realise 'there's nothing here. We gotta move on.' So they move on and leave us old stick-in-the-muds. Take for instance the dart team, and the football team. When Albert and I first got together, or in the early years of our marriage, there was three I think footy teams here. And they used to play from here to Cue and Magnet and out to Wiluna. You know. Lots of travel and lots of mingling and interaction between black and white. And they sort of then outsiders came in. Those whites got married and their lifestyle changed. And there was the darts association. You had eight teams; 4 men and 4 women. And we used to play six a side. And we always had somebody had to stand down you know to let the six play. Now they're battling to get three a side. And there's no footy team. And the basketball is a black thing only (Aunty Mavis Curley, 18 August 2004).

Plate 2.3 (Right): Entrance of the Meekatharra Swimming Pool. Still a popular local attraction particularly during the blistering summer months *(Photo: Sarah Prout, 2004).*

Plate 2.4 (Left): Exterior of the town's indoor cricket centre. Recently fitted with new gym equipment to promote community fitness *(Photo: Sarah Prout, 2004)*

Plate 2.6 (Below): 'The Green' at the Meekatharra Golf Course *(Photo: Sarah Prout, 2004).*

Plate 2.5 (Above): Sunset view from the recreation complex club rooms of the town sports oval. Used primarily by the junior football team *(Photo: Sarah Prout, 2005).*

Perpetuating further de-population is the persistently high rate of crime in the town. Morgan and Fernandez (2002) found that between 1997-1999, Meekatharra had the highest crime rates in the Midwest across all offence categories. Criminal activity within the town was reported in many interviews as a chief consideration prompting the out-migration of a number of long-time non-Indigenous residents in recent years.

2.2.3.2 A Demographic Shift

Processes of rural decline in Meekatharra have produced a decisive demographic shift. In a recent public essay, prominent Indigenous scholar Marcia Langton described the impact of mine closure and restructuring on the changing social geography of Australia's rural and remote regions:

> Ballarat, Bendigo, Bathurst and a few other towns around the country survived the gold rushes but most did not. Many ... are quiet backwaters. Others have all but disappeared. Mostly though, small outback towns are Aboriginal communities, left behind as generation after generation from the old white families moved to the cities. The demographic of the remote inland is becoming a majority Aboriginal world broken up by islands of mine workers and a few service towns (Langton, 2006 p. 16).

Langton's reading of Australia's remote inland landscape offers a fitting interpretation of Meekatharra and the surrounding region. Today, the Aboriginal community in Meekatharra probably constitutes 80 – 90% of the town's population. Many of these Aboriginal residents are descendents of the Wadjari people from the Western part of Yamatji country, or the Wanmalla[21] or Martu[22] people who have 'come in' from the Western Desert.

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[21] Fink (1960) refers to the Wanmalla as those from the area to the east of Wadjari country. She notes that the term is also used by the Ooldea people of South Australia to refer to a 'fighting or revenge expedition' (Fink 160 p.61). Doohan (2006 pers. comm.) also suggests that Aboriginal groups on the northern and western fringes of Central Australian deserts use the term 'Warrmala' to describe their neighbours to the south/southeast with whom they have had certain kinds of relationships. In particular a relationship that allowed them to call upon these people, the men, to perform unpleasant disciplinary actions (generally associated with ritual indiscretions and/or related to revenging a murder). The term Warrmala' is also in the context of the Dreamtime to describe groups of travelling men engaged in ritual activity. It is also used to refer to actual contemporary groups of men engaged in travelling ritual practice. The term is not necessarily always a general directional term but is for those Aboriginal people who live in the western regions, those Aboriginal people who live in Central desert regions may well have 'Warrmala' who are located to the north/north west of them (Doohan 2006, pers.comm.). Shaw (2006 pers. comm.), who undertook an ethnography of Aboriginal presence in the Meekatharra area in 1990s recalls that Wanmalla was a spiteful term used by Wadjari speakers to refer to a number of language groups to the east.

Although census time-series data are limited in scope and scale, statistics for the Meekatharra Local Government Area (which covers 100788.9 sq km and includes many of the surrounding stations and small communities) indicate that in contrast to the fluctuating non-Aboriginal population, the area's Aboriginal population has remained a consistent presence over many decades (Figure 2.4)[23]. The available demographic profile, and anecdotal testimony, seem to strongly support Brody's (2000) claim that over the course of time, 'hunter-gatherer' (in this case Aboriginal) spatiality is far more stable than those of 'settled farmers' (in this case non-Aboriginal society). Indeed Memmott and Moran (2001 Section: Indigenous Population Change, Migration, and Mobility para. 5) suggest that in remote regions, demographic trends are producing two distinct populations: a 'chronically transient' non-Indigenous group and a locally mobile (but spatially relatively stable) Indigenous group.

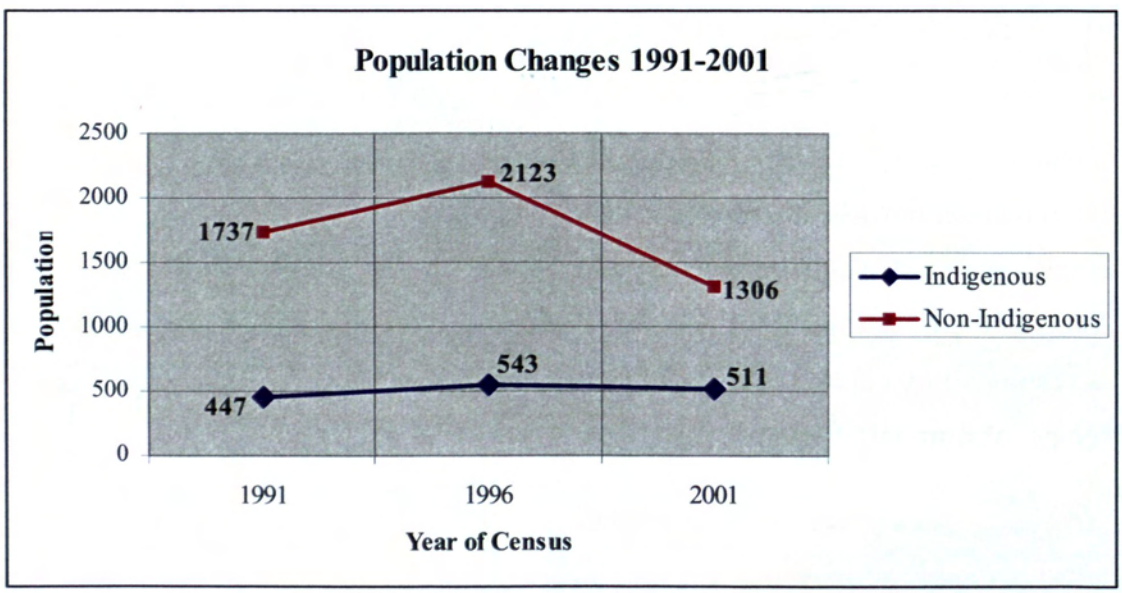

Figure 2.4 Population Change in the Meekatharra LGA 1991-2001
(Source data: ABS, 2002c)

In many ways, Meekatharra's current population profile belies its persistent identity as a mining heartland. Whilst the monuments of mining memorabilia scattered in

[22] According to the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements Project (2006) the term 'Martu' is a term used to describe Aboriginal people from the Western Desert Region. The Martu people hold common traditional laws and customs and include a range of language groups.
[23] Prior to 2001, national Census's did not produce demographic data sets at the level of urban localities. Thus, the exact population of the Meekatharra township cannot be compared across time.

prominent positions throughout the town testify to the industry's significance in shaping Meekatharra's past, the town's present demography suggests that perhaps this centralised non-Aboriginal historical narrative is not representative of contemporary Meekatharra.

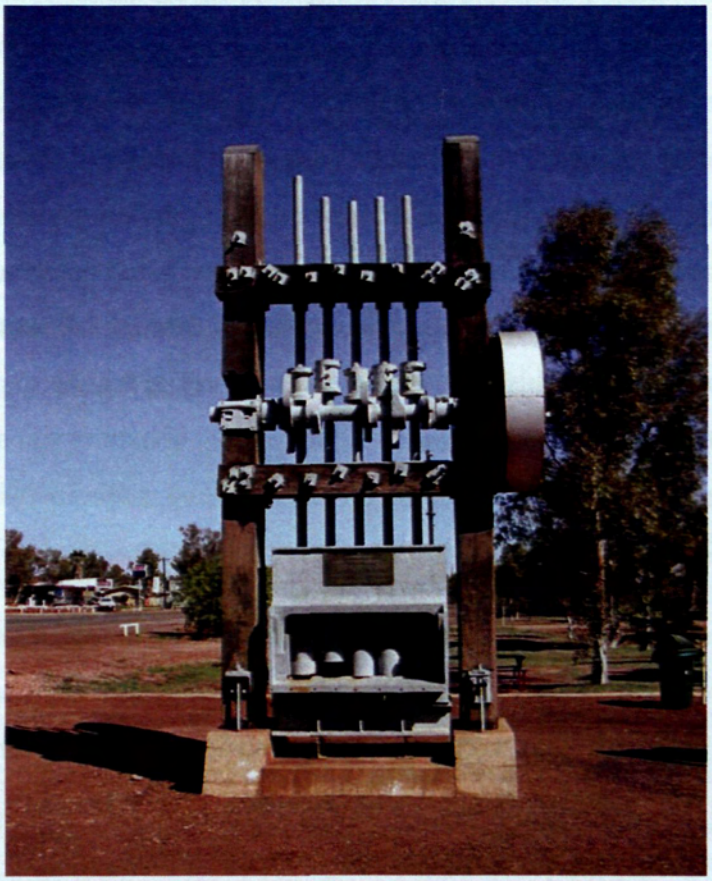

Plate 2.7 Meekatharra's old mining battery standing as a monument at the Main Street tourist rest stop. *(Photo: Sarah Prout)*

In contrast to being directly engaged in or servicing the mining industry, most of the non-Aboriginal population in Meekatharra today service the majority Aboriginal population that live there and in surrounding communities. The Officer in Charge at the Meekatharra Police Sergeant explained:

> *The issues we face here in Meekatharra are simply that, basically the town itself is a white-infrastructure town ... i.e. all the service providers are Caucasians, the majority of them ... And all the infrastructure's been put in basically by the white community if you like, but the population is mainly Aboriginal, or Indigenous (Officer in Charge, Meekatharra Police Station 26 February 2005).*

Because of a decline in the primary industries that Meekatharra has historically been a district service centre for, the town is today in the somewhat ironic position of being identified as a regional mining town that doesn't service the mining industry. Although it remains a significant service centre for the surrounding pastoral stations, these are fast dwindling. Meekatharra is today primarily sustained by its geographical centrality (and thus preferred location for a range of district government offices), and the resident Aboriginal population. A separate thesis could explore the range of fascinating social dynamics that this demographic and economic context has produced. For the purposes of this thesis however, the overview presented here provides the necessary context for the subsequent chapters that describe the forces and sources which prompt and shape movement in and through Meekatharra. Many of the themes introduced in this overview case-study profile will be explored further throughout the thesis.

2.3 Research Design

In recent years, debate within the social sciences about the defensibility and validity of data produced using qualitative verses quantitative methodologies has begun to subside. Most social researchers acknowledge that there are strengths and limitations to both approaches and some scholars have begun to advocate the potential of embracing both approaches within singular research agendas (Brannen, 2005). For example, feminist geographers have traditionally employed qualitative methods because they produce rich, contextually-grounded data which are appropriate to research questions concerned with situated issues of power and gender (Nightingale, 2003 p. 79). More recently however, Rocheleau (1995) and Nightingale (2003) have advocated the adoption of 'mixed-method' research designs that combine qualitative and quantitative methods because this approach produces more diverse data and serves to further demonstrate the situated nature of knowledge.

Despite the diminishing debate surrounding qualitative and quantitative research, the methodological divide generally persists, largely because of the distinct, or as some researchers would argue, oppositional epistemological and theoretical positions which underpin each approach. Quantitative methodologies are generally employed where the epistemological proclivity suggests that reality is objective, singular and identifiable (Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick, 1998). In contrast, qualitative

approaches complement assumptions that reality is subjective and socially constructed (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander 1990). Threads of this wider methodological discourse will be woven into the following discussion which explores the strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in mobility studies. This discussion sets the context for explaining the methodological choices made during fieldwork and analysis.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the mobility literature emanates from two broad but distinct methodological approaches: demographic and migration studies that generally employ quantitative methodologies, and qualitative analyses emanating primarily from the disciplines of Anthropology and Human Geography (Memmott, Long, Bell, Taylor and Brown 2004) [24]. These distinct methodological approaches are not primarily the product of an antagonistic debate about the scientific validity of either qualitative or quantitative approaches to research. In fact as Skeldon (1995) passionately insisted, both approaches have co-existed in migration and mobility research for several decades.

In the context of indigenous mobility research, methodological distinctions are perhaps best explained as the product of different research foci regarding mobility processes, and a continuing reflexive dialogue regarding the appropriate scales of such studies. There is widespread consensus within the indigenous mobility literature that both approaches have significant strengths and limitations and are in fact, complementary. Because of the direct policy relevance of indigenous mobility studies, one of the chief factors influencing methodological design and data sources is the appropriate scale at which such studies should occur for the sound development of social theory and public policy. Quantitative methodologies are able to provide a great breadth of analysis and provide a platform for cross-national and international comparisons of demographic and migration trends across time and space amongst indigenous populations. However, they provide limited depth of analysis and are often reliant on data sets of limited reliability. Conversely, qualitative methodologies can provide great depth of analysis, particularly with

[24] Cooke (1999) is at least one exception to this separation of methodologies within studies of Indigenous mobility. Cooke combined quantitative data from the Aboriginal People's Survey with a series of more qualitative interviews to explore circular migration patterns amongst First Nations communities in the Canadian Prairies.

regard to process and context at local scales. However, whilst valuable in localised contexts, the primary critique of these studies is that they give little attention to the broader spatial and structural context within which they are situated (Taylor and Bell, 1996a). It is difficult to upscale from such specific studies, to scales appropriate for the development of public policy, cross-national comparisons, or social theory (Newbold, 2004). The apparent trade off is one of breadth verses depth.

For two interlinked reasons, qualitative methodologies were adopted to address the objectives outlined in the introduction to this thesis. First, the conceptual framework of the thesis which privileges lived experience above migration models as an entry point for developing an understanding of mobility process, is conducive to a qualitative approach. Second, quantitative approaches would have failed to generate sufficient, accurate data regarding circular, short-term mobilities – spatial practices which are central considerations in appropriately addressing the thesis objectives. In explaining this methodological decision further, the following section outlines one of the primary contributions of the thesis: the development of a research design that a) provides a greater breadth in scale of analysis and yet retains the rich depth of analysis that qualitative methodologies facilitate, and b) positions the 'region' as an appropriate and constructive scale for research and policy development.

Quantitative analyses that manipulate statistical data sets are not favourable in this context because they produce only one dimensional data and cannot provide any detail on individual's experiences and interpretations of mobility processes. Further, this study intentionally avoids employing quantitative methods or data sets as complementary or secondary sources because of their inherent representational, conceptual, and logistical constraints.

Quantitative methods in mobility studies generally rely on the analysis of census data (Newbold, 2004), which cannot provide the level of accuracy or detail required to effectively complement the analysis of a range of mobility practices. At a most basic level, the five year interval between Australian census surveys renders these data sets quickly out-dated and irrelevant. This is most certainly the case in the fieldwork region where by 2004, even the most basic 2001 demographic census data, such as town population size, were clearly inaccurate. Beyond this initial conundrum

however, there are several additional concerns surrounding the precision of census data regarding Aboriginal populations in Australia. Researchers have clearly established firstly, that census surveys are affected by poor conceptualisations of Aboriginal mobility, and secondly, that although census methodology has improved in recent years (Taylor, 2002), the ABS's Indigenous Enumeration Strategy (IES) is still unable to produce data that accurately and representatively enumerates Aboriginal populations (Martin and Taylor, 1995; Martin, Morphy, Sanders and Taylor, 2002; Memmott et al., 2004; Newbold, 2004; Taylor and Bell, 2004b; Warchivker et al., 2000; Young and Doohan, 1989; Young, 1990). Martin and Taylor's (1996) study in the Queensland Aboriginal community of Aurukun, provided one example of the enumeration inaccuracies (in this case undercounts) which are commonplace within ABS census data.

In addition to the questionable 'representativeness' of census survey data, arising from an inability to accurately enumerate Indigenous populations, census language can lead to further data inaccuracies. As Norris, Cooke, Beavon, Guimond and Clatworthy (2004) and Eschbach (2004) have demonstrated in the North American context, changing census definitions of 'indigenous' as well as changing indigenous self-identification (or ethnic mobility) have altered census data sets concerned with the spatial distribution and mobility practices of indigenous people across time and space. Taylor (2006) has made similar observations in the Australian context.

Census concepts are also steeped in, and reinforce, particular conceptualisations of place and spatial and social interaction (Young and Doohan, 1989). Taylor (2002 p. 2) noted, for example, that the concept of 'household' in census language refers to two or more individuals who reside in the same dwelling, regard themselves as a household, and share living costs. However, many Aboriginal people have a broader and more fluid understanding of the notion of 'household' which may include extended family members and visitors (Finlayson, 1991; Musharbash, 2003; Taylor, 2002). Further, the census concept of 'usual place of residence' assumes a single locale of residency. However, for many Aboriginal people 'usual place of residence' is conceptualised as a region or area encompassing several specific locales (Memmott et al., 2004; Newbold, 2004; Young, 1990). Divergent conceptualisations

of census language have significant implications for census data collection and outcomes[25].

Further, assumptions inherent within the census survey about 'normal' spatial practices also mean that it does not capture particular types of movement. Census data do not register multiple spatial movements between one and five year periods and are therefore unable to capture short-term, circular mobilities (Memmott et al., 2004; Newbold, 2004). The ABS has acknowledged these data deficiencies. In describing Western Australia's Aboriginal population after the 1991 Census, they noted:

> The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines migration as a permanent change of residence (usually 6 months or longer). However, many Aboriginal movements are short term, repetitive or cyclical in nature and often have no declared intention of a permanent or long-standing change of residence. Such movements often reflect the physical separation of kinfolk in a society where the maintenance of kinship ties is of prime importance. Residents of remote areas of the State may also be required to migrate in the short term to more urban areas in order to access services which many not be readily available in their place of usual residence (ABS Cat. No. 4107.5, cited in Manguri and WACOSS, 1994 p. 8).

Because of their capacity to disrupt conventional service delivery models, these short-term, circular mobilities – which current census methodology cannot quantify – are beginning to take precedence on the policy agenda (Norris and Clatworthy, 2006). Newbold (2004 p. 122) suggested that in circumstances such as these, where census geography is not reconciled with indigenous social geography, important locally specific mobility characteristics are obscured and policy formulation is rendered ineffective. Perhaps more importantly though, the language, structure and methodology of the ABS reflect assumed conceptualisations of movement and the ongoing marginalisation or erasure of mobility processes which do not conform to these 'norms.' In many ways the census survey adds weight to contestation of any assumption which posits such quantitative data collection techniques as objective and value free.

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[25] Daly and Smith (1997), for example, draw out a number of problems associated with the distribution of welfare payments to various Aboriginal family structures based on the way the census defines and enumerates 'family.'

In view of the shortcomings of existing data sets, researchers who use quantitative methodologies have employed different adaptive strategies. Survey methods have been used as an alternative quantitative approach to relying on census data analysis (see for example Foster, Mitchell, Ulrik, and Williams 2005; Memmott et al., 2006). Such methods produce more accurate and nuanced data sets than the current census data. Surveys can be conducted at various spatial scales, although to provide a comparable breadth to existing data sets and avoid the 'breadth' limitations of qualitative studies, they require substantial resources for effective execution. Indeed as a secondary method, the regional scale of analysis required for such an approach to produce meaningful complementary quantitative data was beyond the scope of the resources available for the present study.

Due to logistical constraints, it is hardly surprising that census data continue to constitute the primary source from which quantitative analyses of Indigenous mobilities are derived. Following Young and Doohan (1989), Taylor (1996; also Taylor and Bell, 2004b) is at the forefront of analysis of census and other statistical data. These scholars carefully manipulate quantitative data sets to negate some of the above shortcomings in order to develop models of Aboriginal mobility at scales large enough for national and international trend comparisons. The comparison of de-jure (usual or normal residence) and de facto (in-resident) population counts is one example of potential manipulations to census data which can produce more detailed perspectives of demographic and migration trends (Taylor, 1998). These researchers persist with flawed quantitative data sets whilst seeking out more appropriate ways of statistically capturing accurate representations of Aboriginal mobility at broad scales (Taylor and Bell, 2004c). This persistence is at least in part a reflection of the conviction that smaller-scaled qualitative studies are not generalisable or sufficient for theory building, comparative trend analysis, or comprehensive policy development.

The deliberate adoption of a qualitative approach in the present study however seeks to unsettle one aspect of the methodological discourse which dominates the mobility literature. This discourse presents methodological approaches to mobility studies as a series of 'trade-offs.' Quantitative data sets offer adequate breadth from which generalisations might be drawn and theory developed, but they are often encumbered

with inaccuracies, reinforce dominant conceptualisations of 'normalised' mobilities and fail to capture certain types of movement. Qualitative methodologies offer rich depth of understanding regarding the processes and consequences of Aboriginal mobilities on a localised scale, but are often seen as not amenable to being used to make generalisations which build theory or from which policy might be developed (Taylor, 1998). However, this thesis starts from a position which recognises that, just as broader-scale mobility trends are important for policy development, so too are localised nuances and in particular, the short-term circular mobility processes which at present, are not captured by any of the available data sets. The selection of qualitative methods therefore seeks to challenge the dichotomised thinking which posits quantitative research as the primary conduit for policy development, and qualitative research as a complementary but perhaps secondary alternative. Here, the localised context of mobility is privileged as essential to sound policy development and social theorisation. Further, as Wilson and Peters (2005) and Chapman (1991) have demonstrated in the Canadian and Pacific Island contexts respectively, qualitative methodologies provide a mechanism through which Aboriginal perspectives of their mobility practices can be articulated. Whilst this approach does not allow for large-scale generalisation about Aboriginal mobility processes, it provides an alternate frame of reference for evaluating and building upon existing discourses of Aboriginal spatiality in both policy and academic contexts.

2.4 Methodological Tools and Processes

Although the social sciences have produced a wealth of innovative and substantiative qualitative research, one of the persistent criticisms of this type of research that has rendered it more tenuously accepted in the broader academic community as a legitimate avenue for inquiry, is a perceived lack of scientific rigour (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Bradshaw and Stratford (2005) however suggest that rigour can indeed be demonstrated in the use of qualitative methodologies by establishing trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is demonstrated through keeping and providing a clear record and explanation of methodological decisions and actions, through checks and triangulations, and through situating the engagement by providing an honest and comprehensive account of the circumstances in which the research took place. Following these guidelines, this section explicitly describes the methodological choices and processes that comprised the fieldwork and subsequent phases of

analysis, to equip the interpretive community in their task. It also grapples with issues of representation and interpretation and how these affected all stages of fieldwork and analysis.

The cultural turn in the social sciences has produced a surge of literature concerning the power relationships embedded in research involving 'the other' (see for example Fawcett and Hearn, 2004; Fine, 1998) and the necessity of adopting research practices which, in the context of indigenous populations, subvert colonising practices (Backhouse, 1999; Howitt and Stevens, 2005; Ivanitz, 1999; Manderson, Kelaher, Williams and Shannon 1998; Menzies, 2001; Patten and Ryan, 2001; Reed and Peters, 2004; Smith, 2001). It has also produced a rigorous debate about representing or 'speaking for' 'the other' in scholarly discourse, especially where such 'others' have been historically oppressed and marginalised and whose voices have been distorted or ignored by the academy (Blunt and Wills, 2000; Crush, 1994; Spivak, 1994). Whilst it is not a primary objective of this thesis to make a substantiative contribution to this methodological discussion, the research design intentionally grappled with many of the questions raised in this literature regarding power relationships and representation, and sought to facilitate the collection of data in a way that diverged from conventional colonising research practices. Many of these ethical and methodological considerations are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. However, following Punch (1998), it is important to acknowledge at the outset that any sequential and neat discussion of fieldwork methodology necessarily masks some of the complexity and messiness that being 'in the field' entails. There are a range of dynamic human interactions, and moral and ethical dilemmas that must be addressed and resolved in the field and which can never fully be captured or expressed in written reflection (Punch, 1998). With this proviso, the following discussion seeks to recognise these dynamics and dilemmas, where possible.

Qualitative research draws upon multiple methods, although some are used more commonly in particular disciplines than others (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Of these multiple methods, the three most commonly employed in social and cultural studies are interviewing, participant observation, and documentary or textual analysis (Punch, 1998). Following Patton (1980), who advocated the use of multiple methods

– what he called *methodological triangulation* - as an ideal research strategy, each of these methods were incorporated into the research design of this study in some way. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were the chief methods employed since the primary objective of the research was to explore the perceptions and experiences of both service providers and Aboriginal people with regard to spatial mobility in Meekatharra and the broader region. In order to develop a regionalised picture of these issues, interview participants were recruited from a wide range of cultural and professional backgrounds and in various locations throughout the fieldwork region. In addition, these two interview formats facilitated discussion of generalised perspectives and overviews of spatial mobility as well as more detailed individual stories. These two design considerations worked together to produce a rich and complex, variously scaled and nuanced account of Aboriginal mobility.

Analysis of textual sources such as policy documents and minutes of meetings service providers, local authorities and inter-agency groups, as well as an active and prolonged presence in the field were secondary methodologies that served the important tasks of triangulation: they provided a means through which interview data could be contextualised, supplemented, and cross-checked. An explanation of the use of these secondary methods provides a helpful introduction to the more detailed discussion of the interview and analysis processes.

2.4.1 Participant Observation and Textual Analysis

2.4.1.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation is the primary tool of anthropological and ethnographic research (Spradley, 1980) and has been used in different forms to great effect in several qualitative studies of Aboriginal mobility. Young and Doohan (1989 p. 2) suggested that participating in Aboriginal 'moving experiences' provides non-Aboriginal researchers with a unique opportunity to conceptualise mobility in the same way as their Aboriginal research participants. They used this approach as their primary methodology in studying Aboriginal mobility in Central Australia during the 1980s. Over a 12 month period, Young and Doohan accompanied Aboriginal participants on long journeys through the region recording observational data from these experiences. They also conducted interviews with Aboriginal organisations and key community members, and supplemented their observational record with primary

data collected by one of the researchers over the previous five years. Smith (2000a) also used participant observation in his research examining mobility practices in northern Queensland during 1996-1997. He combined this observational data with a daily record of adult population movement through Coen, a town population approximately 350, to develop a picture of mobility in the area.

There are a range of types of participant observation that can be employed in qualitative research and these are determined by the degree to which the research is participatory and the degree to which it is observational (Cook, 1997; Kearns, 2005 p. 193; Spradley, 1980). For logistical and ethical reasons respectively, participant observation in this study took a different form to that employed by Young and Doohan (1989) and the more traditional anthropological form of recording people's habits and behaviours. Young and Doohan's primarily observational methodology was practicable because of the research team's human and funding resources, extended fieldwork timeframe, and prior research relationships established in the area. Given limited financial resources, the shorter timeframe of the present study, and the safety considerations of lone research in a new research environment, such an approach was not feasible here. Funding the fuel and insurance costs for such an approach was beyond the research budget. In addition to these logistical considerations, this method was ultimately not included in the research design because of its potential to significantly skew the data gathered. Having a vehicle with which to undertake travels has the potential to significantly change people's mobility practices. If a vehicle is available for travel, participants might engage in more/different mobility practices than they otherwise would not.

As the following field diary excerpt suggests, the traditional anthropological approach to participant observation was not applied in the present research context for ethical and conceptual reasons:

> ... [participant observation] is a methodology that is basically too messy and too fraught with ethical dilemma's (in my current situation) for me to feel comfortable using it. I know that observations provide a context for people's words, and a useful method of triangulation, but I just don't feel like I've been able to find a way of recording these that doesn't feel like it's undermining the relationships of trust I am trying to build. I also don't think that it will produce really useful data for me. I am

> most interested in what people think about things and this is best captured through discussions and interviews, not observations (Field Diary, 5 September 2004).

It was not logistically feasible to obtain the *informed* consent of each community member to maintain a written observational record, and the covert collection of such data mitigated against the task of establishing relationships of trust and openness with potential interview participants. Further, observational data could not have produced data about perceptions of mobility – an integral component of study.

Although neither of these more conventional forms of participant observation were drawn upon during the fieldwork process, participant observation assumed a 'complementary' (Kearns, 2005 p. 193) role in the research process. Participant observation became a highly valuable bi-product of prolonged fieldwork. Being 'in the field' (based in Meekatharra) for eight months facilitated opportunities to attend various committee meetings, accompany a number of service providers on various trips to other towns within the region, and participation in community events such as the town's Centenary Celebrations and annual basketball tournament. At these large community events, general observations were recorded and, where verbal permission was granted, written records of informal conversations were also recorded in the field diary. The purpose of this field diary was not to amass a detailed record of observation but rather to supplement interview material and research themes where relevant and ethically appropriate. In the same way, where other casual conversations were relevant to the research themes, permission was sought to make a written record of them. Verbal consent to make notes of the conversation was always sought during or immediately following the exchange. In some cases, a copy of these notes was subsequently submitted to the individual to confirm their approval of the written record[26]. In other cases, verbal permission sufficed.

Prolonged fieldwork also facilitated participation in particular local experience that served as valuable tools of triangulation and analysis of several central research themes. The following reflections were tape-recorded on the final drive out of Meekatharra at the end of fieldwork:

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[26] See Appendix 1 for a copy of the Observational Consent Form. This form concerned making a subsequent written record of non-recorded causal conversations.

One of the things I was reflecting on yesterday that has become an integral part of this research project is the significance of time and the significance of experience. And by experience I mean actually participating. And although I didn't use participant observation as an explicit research method, by virtue of living in the town, my experience became a method of triangulation in itself. Although it's subjective in nature, it has helped me to contextualise my data and to interpret which themes seem to shape daily life more so than others ... One of the themes that I suppose came through quite strongly in this period of fieldwork was the notion of spontaneity in travel being made possible by the fact that home is not a particular place but a network of people. And for me, part of the experience of living up here has been an interesting transition from being timid and feeling alone in travelling, to feeling far more relaxed about travelling distances by myself and without huge numbers of safety precautions. Because I feel like I know the region better now. I understand the region better. But also that I know people throughout the region ... And that brings a certain feeling of security: like if I broke down, I know I'd be OK because sooner or later someone would come along that I knew or that I felt I could trust to help me get to somewhere that I knew. Now knowing people in several towns throughout the region, I feel safer that if something were to happen to me, I could get to one of those places and camp with someone for the night. And that experience of coming to feel more safe over a short period of time, gives me some insight into that theme of spontaneity being possible in mobility because of networks of family and friends which for most people in this region, are so much stronger than the six month period obviously that I've been here for. Most people have been cultivating those family networks and those friendship networks for their entire lives (Fieldwork Reflections, 7 March 2005).

2.4.1.2 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis was a second triangulating method employed during fieldwork and analysis. During fieldwork, a number of policy documents were collected and formed important supplementary sources of information, particularly with regard to government structures for service provision, delivery frameworks, and service rationalisation. Further textual sources included meeting minutes from various community organisations and interagency meetings. These contained valuable insights into various issues impacting the town and service delivery within it. ATSIC speeches and newspaper articles concerning the Yamatji region also provided important context to the research. All of these documents supplemented interview

material, situating it within the broader social and political discourses in the region and Meekatharra specifically.

2.4.2 Interviews

Two types of interviews - semi-structured and in-depth - comprised the primary methodology for this research. Each type of interview was employed to collect different types of data from different participant groups[27] in order to complement the overall objectives of the research. In all, 52[28] semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with a variety of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.

2.4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are content focussed and whilst maintaining a general format, they allow flexibility to pursue topics and issues raised by the interviewee (Dunn, 2005). This semi-structured format was adopted for 35 interviews with service providers at both regional and local levels. In Meekatharra, semi-structured service provider interviews reached saturation point as key themes and issues were clearly identified and frequently re-iterated. Interview schedules were comprised of two general parts and generally took 45 minutes to one hour[29]. The first part of the interview sought information regarding the participants' role within their organisation, including how long they had been in their current position and the extent to which their position provided them with insights into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mobility processes within the town/region. The second part of the interview focussed specifically on participant understandings and interpretations of mobility processes within the town/region (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and the interface between these processes and the delivery of their service. The interviews concluded with an opportunity for the participant to add any further comments or insights regarding mobility which they felt were significant but had not been explored in the interview previously. Each section included a number of secondary questions and flexibility to pose follow-up or clarifying questions.

The flexibility afforded within this basic structure provided an opportunity for interviewees to articulate and reflect upon their individual attitudes towards and

[27] See Section 2.4.3 below for descriptions of each of these groups.

[28] This includes four interviews which were 'second interviews.' Each of these secondary interviews were with Aboriginal women.

[29] Interview schedules are provided in Sections A and B of Appendix 2.

perceptions of mobilities. Analysis could therefore explore the ways in which individual conceptualisations of mobility informed service delivery within the broader policy frameworks. At the same time, maintaining a basic interview structure meant that content could be generally compared across interviews to draw out similarities and anomalies regarding specific concepts[30]. Such comparisons were particularly important in interviews with service providers across agencies and locales for:

a) building a comprehensive picture of mobility characteristics and processes;
b) determining which of these characteristics dominated service provision discourses, and;
c) examining how various service providers interpreted them.

Using a semi-structured interview schedule provided adequate structure to draw out specific and comparable content as well as sufficient flexibility to pursue individual and unique themes.

2.4.2.2 Spatial Stories

The second type of interview used during fieldwork was a form of in-depth interview. These interviews were used with most Aboriginal participants to collect what de Certeau (1984 p. 115) has called 'spatial stories.' Interviewees were encouraged to 'tell their moving or travelling stories.' From these accounts, their spatial practices and conceptualisations of place, space, and movement could be elicited. As with in-depth interviews, collecting spatial stories involved following a loose schedule of themes as part of directed conversation (Minichiello et al., 1990). These long yarns were anywhere between 45 minutes and two and a half hours in duration. General themes included a historical discussion of where interviewees and their parents were from, where they considered 'home' now, where they would like to live in the future, and their stories of moving and travelling throughout life[31]. Spatial stories were more directed than life or oral histories because they were concerned with specific aspects of a person's life. As Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick (1998) have suggested, collecting these kinds of directed stories provides a conduit to personal conceptualisations of the topic of investigation:

[30] A more detailed discussion of the analysis process and its interpretive limitations can be found in section 2.4.4.
[31] A list of these issues and themes is provided in Section C of Appendix 2.

> These stories, or personal narratives, represent the experiential truth of the life rather than the actual experience or the historical truth of life – and salient sections of the life, rather than the whole life (p.64).

A number of scholars have discussed the particular suitability in Indigenous contexts of methodologies that incorporate 'story' as a privileged form of data. Smith (2001) and Kenny, Faries, Fiske and Voyageur (2004) suggested that because story is so linked to the oral traditions of aboriginal cultures, it is often a most comfortable and familiar research approach. Further, story telling places an emphasis on the voices and viewpoints of participants and is therefore an ethically sound and effective research tool in indigenous contexts (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006).

In addition to the suitability of this methodology in indigenous contexts, spatial stories were also incorporated into the research design because of the unique and complementary record of mobility that they provided. In her study of the migration stories of British Asian women, Tolia-Kelly (2004 p. 278) explained that personal narratives have a unique capacity to ground the research in the lived experience (see also van Manen, 1990). In the present study, spatial stories, although far fewer in number than semi-structured interviews, brought a rich personal and human context of lived experience to broader research themes. These stories provided a distinctive record of mobility that could not be obtained through other methodologies. For example, as participants recounted parts of the spatial stories of their parents (and in some cases grandparents), they produced a range of insights into intergenerational continuity and change in Aboriginal mobility. They also reflected upon the historical events and circumstances that shaped their families' stories, and how they influenced the spatial practices of the next generation. In other words, spatial stories, in addition to exploring contemporary mobility processes, produced a retrospective and contextualised account of Aboriginal mobility. As following chapters discuss, this historical context became one of the central themes influencing contemporary mobility practices in Yamatji country.

2.4.2.3 Ethics and Checks

Before entering into a discussion of the various participant groups who engaged in the interview process, it is important to describe the specific ethical and

methodological protocols and checks that governed the interview process. Ethical engagement in interviews was directed largely by an interview consent form and the research information sheet that accompanied it[32]. Mindful that the notion of 'informed consent' is somewhat ambiguous, even where data is collected in an overt manner (Homan, 1991), the consent form and its presentation in the interview situation, sought to provide interviewees with as much control as possible over the use of the information they provided. The form afforded interviewees the opportunity to decide what format the interview record would take (either tape recording or short hand notes), the nature (if any) of record they would like to have returned to them, how they would like to be identified if portions of their interview record were cited in the thesis, and whether the information they provided could be used in future research.

Where participants consented, interviews were tape recorded. Interview records were later partially or fully transcribed. Transcripts are always selective re-constructions of the primary (interview) and secondary (tape recording) data (Kowal and O'Connell, 2004) and the nature of re-production is always determined by the techniques to be employed in analysing it. Since the purpose of interview transcription in this study was to provide an accurate record of the interview exchange, rather than to prepare the data for a linguistic analysis, the integrity of the data or the subsequent phases of analysis was not compromised in the few cases where portions of the interview were not directly transcribed. If portions of the interview conversation were deemed to be principally unrelated to the research topics, detailed notes sufficed. These passages could be transcribed later if deemed relevant or necessary in subsequent stages of analysis. Where interviewees did not consent to tape recording, the interview account was based solely on detailed notes taken during the interview and any supplementary notes taken directly after the interview. However, the distinction between direct transcription and detailed notes is important in terms of data presentation in the dissertation. This distinction is denoted by the use and non-use of italics where interview excerpts appear in the text. Extracts from interviews that were not tape-recorded appear in regular font to denote that the words are a reconstruction of the actual conversation based on interview notes. All

[32] Copies of the Interview Consent Form and Information Sheet are provded in Appendix 1.

extracts of tape-recorded interviews that appear in thesis have been fully transcribed and therefore appear in italics[33].

A number of data checks were also built into the interview process. Firstly, where interviews were tape-recorded, which occurred in approximately 80% of interviews, detailed notes including details of setting and body language were taken to supplement the transcripts. Secondly, a range of elucidatory or 'probing' questions (Minichiello et al., 1990 p. 89) were asked during the interview exchange in order to clarify certain points or themes. Further, Poland and Pederson (1998) have noted the significance of silences during the interview dialogue as points for potential reflection and deeper engagement with the subject matter, and these were intentionally incorporated into the interview context for precisely this purpose. A final important 'check' built into the interview process was that participants always had the option of reviewing their interview notes and transcripts. Where interview feedback was requested, participants were encouraged to review the written form and respond with any feedback, changes or additions. Of these, one interviewee made minor clarifying revisions and another, having reviewed her transcript and deciding that she had spoken on several matters in a way that she felt was inappropriate or unjust to some others, requested that the transcript be discarded and a new interview conducted. With one exception, ample time was available for this review process to unfold[34]. In addition, some follow-up interviews were undertaken for clarification or augmentation of the original transcripts. These were extremely valuable exchanges which enhanced the original interview records and provided valuable additional information.

2.4.3 Interview Participants

Any methodology which centres on the use of interviews privileges the role of participants in the collection and interpretive phases of the research process and this

[33] The use of [brackets] denotes clarifying words or statements inserted by the researcher after the interview, or interviewee gestures non-verbal cues. Underlined words convey emphasis in speech. (?) denotes a word or several words (usually no more than two or three) of text that could not be determined from the tape record.

[34] In one case, an interview transcript was returned to the interviewee the night before I left Meekatharra for Perth for over one month. Knowing in advance that the participant would have moved to Geraldton before my return to Meekatharra, I provided the interviewee all my contact details and encouraged them to contact me if they had any questions or wished to revise any part of the transcript. They didn't.

research project was no exception. A breakdown of selected participant characteristics is available in Table 2.2 below.

Four general categories or groups of interviewees were recruited to participate in the research. These were:

1. Local Aboriginal residents (including locally-based Aboriginal service providers)
2. Locally based non-Aboriginal service providers and local government representatives
3. Local business operators
4. Regionally based service providers

Table 2.2 Select Characteristics of Interviewees

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Totals
Female / Employed / Local (Meekatharra)	10	9	19
Female / Employed / Local (Other Town*)	-	1	1
Female / Employed / Regional (Geraldton)	3	2	5
Female / Unemployed / Local (Meekatharra)	5	-	5
Female / Unemployed / Local (Other Town)	-	-	-
Female / Unemployed / Regional (Geraldton)	-	-	-
Male / Employed / Local (Meekatharra)	-	13	13
Male / Employed / Local (Other Town)	1	3	4
Male / Employed / Regional (Geraldton)	3	2	5
Male / Unemployed / Local (Meekatharra)	-	-	-
Male / Unemployed / Local (Other Town)	-	-	-
Male / Unemployed / Regional (Geraldton)	-	-	-
Total	22	30	**52**

* Other towns included Mullewa, Mt Magnet and Wiluna

Within each of the four criterion participant groups, 'networked introductions' (Rubin and Rubin, 1995 p.68) and opportunistic sampling (Patton, 1990 p.179) enriched the representations. Interviewees commonly suggested additional individuals who would be interested in research and would have valuable insights to offer. These often unprompted suggestions indicated a positive engagement not only within the interview context but with the research subject more generally. Engagement with each of these participant groups, which in some cases overlapped, is discussed in greater detail below.

2.4.3.1 Local Aboriginal Residents

The personal stories and experiences of Aboriginal people within the local context provided a vital foundation upon which this thesis is built. As previously discussed, their 'spatial stories' brought a rich and grounded context to themes that undergird this dissertation. This participant group included a mix of local Aboriginal residents who were employed (11) and unemployed (five). This variation in employment status provided important comparative insights regarding the extent to which engagement with the mainstream economy influenced mobility patterns and processes, and what factors influenced this engagement. In addition, many of the employed local Aboriginal participants were service providers and were therefore interviewed in relation to their spatial stories as well as in relation to their working knowledge of service provision issues outlined in the themes of semi-structured interviews. These dually positioned interviews produced insights into broader processes and specific circumstances and were invaluable components of the research.

Importantly, with the exception of one,[35] all of these participants were women. Recruiting only female participants in the local Aboriginal context was a conscious choice during the fieldwork process as early informal conversations with local Aboriginal residents about the research indicated that interviewing Aboriginal men by themselves could easily be construed as inappropriate. Undoubtedly, the gendered nature of this sample of participants has influenced the nature of the data. However, the fieldwork experience also supported the assertion of Kenny et al. (2004 p. 20) who suggest that the stories of Canadian aboriginal women are broader than just individual experience because they include in their own stories and the lives of children and men. Many women who were interviewed in Meekatharra described parts of their husbands, partners and/or father's stories in conveying their own journeys. Further, the direct perspectives of some Aboriginal men were incorporated through inclusion in the fourth participant group – regional service providers (described later) – where the interview context was clearly work-related and therefore not culturally inappropriate.

[35] One interview was conducted with an Aboriginal male in the town of Wiluna. As an ATSIC representative, he provided insights about Aboriginal mobility in the Wiluna area and comparisons with mobility in Yamatji country. This was an opportunistic interview that took place at the Wiluna Medical Centre and there was no concern of cultural inappropriateness.

There were a number of challenges to the processes of recruitment within this cross-cultural context. The first of these challenges involved publicising the research widely enough so that local residents were both familiar and comfortable with my role in the community over the fieldwork period and so that people could become engaged in the research in an informed manner. Whilst local gate-keeping organisations can sometimes censor and restrict research they are often excellent reference points for ethically sound research practices and non-threatening recruitment mediums (Backhouse, 1999). Their absence in Meekatharra made the task of recruitment more complex:

> In coming back to Meekatharra [after a short Honours fieldtrip in 2002], I was not naive enough to believe that I would be remembered, or that I had solid research relationships established. I had been a 'typical consultant' then and would need to work hard at establishing research relationships as if I had never set foot in the town. Still, that feeling of familiarity gave me a confidence about approaching this task.
>
> My first step was a pre-fieldwork scoping trip to both Geraldton and Meekatharra ... I was particularly concerned on this trip with getting approval to do the research. I had fancifully hoped that some overarching and representative individual or organisation would give my research the stamp of approval and declare to me that yes, I could proceed. No such clear and simple process unfolded. I could not find any gate-keeping bodies whose permission or feedback I could seek and there seemed to be no local administrative or governing body for the local Aboriginal population. There only seemed to be individuals it was 'worth talking to.' I was relieved to finally be able to meet with the Shire CEO and discuss the research and my plans with him. I wanted my intentions to be as clear and open as possible and explaining it to him had, in my mind, seemed an important step in that direction.
>
> At the end of my first trip I hadn't come away with the broad knowledge and formal approval of the project that I supposed I had unrealistically hoped for, largely because neat categories of gate-keepers and administrative bodies did not exist in the town. 'Gaining Access' to Meekatharra as a field-study site was a rather ambiguous process which lacked organisational and temporal boundaries. Explaining the research and gaining approval would become an individually negotiated process which I would engage in on an almost daily basis throughout the fieldwork period (Field Diary, 3 March 2005).

This lack of gate-keeping organisations meant that no assisting guidelines on culturally appropriate ways to invite and encourage Aboriginal people's participation in the research process were available or voluntarily articulated. Tied to this was a sensed reluctance of certain members of the Aboriginal community to enter into dialogue about the research. There was a tendency of some Aboriginal residents to deflect discussion about the research to several 'higher profile' community members. It was difficult to garner any clear insights into the reasons for this reluctance, although it was observed in relation to a number of other community initiatives and activities as well. The discussion in Chapter Four (section 4.6.2) of Aboriginal engagement with mainstream social institutions perhaps provides some insights into the factors that produce and foster this environment of reluctance.

A second challenge to the recruitment process in the cross-cultural context, particularly amongst the more mobile members of the Aboriginal population, was the appropriate timeframes required to implement the spatial stories methodology. The collection of these stories required, firstly, that participants be in the same place as me at the same time, secondly, that some prior relationship of trust had been established with them, and thirdly, that they be in an appropriate frame of mind to 'sit down for a long yarn.' After several months in the field, Martin's (2003) call for scholars to build flexibility and reflexivity into their research designs as a matter of respect for participants, their culture, and their lives, had become a central methodological consideration:

> I feel only now, after 3 months, like I am beginning to be able to be in a position where I can request the participation of some of the women in the community. There are very different timelines here ... The process of requesting participation has been very instructive for me. In most cases, arranging a time to sit down and yarn about spatial stories is not an acceptable procedure. Usually, when I suggest the possibility of someone sitting down to yarn with me and help me out with my research and when we might do that, their response is that they know where I am and when they're ready, they'll come to me. Cementing a time is rarely the outcome. I have often felt frustrated that the process of initiating dialogue is taken from my control and becomes dependent on the participant ... [but] part of the journey for me is to come to terms with the fact that my timing is not that of my participants. The notion of scheduling a time to talk and record stories in a formal fashion may seem strange at least and possibly even rude to a number of people, and my research timelines and goals must be

> reconciled to this reality. Sometimes I find this hard given my love of timetables and deadlines, but it is a good lesson to learn. This research process requires a great deal of flexibility and I hope I am not being ignorant or resistant to that and am in the process of being fashioned accordingly (Field Diary, 19 October 2004).

Perhaps the greatest challenge to participant recruitment was a product of the research topic: the dilemma of sedentarily building relationships of trust and continuity (a pre-requisite for encouraging engagement and participation of this nature) with highly transient people. However, whilst mobility and different timeframes were challenges to the recruitment process, experiencing these dynamics provided a valuable context to the remarks of service providers who described the disruption to the continuity of their professional relationships with Aboriginal community members caused by these same processes. In addition, these processes challenged and re-focussed the research agenda and forced the re-negotiation of a more appropriate implementation.

Concerned that the research should not adopt colonising practices by pushing the research agenda, participant recruitment was approached cautiously. In some cases, key community representatives were well known and their participation was directly sought. In other cases, participants who were informed of the research suggested or even organised other family members or friends to participate in the research who they believed could provide valuable insights. In other cases, recruitment of local Aboriginal participants was purely opportunistic given the highly flexible nature of the fieldwork process.

2.4.3.2 Locally based non-Aboriginal service providers and Local Government representatives

This participant group included Shire employees, representatives of State Government agencies including Health, Education, Housing and Works, Community Development, and other government and non-government service providers[36]. The input of this participant group was central to the research for three reasons. Firstly, they represent the institutions of social and political control within their communities, and their work centres around interactions with a broad cross section of

[36] The specific names of the other government and non-government agencies have been withheld in order to preserve the anonymity of those interviewees who wished to remain unidentified.

the local and regional community – both transient and sedentary. Secondly, they are at the interface between service provision and mobility and therefore have important insights into the relationship between these two processes. Thirdly, service providers implement policy and have unique insights into both the impacts and the local reception of the policies they administer. Whilst some of these participants were initially approached in writing, it quickly became clear that such formalities were alienating and a more informal face to face approach was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were implemented with this participant group.

Although the majority of these interviews took place in Meekatharra, four additional comparative interviews were conducted in other towns throughout the region[37]. These Interviews were undertaken with providers of education and / or health services where possible. These interviews were not intended to provide a detailed picture of mobility processes and the way these interface with service delivery in each town, but rather to ground regionally based interviews (discussed in section 2.4.3.4 below) by highlighting similarities and differences in comparatively localised contexts.

2.4.3.3 Local Business Operators

As economic centrepieces within the town, local business operators interface directly with the transient populations and have particular insights about the impacts of these mobilities on both the social and economic climate of the town. Some of these individuals were identified through various community group meetings and others were directly approached in their workplaces. Some of the most interesting interview settings evolved from the participation of these individuals. These ranged from early Saturday mornings in the back of the local bakery, sitting at the bar during lunch hour at one of the local pubs, and pulling up a chair beside the pits at the local mechanics shed. Many of these local business owners were also Council members and were able to bring both governing and commercial perspectives to their interviews.

2.4.3.4 Regionally-based service providers

The fourth category of individuals whose participation was sought in this research project was Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal regionally-based service providers. These

[37] See Figure 2.2.

service providers are based at regional offices in Geraldton and oversee, or are directly involved in, the delivery of their respective services throughout the Midwest region. Most of these interviewees were engaged in some combination of policy development and implementation. Engagement of this particular participant group provided a broader context regarding service provision and mobility within which to situate the localised processes at work in Meekatharra and other towns throughout the fieldwork region.

Where Aboriginal service providers participated, both general processes and personal accounts and experiences were commonly incorporated into a mixed interview technique, resulting in a richly contextualised dialogue. A methodological challenge of interviewing this group was that it required interviewees to generalise at spatial scales which were not particularly representative. However, many understood the necessity of this task:

> *SP: ... I'm most interested in Meekatharra and the towns around there, but it's important for me to sort of get a regional perspective because I know that people in Meekatharra do move around to all those places. So I need to put that in that context. So I have to ask these questions about Aboriginal people in the region ...*
> *AT: - you've got to –*
> *SP: ... But it's a tough one too because it's like you say, there aren't necessarily specific answers where you go, 'this is why this happens.' It just doesn't quite work that way ...*
> *AT: it's like the Meckering Fault Line down there ... The earthquakes in WA. The biggest earthquakes ever recorded. I mean, you used to have the land like that* [gestures with his hands]. *All of a sudden you've got, when you get an earthquake and you can see the earth crack open in front of you, well it's never going to be exactly the same is it. You're going to always have fault lines in there. And if you excavated the top layer off, you'll see the different layers and you'll think 'well, that one should be straightened up and you know what I mean? It's like the old jigsaw* [picks up a marker and begins to draw on the whiteboard]. *You've got pieces coming down there and some coming out this way and this way. And then you might have a different coloured rock coming in here and another one there. And so it's never all being straight like that. And you stand on top and think 'oh, lovely land' but you don't know what's happened underneath ... and I think that's what this is here. You've got all that information here, and at the end of the day you're going to*

give an interpretation with all that information (Ashley Taylor, 14 September 2004).

2.4.4 Analysis

Although this discussion of analysis has been structurally separated from the preceding methodological descriptions, in reality, the processes of analysis and interpretation are woven through all stages of data collection and continue through all stages of writing. As Minichiello et al. (1990 p. 248) have noted, "Without analysis occurring in the field, data has no direction." In fact, (Miles and Huberman, 1984) suggested that separating analysis from the fieldwork phase of research weakens the analysis. They argued that engaging in analysis during the field drives ongoing data collection and prepares it for analysis. One of the central criticisms of qualitative analysis is the potential for arbitrary and untraceable interpretation of data. Social researchers have stressed the significance of context and triangulation in order demonstrate rigour in analysis (see for example Bradshaw and Stratford, 2005; Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick, 1998). During fieldwork therefore, propositions were constantly being formed and key themes being distilled. A field diary and monthly field reports formed an integral part of the reflexive fieldwork process and established a clear record of methodological choices throughout the fieldwork period. The fieldwork diary and monthly reports included questions and supervisor responses about the research design, methodological concerns, contextual notes to return to during later stages of analysis and writing, issues of recruitment, documentation about the process of interview schedule design, refinement and execution. This record of decisions and actions assisted contextualised interpretation of data and fostered accountability within the fieldwork process.

Analysis concerned with more deliberate and focussed data coding of interview records and observational notes began at the end of fieldwork and was undertaken using the computer-based qualitative analysis package QSR NVivo.

2.4.4.1 QSR NVivo

NVivo, a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package (Peace and van Hoven, 2005), was used for storing, organising, retrieving and coding tasks because it is designed specifically to coordinate and assist with the analysis of complex and voluminous qualitative data such as that generated during

prolonged fieldwork. NVivo eliminated the manual tasks associated with coding interview records, and had the capacity to perform complex coding tasks very quickly to assist with theory building and thematic organisation. The expediency of organisational coding and retrieving tasks resulted in an increased capacity to explore the data more intensively, creatively, and comprehensively. Rather than engendering an alienation from the data (a common caution amongst scholars regarding CAQDAS (Kelle, 2004 p. 283), the truncation of manual tasks actually facilitated increased interaction and familiarisation with the data. Importantly though, NVivo is a storage, organisational and retrieval tool only; it cannot analyse data. It therefore assisted in interpretation and analysis without actually undertaking either of these tasks (Minichiello et al., 1990; Peace and van Hoven, 2005). A second criticism of CAQDAS is that their limitations can pigeon-hole researchers into the types of analysis which they are capable of performing rather than the types of analysis which might be most suitable for the data set (Minichiello et al., 1990; Peace and van Hoven, 2005). These concerns continue to diminish as CAQDASs become more powerful. Mindful of this concern however, tasks which NVivo could not perform effectively, such as visually mapping codes, were undertaken manually.

2.4.4.2 Coding

Using NVivo, descriptive and analytic codes were applied to each interview record to analyse both manifest and latent content (Cope, 2005). Analysis of latent content is generally the point at which most qualitative analysis is open to critique because it involves a subjective interpretation of 'what's written between the lines' (Winchester, 1996). However, even the coding and presentation of manifest content, which is assumed to be the spoken and physically observable data, is a process of assigning text to subjectively constructed thematic categories.

In order to keep a reflexive account of changes made to the coding structure and the reasons for these changes, a coding diary was created and continually updated to provide a clear rationale for any changes and allow for important re-tracing where necessary. These decisions themselves were fundamental to the coding process as they distinctly shaped the analysis. Initial codes were based on the topics and themes of focus within the interview schedules. These codes were further refined, altered and added to produce a final 50 codes. This included 12 primary codes, 15 secondary

codes, 20 tertiary codes, and 3 quaternary codes[38]. Although further divisions and subcategories could have been created, the number of codes would have become unmanageable and many forgotten. Further subdivisions were reserved for more detailed analysis of each code. Only 10 codes were explicitly analytical. However, latent analysis occurred frequently when interview excerpts addressed themes related to descriptive codes without explicitly referring to them. Here the distinction between participant and theoretical concepts was clear, and noted within the coding record. These 50 codes were also managed in NVivo through the helpful provision for the inclusion of a description of each code; a definition, what kinds of material might be coded under it, and what kinds of material should not be coded there but perhaps elsewhere. These blurbs were easily accessible and assisted in the coherent coding of text.

Another concern regarding the coding process, whether manually or with the assistance of CAQDAS, is a concentration on coding small portions of text and losing the essence of the interview as a whole. Interpretation and coding of specific portions of text must therefore be tied into the context of the interview as a whole. As Minichiello et al. (1990) have noted, this means being aware of how issues or conclusions were arrived at in the interview exchange. In order to preserve some of this context, coded portions of text often included the surrounding dialogue. In addition, for some of the more complex interviews which covered a range of topics and complex concepts, case summaries (Minichiello et al., 1990) were created and linked to the interview record in order to provide an overview of the key themes raised in the interview. Case summaries in these instances were an invaluable tool for contextualising the complex coding within the interview record.

Ultimately, these coding activities formed part of the process of analysis but did not fully constitute it. Following Miles and Huberman (1984), analysis and interpretation were iterative tasks undertaken throughout the fieldwork process. And, whilst coding organised the data into general themes and categories, the links between these categories and the content within them, continued to be explored and interpreted through the writing phases of the thesis.

[38] A diagrammatical representation of these codes is provided in Appendix 3.

Concerns regarding representation, rigour and interpretation can never be wholly avoided when the qualitative approach to research is employed. However, this chapter has sought to provide adequate context regarding the case-study area, and the methodological choices and tools employed within which to situate the findings presented in the following chapters.