research and policy in Canada. They proposed that there are potentially a number of significant policy implications of these short-term, circular aboriginal mobility processes. They highlighted: 1) the policy challenges of adapting to the service needs of a changing population composition, 2) the discontinuity of service delivery to mobile populations, and 3) the poor housing, health and education outcomes of frequently moving individuals. Likewise, Cooke (1999) noted that there have been no major studies addressing the issue of circular migration amongst aboriginal populations. He concluded that circulation is an important component of mobility and its persistence and frequency amongst First Nations peoples is a central consideration to the wellbeing and development of Canadian aboriginal communities (Cooke, 1999 p. 154).

In the Australian context, demographic, quantitative research that has traditionally focussed on large-scale population shifts and patterns of rural-urban migration, has increasingly recognised the significance of understanding short-term, circular mobility processes (Taylor and Bell, 2004b; Taylor, 2006b). However, despite a general consensus that circular mobilities are ongoing and have significant implications for policy development and service delivery, as Taylor (1996)

suggested, little is known about the scale, direction or patterns of these mobilities, or the demographic characteristics of those involved. Taylor (2006b) noted:

The fact is that policy makers who contemplate the effects of temporary mobility on the spatial pattern of demand for services do so in an information vacuum ... an enormous research and information gap prevails in regard to the impact of short-term population movements in remote Australia (p. 23 and 29).

Progression of this research agenda has largely been hindered by a lack of appropriate methodologies which can effectively 'capture' movements that occur at smaller temporal and spatial scales than the established parameters of large statistical data sets such as census surveys (Taylor and Bell, 1996b).

In their recent regional study of Aboriginal mobility processes along the Queensland / Northern Territory border, Memmott, Long and Thompson (2006 p.1) argued that research has not addressed Aboriginal mobility processes at smaller and shorter scales, and that "more accurate and substantiative quantitative and qualitative data of this nature is required to better target policies, programs and services to Indigenous people." However, as subsequent discussion suggests, these short-term circular movements have been richly incorporated into a handful of ethnographic studies which have taken place over substantial expanses of time and space (Birdsall, 1988; Hamilton, 1987; Smith, 2004; Young and Doohan, 1989). This small group of studies describe the complexity and characteristics of short-term circular mobilities amongst Aboriginal populations in a range of locations throughout Australia.

1.3.1.2 Diverging from Models

Faced with the inadequacies of conventional migration models in indigenous contexts, some researchers have sought alternative models upon which to base their conceptualisations of indigenous spatial behaviour. Young (1990) and Young and Doohan (1989), for example, have suggested that definitions of mobility practices emanating from Melanesia might be more appropriate to Australian Aboriginal populations. In Melanesia, people have retained strong ties to land and kinship structures. Models used to describe their movements include chain migrations, where individuals or groups move within a region, or along a particular route which is determined by the spatial distribution of friends and kinship networks; circulation,

where individuals continually return to a point of origin after journeys to other places (Bedford, 1981; Chapman and Prothero, 1985a; b); and multi-locale living where individuals have associations with more than one locale as a 'home-base' (Young, 1990).

However, as Chapman (1991) cautioned in the context of academic inquiry into Pacific Islander mobility processes, the fervent quest to neatly model, predict and enumerate mobility patterns, can be potentially counter-productive to the overarching agenda of developing a greater understanding of mobility processes. Having presented his analysis of Islander mobility in terms of complexity, contradiction, and multiplicity, Chapman asserted:

The fact that scholars trained in the Western intellectual tradition are greatly discomforted by these kinds of contradictions, paradox, and ambiguity lies at the heart of the scholarly impasse in which studies of population movement in the island Pacific now find themselves ... Similarly, a vast literature goes to enormous lengths to ascribe recurrent difficulties of analysis to a reluctant dependence on aggregate census data, to a notable lack of time depth in field inquiries, and to an inability to apply conventional models to societies that are both culturally diverse and spatially fragmented. Underlying such difficulties is the more fundamental fact that, more and more, the ferment of island mobility does not merge easily into a scholarly tapestry woven with the threads of dichotomized thinking and dualistic models (Chapman, 1991 p. 287).

Chapman's critique serves as a cautionary tale for academic inquiry focussing on any form of indigenous population mobility. It advocates the problematisation of dominant interpretative frameworks and the adoption of conceptualisations of Aboriginal mobility which embrace overlap, fluidity, and complexity.

Chapman is not alone in his concerns. Following Silvey and Lawson (1999), Wilson and Peters (2005 p. 396) have suggested that one of the ways in which geographers have the greatest potential to contribute to migration studies is through a re-examination of the assumed categories upon which migration models are based. They also emphasised the value of reconnecting population geography with social construction theory in order to explore the ways in which migration narratives are socially constructed and serve particular purposes. In applying the theoretical model

of trans-nationalism to the experiences of Canadian First Nations migrants in their moves from reserves to urban centres, Wilson and Peters (2005) argued that aboriginal conceptualisations of their own movements are more appropriate than classical migration models. They suggested that privileging the perspectives of migrants can serve the elucidating function of problematising the dominant interpretive frameworks. In a parallel reflexive dialogue in the Australian context Young and Doohan (1989) advocated the conceptualisation of Aboriginal mobility processes and practices around Aboriginal narratives and definitions of their spatiality. Memmott et al. (2006) also adopted a conceptual framework which allowed them to depart from conventional constructions of mobility and migration. They employed methodologies which focussed on the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal research participants in relation to their mobility processes. Such analyses have generally been the province of more ethnographic studies.

In Australia, the few existing ethnographic studies of Aboriginal mobility have originated chiefly from the disciplines of Anthropology and Human Geography, and are concerned primarily with the nuanced characteristics of Aboriginal spatial mobilities and the motivations that undergird them (see Beckett, 1965; Brady, 1999; Hamilton, 1987; Smith, 2004; Young and Doohan, 1989; Young, 1990). Most of these studies are at least 15 years old and located in regions least disrupted by colonisation including Central Australia, the Western Desert, and far north Queensland. There is therefore a limited record within the Australian literature of ethnographic studies concerned with the mobility of Aboriginal populations whose cultural and socio-economic orientations have changed most significantly over time as a consequence of and response to colonial occupation and administration.

Because ethnographic studies are constructed at smaller spatial scales and consider the localised nuances of Aboriginal mobility processes, they have a rich capacity to contribute to service delivery policy at regional and local levels⁹. They also have great potential to contribute to the development of robust social theory regarding mobility and migration processes (McHugh, 2000). The paucity of recent ethnographic studies restricts comparisons of mobility processes across regions to

⁹ Chapters Two and Eight provide more detailed discussions of the potential contributions of ethnographic studies of indigenous mobility in both policy and research contexts.

determine which characteristics of mobilities are localised and which are consistent across the geographical plain. These research gaps also limit present understandings of the ways in which localised mobility processes change over time. They consequently hinder the development of social theory regarding the characteristics and socio-cultural and historical considerations which shape and inform contemporary Aboriginal spatial practices. Such research restrictions have hindered policy development in relation to understanding contemporary mobility processes, targeting resources effectively, and forecasting future needs.

1.3.2 Dissertation Objectives

In recognising the substantial opportunities to develop and consolidate scholarly research and literature regarding Aboriginal mobility, Taylor and Bell (2004a) summarised the future direction which they propose that indigenous mobility studies should take:

We would argue that a primary focus should be given to further elaborating the way in which mobility dynamics and settlement outcomes are shaped by the changing interface between Indigenous culture and the encapsulating state. An enhanced understanding of these interactions, in diverse settings and at varying temporal and spatial scales is fundamental to articulation of a robust and comprehensive theory of mobility amongst Indigenous peoples ... Equally important, and perhaps more tractable, is the task of capturing the many forms of spatial activity that characterize Indigenous life ... The challenge for research is not simply to capture dynamics of these diverse forms of movement, but to understand how they intersect and interweave to underpin the lives of Indigenous peoples (p. 265-266).

Here, Taylor and Bell identify two aspects of mobility studies that remain largely undeveloped conceptually. First, they advocate an emphasis on the changing relationship between mobility practices and indigenous interactions with institutional structures. Second, they articulate the need for a greater appreciation of diverse Aboriginal spatial practices and the complex interplays between them. The focus they call for is less concerned with privileging the examination of a particular type of mobility process and more concerned with developing an understanding of the underlying circumstances, settings, and situations which give rise to the multiplicity of Aboriginal mobility processes that exist in contemporary Australia.

This thesis examines these changing relationships and diverse mobility processes in the context of Yamatji country, Western Australia. It approaches the task by adopting a similar conceptual orientation to that of Chapman (1991), and Wilson and Peters (2005), who privileged lived experience over migration models as an entry point to the study of population mobility. The present study builds upon the indigenous mobility literature by challenging dominant frameworks through which Aboriginal spatial practices have been and are interpreted. The emphasis of enquiry however is not on dominant scholarly frameworks for conceptualising Aboriginal mobility, although these certainly inform the discussion. Rather, this dissertation focuses on the conceptualisations and interpretive frameworks which arise from public discourse, particularly in relation to the delivery of basic government services. Following Young and Doohan (1989), Chapman (1991), Wilson and Peters (2005), and Memmott et al. (2006) therefore, the first objective of the thesis is *to examine experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal spatial practices in Yamatji country, Western Australia*. Engaging with this first objective presents an opportunity to critically examine the dominant understandings, interpretations, and assumptions about Aboriginal mobility processes in the discourses, cultures and practices of locally and regionally-based Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents and public servants. It also provides a mandate for developing a detailed understanding of the forces and aspirations which inform Aboriginal mobility processes and the characteristics that shape them.

In the absence of detailed analysis of the relationship between Aboriginal mobility practices and service delivery in the existing literature, the second objective of the thesis is *to investigate the relationship between the provision of basic government services and Aboriginal spatial mobilities in Yamatji country*. By focussing on government-delivered health, housing and education services, the dissertation expands upon the theme introduced in the opening interview excerpt, of how, when, and why Aboriginal mobility behaviours 'upset the white man.' In essence this objective is concerned with competing rationalities regarding 'appropriate' spatial interactions. The thesis argues that efficient and just service delivery which redresses the inequitable nature of co-existence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

people, requires an abandonment of overly simplistic assumptions and unarticulated interpretations of Aboriginal spatialities.

The third objective emerges as a response to the data analysis engendered by the first two objectives. It is, *to reconceptualise Aboriginal mobility processes in Yamatji country, providing an alternative framework for interpreting and understanding these spatial practices*. Central to this framework is a conscious shift away from generalised and pejorative interpretations of Aboriginal spatial practices, toward a more complex and dialectical explanation encompassing historical context, cultural identity, individual aspirations, and social and economic adaptations. This reconceptualisation is based upon an examination of the ways in which Aboriginal people procure, contest, and cultivate a sense of belonging and economic, social and cultural security, since these are the primary considerations which undergird Aboriginal spatial practices in the fieldwork region. Conceptualising Aboriginal spatial practices in this way provides an alternative epistemological vantage point on the rationalities that inform the complex and fluid mobility processes enacted in Yamatji country.

Following Brody (2000), who unsettled dominant conceptualisations regarding the nature of hunter-gatherer spatialities, this thesis unsettles two common assumptions regarding Australian Aboriginal spatiality: first, that Aboriginal mobilities are deviant, irrational, abnormal, or mysterious, and second, that all Aboriginal people conform to the same 'nomadic' spatialities. Using the framework of security and belonging, *it argues that contemporary Aboriginal mobility practices are the product of complex interplays between socio-cultural expression and mainstream institutions. It further argues that effective and just service delivery policy is predicated upon a more integrated understanding of the processes that undergird Aboriginal spatialities*.

1.4 Thesis Structure: A Narrative of Spatial Struggles

As the thesis examines contemporary conceptualisations of Aboriginal mobility in Yamatji country, and explores the relationships between Aboriginal mobility practices and the delivery of basic government services, the central narrative of spatial struggles for security and belonging unfolds.

Metaphorically speaking, Chapter Two describes the lens through which the thesis narrative might be read and interpreted. It provides a detailed discussion of the methodological context of the research. It begins with a descriptive overview of the research case study area and specific locations. This discussion problematises the practice of 'bounding' a case study region in mobility research; a theme revisited in subsequent chapters. Having described the unique and relevant geographical, social, and economic characteristics of the fieldwork area, Chapter Two then situates the research design within the context of the various theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of Aboriginal population movement. This discussion is particularly important in the field of mobility studies where the development of innovative methodological approaches emerges as arguably the most pressing concern for the progression of the research agenda. Drawing on fieldwork journal entries and data characteristics, the specific methodological processes and tools employed during fieldwork are explained, described, and reflected upon. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the process of analysis involved in the research, and the ways in which this process has shaped the conceptual and structural layout of the thesis.

Chapter Three moves on to provide an entry point to the localised narratives of Aboriginal mobility practices in Yamatji country. It describes both the Aboriginal mobility processes taking place in the region, and the various dominant discourses which circulate to explain them. In so doing, Chapter Three engages the reader with the first thesis objective by beginning an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal mobilities within the region. The discussion is structured around the categorisations of 'core' and 'transient' Aboriginal populations that emerged from the fieldwork. A greater portion of the analysis is devoted to examining the spatial, temporal, and demographic dimensions of the 'transient' population since these emerged as being the least comprehensible within the Eurocentric consciousness. The analysis then turns to the other dominant discourses of Aboriginal mobility, focussing in particular on the constructed notion of 'authentic Aboriginality.' According to this authenticity discourse, some Aboriginal spatial practices are constructed as acceptable, even natural, whilst others are interpreted as subversive and illegitimate. A range of

explanations of Aboriginal itinerancy are then presented. Some reinforce this authenticity discourse and some challenge it. Using the example of funeral attendance, Chapter Three concludes by illustrating the censorious impact of dominant discourses on Aboriginal spatial practices.

Chapter Four situates these dominant discourses and interpretations of Aboriginal mobilities from Yamatji country within the broader context of service delivery by the State government. It is in Chapter Four that the second objective of the thesis is most directly addressed. Although the mobility literature almost unanimously identifies population movement as a fundamental consideration for effective service delivery, few studies provide significant depth of detail regarding this relationship. Using three case-study services - housing, health, and education - this chapter carefully examines the intricate dialectical relationship between Aboriginal spatial practices and service delivery. In each case-study, two themes dominate. First, in various ways and for a range of reasons, service delivery can constrict Aboriginal mobility, prompt long-term migrations, and / or increase itinerancy. Second, Aboriginal itinerancy has a range of detrimental impacts on service delivery, particularly in relation to service continuity and resource allocation. Within the context of these broad themes, Chapter Four begins to illuminate the complexity and multiplicity of Aboriginal spatial practices within the region and the ways in which service provision influences and is influenced by it. Most importantly however, it paints a picture of this dialectical relationship as often contested, and appropriately represented by the notion of 'spatial struggles.' By the conclusion of the fourth chapter, the 'problem' of competing rationalities of appropriate spatialities and the ways in which these rationalities find expression in both the provision and utilisation of public services, is firmly established.

Chapter Five begins by reflecting on the contemporary landscape of Aboriginal mobility and service provision described in the previous two chapters. It recalls in particular the fragmented interpretations of and responses to Aboriginal mobility processes historically, and the lack of any intentional engagement with these processes in contemporary service delivery frameworks. This chapter therefore suggests that a more comprehensive framework is required for interpreting and

engaging with Aboriginal spatiality. In addressing the third thesis objective, it is here that the notions of security and belonging emerge decisively to take their definitive role in directing the dissertation to its conclusion. Chapter Five describes the primary sources from which Aboriginal people in Yamatji country procured, cultivated, and contested security and belonging prior to colonisation and the ways in which these processes informed their semi-nomadic subsistence lifestyles. In particular though, it provides specific detail regarding the fracturing impact of colonisation on these processes. It argues that this historically-specific and geographically-specific context is foundational to understanding contemporary circumstances. Chapter Five explores the many adaptations that Aboriginal people in Yamatji country have made in response to the colonial project, including the reclamation of old spaces of belonging and the appropriation of new sources of security and belonging. Today, these adaptations inform complex and dynamic spatial practices. The chapter concludes by describing some of the lingering legacies of colonisation, specifically the changing role of 'country' as a source of security and belonging.

Chapter Six applies the interpretive framework developed in Chapter Five to the context of contemporary Aboriginal engagements with the mainstream economy. Beginning with the notion of 'conditioning' into either an 'employment or welfare culture,' the chapter examines contemporary discourses about Aboriginal economic engagements in Yamatji country. After problematising some of these discourses by peering through an historical lens, the chapter progresses to describe the ways in which varied contemporary engagements with the mainstream economy influence Aboriginal spatiality. It concludes that, like relationships to country and mainstream service agencies, Aboriginal spatiality is significantly influenced by the extent to which Aboriginal people derive a sense of security and/or belonging from engaging with mainstream economic conventions.

Chapter Seven further develops the notions of security and belonging in the context of family, to explore the many and complex ways in which familial relationships influence Aboriginal spatiality in Yamatji country. It details the various ways in which family networks are engaged, contested, and fostered, describing these processes as acts of cultural

maintenance. For many, the economic and social security derived from familial networks of support and reciprocity both facilitates and demands mobility. Further, it is often the knowledge of these networks that enable 'transients' to engage in 'spontaneous' and contingent mobility practices. Even for Aboriginal people who are actively engaged in the mainstream economy, practices such as visiting, attending funerals, celebrations, and major events serve to reinforce important bonds of connectedness and identity. Chapter Seven ultimately argues that for most Aboriginal people in the region, relationships to family are integral to their sense of security and / or belonging and are therefore the most significant force that undergird Aboriginal spatial practices in the fieldwork region.

The eighth and final chapter reflects on the thesis objectives, situates the case-study findings back within the broader research and policy contexts, and presents a snapshot of the potential future contributions within this emerging field of study. Chapter Eight re-engages with the themes presented in this introductory chapter: the cultural content and hidden assumptions in the construction of 'appropriate' models of spatial mobility and how these perpetuate deep colonising practices, the potential methodological contributions of studies which explore experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal mobilities, and the necessity of engaging more intentionally with Aboriginal mobility practices in order to redress marginalising discourses and practices regarding Aboriginal spatiality.

Chapter Eight also grapples with the ways in which policy might engage more effectively with the often overwhelming complexity and multiplicity of Aboriginal spatiality. It argues in particular that to be more effective, policy must be formulated on a more 'regionalised' scale which takes into consideration the unique historical, cultural, and geographical context in which service delivery takes place. It also suggests the policy response to complex spatial behaviours must be one of negotiated practice. According to the notion of negotiated practice, Aboriginal clients adjust to some of the practical limitations of service delivery, and service providers exhibit a willingness to be challenged about some of the dominant assumptions which underpin current delivery frameworks. An active and intentional dialogue between Aboriginal clients and service providers regarding spatial mobility then becomes a first step in developing equitable and just service delivery policies. Ultimately, Chapter Eight ties together the threads of the thesis narrative and brings it to a paradoxically open conclusion.