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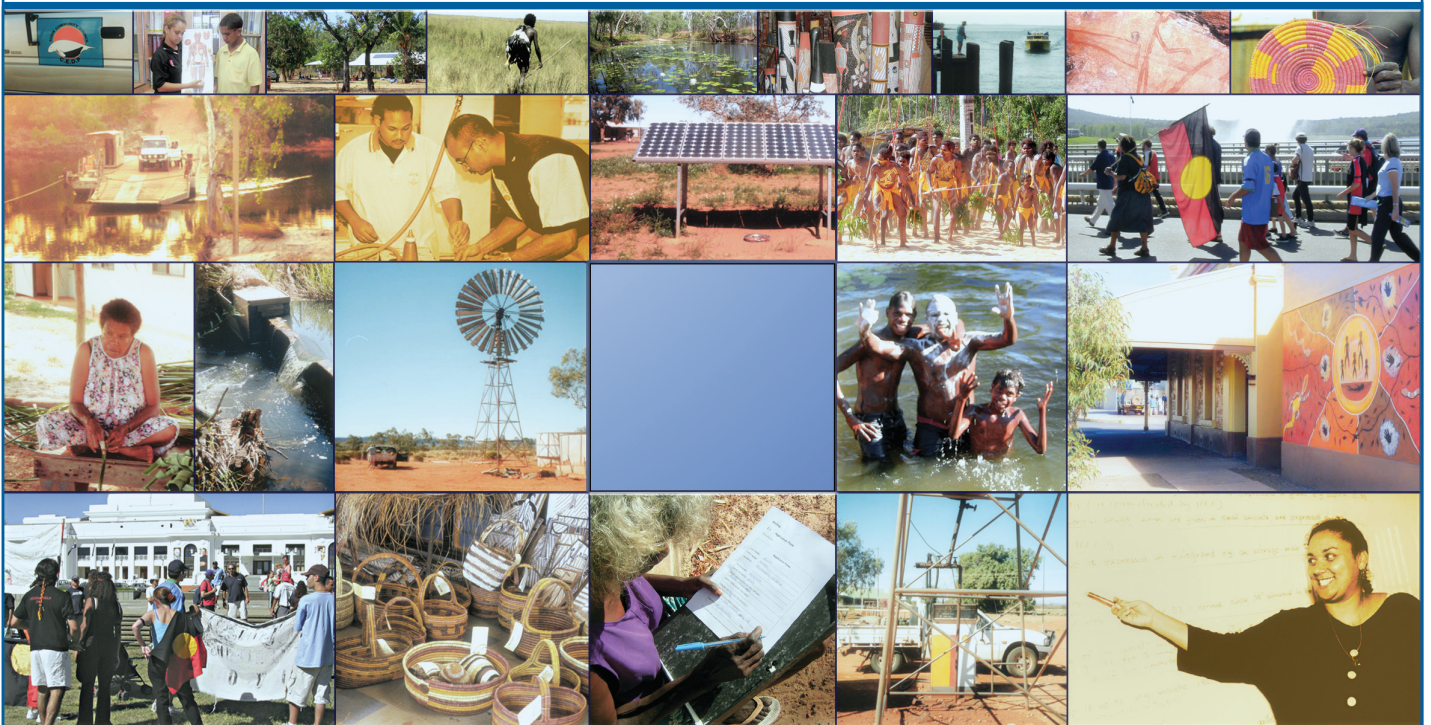
On the move? Indigenous temporary mobility practices in Australia

S. Prout

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ABSTRACT

A range of Indigenous population dynamics play out underneath the demographic picture that can be constructed from official statistics. Primary among these are temporary mobility practices. Although temporary movements are largely 'uncaptured' by conventional statistical measures, they are pervasive in public life and thought. Words like 'walkabout' and 'nomadic' are commonly used in public discourse to characterise Indigenous people as highly mobile over the short-term, and such movement is regularly constructed as problematic for mainstream health, education and housing providers. This paper draws together the disparate body of existing research regarding Indigenous temporary mobilities to build a more comprehensive picture of these population dynamics and their policy implications. It describes the temporal, spatial and demographic dimensions of Indigenous temporary mobilities, analyses the key contextual factors that shape them, and outlines how these population dynamics relate to the governing state. The paper concludes with an exploratory discussion of the policy options and implications relating to Indigenous temporary mobility. It outlines a number of areas that require further research and proposes productive ways forward as policy makers and service providers seek to more actively and intentionally engage with Indigenous temporary mobility practices.

Keywords: Indigenous temporary mobility, demographic data, state administration, kinship, policy frameworks, physical and structural setting.

CAEPR INDIGENOUS POPULATION PROJECT

This project has its genesis in a CAEPR report commissioned by the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) in 2005. The aim of the paper (published as *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 283*) was to synthesise findings from a wide variety of regional and community-based demographic studies. What emerged was the identification of demographic 'hot spots'—particular Indigenous population dynamics in particular regions that give rise to issues of public policy concern. These trends spatially align with specific categories of place that transcend State and Territory boundaries. The 'hot spots' coalesce around several structural settings including city suburbs, regional towns, town camps, remote Indigenous towns, and outstations, as opposed to the more formal regionalised or jurisdictional spatial configurations that have tended to guide and inform Indigenous policy development.

Recognising that the structural circumstances facing Indigenous populations are locationally dispersed in this way, MCATSIA has established an enhanced research capacity at CAEPR to further explore the dynamics and regional geography of Indigenous population and socioeconomic change.

This research activity commenced in late 2007 and is constructed around four discrete yet overlapping projects:

- a detailed regional analysis of relative and absolute change in Indigenous social indicators

- an assessment of social and spatial mobility among Indigenous metropolitan populations

- case-study analyses of multiple disadvantage in select city neighbourhoods and regional centres

- the development of conceptual and methodological approaches to the measurement of temporary short term mobility.

Working Papers related to these projects are co-badged with MCATSIA and released as part of the CAEPR Working Paper Series. It should be noted that the views expressed in these publications are those of the researcher/s and do not necessarily represent the views of MCATSIA as a whole, or the views of individual jurisdictions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Developing more nuanced understandings of Indigenous temporary or 'short-term' mobility is fundamental to 'closing the gaps' and redressing Indigenous socio-cultural marginalisation. Within the current climate of service delivery that assumes relative population sedentarisation, Indigenous temporary mobility practices—which can be anywhere in duration from two days to several months—pose a number of unique policy challenges. These include:

• adapting to the service needs of changing population compositions

• providing continuity of service delivery

• managing the effects of large population influxes and exoduses on social and physical infrastructure in source and destination locations, and

• redressing the ongoing marginalisation of many mobile Indigenous people within the mainstream service sector.

DATA ISSUES

Currently, large-scale statistical measures are not able to provide a robust indication of the frequency, volume, or direction of Indigenous temporary mobility. The national census does not register multiple moves within a one-year period and is not designed to enumerate service populations (as distinct from resident populations). Administrative data are also of limited utility given significant variations (and often deficiencies) in coverage, capture, and accessibility. Even if these kinds of statistical data were more robust and readily available, they would reveal little of the underlying rationales for movement or the sorts of factors that might influence future trends. In essence, they cannot singularly provide a satisfactory evidence base for effective policy development.

The existing body of small-scale Indigenous mobility studies provides the clearest available 'evidence' regarding Indigenous temporary mobility practices. It describes the temporal, spatial and demographic dimensions of Indigenous temporary mobility practices and the contextual factors that shape them. This evidence is integral in any attempt to understand contemporary Indigenous mobilities or in predicting future trends—two considerations that are fundamental to sound policy development.

INCEPTION AND DURATION OF MOVEMENTS

Indigenous temporary movements are often mystifying for service providers because they appear unplanned and unpredictable in duration. However, the degree of planning and predictability is largely determined by the factors that shape such movements. Some types of temporary mobility—travel to major cultural festivals or sporting carnivals, ceremonial and seasonal movement—require significant planning. Other movements are more contingent and opportunistic, and therefore less predictable.

Predictability, however, should not be confused with rationality. Opportunistic and contingent mobilities are based on a very specific set of 'knowable' socio-cultural rationalities and conditions that are highly resilient and enduring. These include both the spatial and social bounds of relatedness, and the variable and dynamic nature of family circumstances.

DIRECTION AND SCALE OF MOVEMENTS

The spatial dimension of Indigenous temporary mobilities has two components: the *process* (or direction) and *scale* of movement. The literature identifies three *processes* of temporary mobility: circulation; bi-local or multi-locale living; and perpetual movement between a series of relational 'home-bases'. With regard

to *scale*, hunter-gatherer based societies have historically been highly mobile within confined territories. In Australia, both the size of these territories and the nature of Indigenous people's mobility within them varied based on a number of environmental and social factors. These factors also influenced each Indigenous group's experience of, and response to, colonisation. The scale and direction of contemporary Indigenous mobility practices therefore vary significantly across the continent.

Bearing these specificities in mind, broad commonalities seem to emerge from the literature:

- in the tropical north, much temporary movement is tightly contained within small, specific regions that are delimited by the intertwined locations of ancestral homelands (country) and kin (family) networks.

- in the large inland desert zone and its northern hinterlands, the location of country and kin are still the primary delimiters of people's temporary mobility practices, but these associations are more spatially expansive than in the tropical north.

- in the southern regional hinterlands that border the desert zone, mobility trajectories are primarily delimited by location of kin, who, as a result of historical policies, may be widely dispersed.

- there is very little available data regarding the mobility trajectories of Indigenous peoples living in the densely populated, primarily southern, coastal regions of Australia. The existing research record suggests that family networks are the primary delimiter of movement in these areas.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MOVERS

As with the non-Indigenous population, position within the life-cycle affects temporary mobility practices. In the case of Indigenous Australia though, life-cycle stages seem to influence the *motivations* for movement more than the *frequency* of movement. However, the literature clearly identifies a peak in temporary mobility amongst young adults. This is the period of life when many Indigenous youth are exploring and contesting their identities in relation to the state, their cultural context, and wider social norms. Many use mobility as a vehicle for this exploration and to establish their own networks of relatedness and belonging. Older generations (over 50 years of age) are another particularly significant demographic with regard to temporary mobility. These individuals are often part of a commonly identified 'core' of more sedentary individuals who are firmly associated with a particular locale. They may serve as focal points for younger family members and take an active role in the rearing of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Paradoxically, these same individuals may be frequently mobile as a result of social and ceremonial obligations and/or roles on managerial and advisory boards.

TEMPORARY MOBILITY AND THE STATE

The literature identifies three ways in which Indigenous temporary mobility relates to the state:

- Indigenous temporary mobilities that are *endosocial*—that is, they are characterised by socio-cultural inwardness, resistant or impervious to external influence. Endosociality is a characteristic of mobilities that are primarily shaped by familial and cultural obligations and conflicts; are intentionally confined within territories of ancestral belonging and/or networks of relatedness; are ceremonial (unrelated to and often unseen by mainstream Australia), and reflect and/or engender disinterest in, or alienation from, the state.

- Indigenous temporary mobility that is generated by an active engagement with the formal economy and the mainstream service sector. Such movements include those that derive from the need and desire to access services, seasonal/short-term employment opportunities, the production and sale of Indigenous art, and obligations on managerial and advisory boards.

• Indigenous temporary mobilities that are a physical manifestation of a constant mediation between customary practice and expression, the desire to actively engage with elements of mainstream society and culture, and the expectations of the state.

While the first two explanations underscore important realities that drive some Indigenous temporary mobilities, neither is singularly sufficient to explain all Indigenous temporary mobility. However, they are brought together under the third explanation to illuminate many of the 'enduring and transformed' (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006) components of contemporary Indigenous mobility practices.

STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES ON TEMPORARY MOBILITY

In addition to physical geography, historical experiences of colonisation, and socio-cultural specificities, there are a number of structural considerations that influence Indigenous temporary mobility practices at any spatial scale. These include:

• the size and relative location of various types of settlements

• economic considerations such as the presence or absence of a robust Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme or strong informal economy, and the proximity of diversified job markets, and

• the state and accessibility of communication and transport infrastructure and technologies.

CDEP:
Community
Development
Employment Projects

POLICY RESPONSES

The two most pervasive themes of the existing mobility literature are the highly adaptive and persistent nature of Indigenous mobility practices through time, and the pressing need for policy responses that systematically engage with these dynamics. This will require a paradigm shift away from policies and practices that conceptualise temporary mobility as simply a demographic risk factor that must be curbed. Given the variations in temporary mobility practices across time and space, effective policy responses must be regionally- and service sector-specific. These responses may vary from small steps such as improving the collection of data on the size of various service populations and strengthening intra-agency communication networks to more substantive service re-structuring around the residency patterns of particular groups.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There remain significant research gaps regarding Indigenous temporary mobility in urban settings, movement associated with mainstream economic engagement, and the characteristics of 'core' populations. These gaps must be addressed. However, given that some aspects of Indigenous temporary mobility practices will always be 'unknowable', policy makers and researchers should also draw upon existing programs and practices that are effectively servicing highly mobile Indigenous populations. Elements of these programs and practices may serve as productive blueprints for more effectively engaging with Indigenous temporary mobility practices in mainstream service delivery frameworks.

All of these efforts to engage more systematically with Indigenous temporary mobility in policy and research contexts must be underpinned by a commitment to genuine partnership with Indigenous peoples in their local contexts. Developing appropriate responses to Indigenous temporary mobility will require attention to local specificities and voices.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Australia's colonial history, one fundamental question has lingered uncomfortably over the socio-political landscape: how do two societies with traditionally contrasting 'settlement' ideologies coexist? At first contact, the 'nomadic' tendencies of Indigenous hunter-gatherer Australians were sharply contrasted with the intrinsic settling-state ideals of private ownership, settlement, development, and economic progress. As Young and Doohan (1989: 1) note, Indigenous mobility practices 'presented a main obstacle to be overcome if they were to fit into the fledgling society of the new Australia'. Governments responded with legislation and administrative practices that attempted to civilise and sedentarise Indigenous populations.

Both societies have experienced significant socio-spatial transformations over the ensuing decades, rendering these early caricatures of colonial 'settlement' and Indigenous nomadism insufficient as illustrations of contemporary Australian population dynamics. The political ideologies driving Indigenous affairs administration have also shifted and oscillated between the principles of *guardianship*, e*quality* and *choic*e (Sanders 2008). However, these divergent settlement traditions continue to underwrite contemporary struggles for an equitable and just coexistence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Burns 2006; Prout & Howitt forthcoming).

Indigenous temporary or 'short-term' mobility practices remain poorly understood within mainstream society. They are often explained away as simply the product of a nomadic predisposition to wander (Burns 2006; Hamilton 1987; Havemann 2005; Peterson 2004; Prout forthcoming a; Young & Doohan 1989). Further, these population dynamics are peripheral to most government policy development processes because of a lack of capture by conventional statistical measures—despite being regularly cited by public servants 'on-the-ground' as a central challenge to service delivery (Prout & Howitt, forthcoming). Consequently, many Indigenous people—for whom frequent movement is integral to lived experience—are marginalised in both public discourse and public policy. Developing holistic understandings of Indigenous temporary mobility practices is therefore fundamental to both the policy agenda of closing the *socio-economic* gaps, and the broader challenge of redressing Indigenous *socio-cultural* marginalisation.

Contemporary Indigenous temporary mobility practices clearly require more intentional and systematic consideration within public policy and practice (Dillon & Westbury 2007). Most conventional service delivery frameworks are operationalised through sunk costs in fixed infrastructure: health services are delivered through clinics and hospitals, education through schools, and housing through physical structures. Many scholars and practitioners have described a contrast and incompatibility between these site-based service delivery practices and the fluidity that often characterises Indigenous populations who may view health, housing and education in broader terms (Bond 2005; Hansen & Roche 2003; Henderson 2001; Neutze 2000; Sanders 2000; Sorin & Ilsote 2006). Some have invoked striking imagery to describe the contrasts. Sansom (1982) and Pholeros, Rainow and Torzillo (1993), for example, have respectively spoken of concertina, and 'slow' and 'busy' Indigenous households. These images of continual expansion and contraction, of living and breathing households, stand in contrast to the static nature of the physical structures themselves. Hartman (2003) employs the imagery of the 'revolving classroom door' to invoke a sense of contrast between spatially-anchored schools and churning student populations. Although Hartman's observations derive from experience in the United States, they are paralleled amongst many Australian Indigenous populations (Prout 2008; Sorin & Ilsote 2006).

In these contexts, where spatially-fixed service delivery practices meet spatially-fluid Indigenous populations, a unique set of policy challenges emerge. Primary amongst these are:

- adapting to the service needs of changing population compositions

- providing continuity of service delivery

- managing the effects of large population influxes and exoduses (related to ceremonial activities, large events and carnivals, and 'keeping company' with sick relatives) on social and physical infrastructure in source and destination locations, and

- redressing the ongoing marginalisation that many mobile Indigenous people experience within the mainstream service sector.

In essence, Indigenous temporary mobility practices have implications for service mix, service demand and methods of service delivery (Young & Doohan 1989). When these population dynamics are ignored within policy frameworks, the invariable result is service under-utilisation, and/or under-servicing (Young 1990). As Taylor (1992) noted over 15 years ago, only when researchers and policy makers develop more nuanced and holistic understandings of Indigenous temporary mobility practices (and the impact of various policy interventions on these practices) will resources be allocated and services delivered in ways that engender more equitable outcomes for highly mobile Indigenous people.

Most data regarding Indigenous temporary mobilities are embedded within a series of focused, field-based studies spanning the last 50 years. Complementing these core analyses are a group of anthropological studies that refer to Indigenous mobility practices as part of their broader analyses of Indigenous socio-cultural process and practice in localised contexts. This 'database' is disparate and, in some cases, inaccessible to policy makers. In the absence of a comparative analysis that draws this literature together, it is difficult to assess which characteristics of Indigenous temporary mobility are contextual and which are consistent through the passage of time and across socio-culturally, economically, and geographically diverse regions. It is also difficult to determine whether geography and/or temporal setting influence the types of factors that shape Indigenous temporary mobility practices. In essence, researchers and policy makers are unable to draw any substantive inferences about how Indigenous temporary mobility processes have changed, or remained the same, across time and space. This 'information vacuum' (Taylor 2006) undermines any attempts to predict the future servicing needs of Indigenous populations across diverse spatial domains.

Building on Taylor and Bell (1994), to move the Indigenous mobility research and policy agenda forward, this paper draws together and reviews this disparate literature to build a more comprehensive and comparative picture of nature and characteristics of these population dynamics across time and space. Critically, such a review cannot claim to present a complete picture of Indigenous temporary mobility practices that will immediately translate into actionable policy prescriptions. It is necessarily academic, and restricted by those dynamics and locales that have been researched and written about. However, in being explicitly mindful of existing data deficits, the review develops an accessible comparative and conceptual framework for better understanding Indigenous temporary mobility practices. And, where possible, the paper seeks to draw relevant connections between policy and research as they relate to Indigenous temporary mobility. In an exploratory fashion, it also canvasses potentially productive ways forward in appropriately and systematically engaging with Indigenous temporary mobility dynamics in public policy and practice. The analysis therefore has practical relevance for policy-makers and service providers.

Throughout the paper, *temporary mobility* (at times referred to simply as *mobility*) is distinguished from *migration* in that the former does not involve a permanent population redistribution. Of course, what constitutes permanence is subjective and perhaps unresolvable (Stillwell & Congdon 1991). This analysis therefore applies relatively arbitrary parameters to delimit the discussion. Here, temporary mobility

includes movements that are anywhere between two days and several months in duration. The discussion is also focused primarily on movements between localities. Although there is evidence that considerable intra-community and intra-urban mobility takes place (see Musharbash 2003 and Gale 1981 respectively), it has a different, and arguably less complex, set of implications for service delivery than movement between localities.

The comparative analysis comprises three sections. The first section outlines the strengths, limitations and applications of various available sources of Indigenous temporary mobility data. It intentionally confronts common concerns related to the applicability and accessibility of qualitative data in policy contexts. The second section draws on the available literature to describe, explain and contextualise Australian Indigenous temporary mobility practices across time and space. It sketches the spatial, temporal and demographic dimensions of these population dynamics. It then analyses the three dominant descriptions, which emerge from the literature, of how Indigenous mobility relates to the state.[1] The second section concludes with an examination of the broad structural factors that influence Indigenous temporary mobility practices. The third and final section of the paper presents an exploratory discussion of the policy implications of contemporary Indigenous short-term mobility practices. It provides a critical assessment of select existing programs and policies that are related to or impinge upon Indigenous temporary mobility and proposes future possibilities for both policy and research regarding these population dynamics.

Of course, any discussion that focuses solely on Indigenous temporary mobility practices risks feeding a perception that all Indigenous people are highly mobile. The danger is that such analyses can obscure other aspects of Indigenous 'spatiality'—such as population distribution, migration trends, and immobility—which also provide essential context for sound policy development. While this analysis seeks to engage with the broad notion of Indigenous spatiality where possible, these other components of Indigenous spatiality are comprehensively addressed in other outputs related to the Populations Project[2] and the broader Australian and international literatures (Biddle & Hunter 2006; Cooke & Belanger 2006; Gray 1989; Norris & Clatworthy 2003, 2007; Peters 2001; Reeves & Frideres 1981; Smith 1980; Taylor 1997, 2006; Taylor & Bell 1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2004a; Taylor & Biddle 2008).

DATA ISSUES

Policy makers regularly draw on statistical or 'hard' data as an evidence base for sound policy development. The Federal Government's renewed emphasis on 'closing the gaps' has vigorously reinforced this practice in Indigenous policy domains. Here, a focus on statistical data has two foundational justifications. Firstly, they provide benchmarks for measuring and monitoring outcomes and for justifying resource allocation and budget expenditure. Secondly, many policy-makers are wary of the highly subjective and ideologically positioned nature of 'anecdotal evidence'. For example, as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) has unfolded, different voices have offered competing and contradictory accounts about whether or not the intervention is working (NTER Review Board 2008). Given the lack of benchmarks against which to measure and monitor the progress of the intervention, gauging its success is a somewhat ambiguous task. And, in the face of little 'hard data', it remains almost impossible to determine which reports most closely reflect the realities for affected communities.

It appears then, at least superficially, that a bureaucratic inclination toward relying on statistical or 'hard' data as an evidence-base for policy formulation is straightforward and well founded. There are, however, instances in which such dependence can become an Achilles' heel to ethical, productive and evidence-based policy development. What, for example, of particular population practices that are largely invisible to conventional measurement, but highly relevant to the project of 'closing the gaps'? Indigenous temporary mobility dynamics represent one such case.

NTER:
Northern Territory
Emergency Response

STATISTICAL MEASURES

As has been clearly demonstrated elsewhere, Indigenous temporary mobility practices are largely uncaptured by the primary apparatus through which statistical demographic data is derived: the national census (Prout forthcoming b; Taylor 1996, 1998). The census only measures changes of residence over one and five year intervals. Census data can be manipulated to provide a snapshot of temporary mobility by cross-tabulating place of usual residence with place of enumeration on census night (Biddle & Prout forthcoming; Taylor 1998). However, the clarity of this snapshot is compromised in two fundamental ways. Firstly, census concepts such as 'household', 'family', and 'usual residence', hold different meanings in many Indigenous contexts (Morphy 2007b, 2007c; Musharbash 2003; Taylor 2002; Warchivker, Tjapangati & Wakerman 2000; Young & Doohan 1989; Young 1990). These differences in language and conceptualisation affect census responses with regard, for example, to whether a person was away from their place of 'usual residence' on census night. Secondly, there are ongoing problems with Indigenous enumeration coverage (Martin et al. 2002; Morphy 2007a; Taylor & Biddle 2008), particularly with regard to highly mobile individuals (Morphy, Sanders & Taylor 2007). The snapshot is therefore skewed.

Even if these concept and coverage issues could be satisfactorily resolved, however, static snapshots of Indigenous temporary mobility are of limited utility in policy contexts. Service agencies are affected by, and therefore primarily interested in, the dynamic flows of Indigenous mobility (Prout 2008). While census snapshots can provide a point-in-time measure of the volume of temporary movement, they are unable to resolve the common bureaucratic mystification associated with the temporal dimensions of Indigenous mobilities—their frequency and duration. There are other sources of 'hard' data that could, theoretically, provide more fine-grained data regarding the spatial and temporal dimensions of Indigenous mobility. These include administrative data, such as school attendance and enrolments data and outpatient records. The final section of this paper explores this possibility further.

Of course, even where quantitative measurement could be improved, using the resultant statistical data as the sole basis for policy development has significant flaws. One significant danger of this approach is that frequent mobility can be interpreted simply as a demographic 'risk factor' (e.g. Danaher, Danaher & Moriarty 2007; Henderson 2001). In a 2002 report to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training regarding the impact of school changes on student learning, KPMG consulting (2002: 2) observed that:

> Mobile students are frequently compared with 'settled', 'stable' or 'sedentary' students, and thus categorized according to a deficit model. By default, a mobile student must be 'unsettled' or 'unstable'. The question of definition is critical because the way in which mobility is conceptualized helps shape the direction and findings of research that takes place.

As this paper will demonstrate, Indigenous temporary mobility practices, and their motivations and impacts, are complex, often individualised, and culturally embedded. Policy responses must therefore be predicated on holistic conceptualisations of these population dynamics that consider the social, economic, cultural, historical and geographical setting in which movement takes place.

OTHER EVIDENCE

As suggested in the introduction, the primary available evidence regarding Indigenous temporary mobility practices is embedded within a series of small-scale, often qualitative, studies. There are several compelling arguments for policy-makers concerned with Indigenous population dynamics to engage with such evidence. These might be cast as antidotes to the limitations of statistical measures discussed above. Qualitative analyses provide rich depth of data regarding locally- and regionally-specific 'statistically invisible' temporary mobility practices. They often draw out and engage with Indigenous perspectives of their mobilities. Many of these small-scale studies also include innovative quantitative measures of

Indigenous mobility, either in the form of long-term daily censuses of a particular community (e.g. Smith, B. 2000), systematic surveys of individuals' mobility practices (e.g. Foster et al. 2005; Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006; Warchivker, Tjapangati & Wakerman 2000), or the analysis of unique locally available administrative data sets (e.g. Brooks & Kral 2007).

Undoubtedly though, the greatest strength of these analyses is their capacity to draw out the socio-cultural and historical circumstances and factors that motivate, restrict, and shape Indigenous mobility and immobility. This evidence has the direct capacity to challenge conventional and ill-conceived conceptualisations of Indigenous mobility practices and thus enhance the knowledge base upon which social, economic, and service delivery polices effecting Indigenous populations are developed. It is integral to any attempt to understand current mobility practices and to predicting future trends—two considerations that are fundamental to sound policy development.

INDIGENOUS TEMPORARY MOBILITY ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

For two reasons, drawing together and comparatively analysing the body of existing Aboriginal mobility research in Australia is a challenging task. Firstly, Indigenous temporary mobility practices are characterised by complexity and contingency. Secondly, the existing studies are locationally, temporally, and conceptually disparate. These analyses derive from diverse research disciplines that take varying foci and apply different methodologies. They have also been commissioned or sponsored by a range of interest groups for varying purposes. Each of these considerations influences the research direction, design and findings. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether different emphases among the findings of these studies reflect actual differences in temporary Aboriginal mobility processes across time and space or different approaches to enquiry and analysis. Although mobility has been a central feature of Indigenous lived experience for thousands of years, non-Indigenous attempts to understand and conceptualise it through time have clearly been piecemeal and unsystematic.[3]

Despite its somewhat erratic composition, the Aboriginal mobility literature clearly identifies a culture of mobility with frequent, intensive flows of movement through the outstations, towns and cities across the country that cannot be explained away as simply the product of an inherently Indigenous predisposition to wander. Many small-scale studies provide some measure of the frequency and volume of Indigenous temporary mobility (e.g. Altman 1987; Birdsall 1988; Brooks & Kral 2007; Hamilton 1987; Musharbash 2003; Palmer & Brady 1988; Smith 2002, 2004; Taylor 1988). Taken together, these analyses indicate high levels of temporary mobility. For example, in a year-long survey of mobility in a small central Australian community during the late 1990s, Warchivker, Tjapangati & Wakerman (2000) estimated that between 26 per cent and 58 per cent of the total population were mobile individuals. While they were present at the community for at least one of the survey periods and were in some way associated with the community, they were not defined as part of the 'core' resident population. Foster et al. (2005) made similar observations from their more recent survey of the Alice Springs town camps. They calculated that 36.7–39.6 per cent of the total population move frequently in and out of the town camps.

THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION

Indigenous temporary mobilities often mystify health, housing and education providers because the movements can appear impulsive and unpredictable in duration: characteristics that are regularly linked to resource wastage and service discontinuity (Prout 2008). So how can available research assist in de-mystifying the temporal dimensions of Indigenous mobility practices? The literature suggests that the degree of planning and predictability involved is largely determined by the factors that shape mobility. Some of these factors produce broad identifiable patterns and trends in both inception and/or duration of temporary mobility. Others are inextricably linked to localised contingencies.

For example, temporary ceremonial movement in Australia's central arid lands clearly involves intricate planning, much of which is invisible to non-Indigenous service providers and administrators (Peterson 2000; Young & Doohan 1989). In Central Australia, initiation, or *jilkaja,* journeys have become increasingly important mechanisms for reproducing and reinforcing regional Indigenous socialities (Peterson 2000). They are now more expansive, inclusive, and consequently more logistically complex, than perhaps ever before. Though a *jilkaja* journey centres around an uninitiated boy, they now sometimes extend thousands of kilometres and involve hundreds of participants—an enormous extension of their pre-colonial forms. Peterson (2000) estimates that one long and involved *jilkaja* journey he described would have cost its participants (collectively) at least $120,000. Organising travel and adequate resourcing and ensuring proper observation of cultural protocols for those directly involved in and effected by the ceremonial movement requires significant forward planning and communication.

At larger scales of analysis, temporal patterns of movement can also be distinguished. In Australia's north, for example, there are clear seasonal variations to Indigenous temporary mobility practices. During the dry season (May–September), when roads and other travelling routes are more accessible, and the natural inland environment is most resource-rich, mobility is more frequent and intense (Smith 2002). During the wet season (October–April) the overall volume of mobility decreases. Despite radical economic and administrative changes since colonisation began, these seasonal variations in mobility endure, albeit in many ways transformed. Throughout Australia, there are also planned annual events—large rodeos, sporting carnivals and festivals—that produce predictable patterns of short-term regional movement amongst many Indigenous populations. These events—including Croc Festivals, the Garma Festival, NAIDOC week celebrations, and large football carnivals—generate large population influxes into destination locales and parallel exoduses from source locations.

Other mobilities, however, are neither patterned nor predictable in inception. As Smith's (2004) example illustrates, such movements are often highly opportunistic:

> It is not uncommon for a car or truck-load of people from another settlement to pull up at a relative's house in town, or at an outstation camp and call out to kin trying to persuade them to jump on, these new passengers often leaving without even a bed-roll or a change of clothes, departing to another location and returning weeks or months later (Smith 2004: 252).

In a sense, predicting these movements is a 'known unknowable'. Predictability, however, should not be confused with rationality. According to the literature, these opportunistic and contingent mobilities are based on a very specific set of 'knowable' socio-cultural rationalities and conditions that are highly resilient and enduring. These include both the spatial and social bounds of relatedness, and the variable and dynamic nature of family circumstances.

Individuals will only embark on an opportunistic, unplanned journey if they are appropriately related to the rest of the travelling party and have family at the proposed destination who will be able to meet their temporary needs (Hamilton 1987; Peterson 2004; Prout 2007, forthcoming a; Smith 2004). The expectations and limitations that govern these processes of accessing and providing resources are negotiated differently across time and space. In essence though, collective responsibility and reciprocity within family networks— what Peterson and Taylor (2003) refer to as the Indigenous domestic moral economy—are socio-cultural norms that facilitate much opportunistic mobility. They also *command* such mobilities:

> Travelling from place to place can only be undertaken in this apparently haphazard way precisely because an elaborate network of reciprocal exchanges underpins it, whereby relatives accept unannounced visits from one another and provide the wherewithal for the visitor's survival if necessary. And an important purpose of such journeys, even in the absence of ritual, marital or other commitments, is to maintain this structure of reciprocal interdependence by calling upon it (Hamilton 1987: 49).

The literature almost uniformly identifies kinship as a primary driver and/or delimiter of mobility. Amid considerable socio-culturally diversity, and varied post-settlement circumstances, family remains principle social currency for most Indigenous Australians. As Peterson and Taylor (2003: 110) explain, 'personhood is constituted through relatedness'. In other words, identity and status is negotiated through each individual's wider sphere of relatedness (Myers 1986). And, as Hamilton explains above, temporary mobility is often the key mechanism for maintaining and cultivating this relatedness. Further, because family circumstances are dynamic and can change abruptly—a crisis may occur, a feud may erupt or an illness may suddenly arise—people's mobility practices often reflect these characteristics.

Generally, localised movements are more frequent and therefore shorter (between one day and several weeks), and more expansive movements are longer (between several weeks and several months) (Prout forthcoming b; Taylor, 1997; Taylor & Bell 2004c). However, as the following example illustrates, the duration of much temporary mobility is highly contingent:

> A trip may take several forms. A woman, for example, may wish to travel from Perth to DeLand[4] for some purpose but may not be able to find transport past Bayshore. She may wait in Bayshore (for a day, a week or a month) until she can get transport, whereupon she will resume her trip. When she gets back home to Perth, her trip will be over. The separate legs of the trip are not counted as individual trips despite the time spent waiting. However, if while she was waiting for a lift to DeLand she were to avail herself of an opportunity to go to a third town for a visit and then back to Bayshore, that would be a separate trip. If she decides that she will not get transport to DeLand within what she deems as a reasonable period of time, she will give up her objective and return to Perth. This entire period of travel she will refer to as a 'wasted trip' (Birdsall 1988: 147–8).

As subsequent discussion will demonstrate, the ability to be mobile for indeterminate periods of time is clearly associated with structural factors such as the nature of an individual's relationship with the mainstream economy, a loose emotional and/or fiscal investment in fixed assets such as a house, and the ability to access welfare payments in a broad range of locations. However, these structural circumstances are rarely the cause of movement or the determinant of duration. Rather, the way these circumstances are managed reveals alternative emphases that drive livelihoods and ultimately command mobility: the procurement, cultivation and contestation of relatedness; the fulfilment of socio-cultural obligations; and the independent navigation of relationships with mainstream social and economic institutions. So whilst many temporary movements may appear impulsive in inception and arbitrary in duration to outside observers, they are by no means irrational or random. They are highly purposeful and strategic.

THE SPATIAL DIMENSION

The term 'walkabout' is commonly applied to Indigenous temporary mobility practices to imply a kind of aimless and erratic wandering off into the unknown. The realities are somewhat less arbitrary. The spatial dimension of Indigenous temporary mobility practices has two chief components: the direction or *process* of movement, and its spatial *scope and shape* (Prout 2007).

The literature identifies three processes of Indigenous short-term mobility. Each might be conceptualised in relation to the notion of a 'home-base'. The first matches Zelinsky's definition of circulation:

> ... 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 (Zelinsky 1971: 226).

This type of mobility, common in Melanesian contexts (Chapman & Prothero 1985), involves continual returns to a 'home-base' after frequent journeys away. The home-base may be a particular community, town, or settlement. The second process of Indigenous short-term mobility is known as bi-local or multi-local residence. This type of mobility involves continual movement between two or more 'home-bases' in more than one community, town or settlement. These two or more locales may be viewed as extensions of one another: places in which an individual might be considered usually resident (e.g. Burns 2006). The third process of Indigenous short-term mobility identified in the literature is perpetual movement between a series of locales within which an individual has family. This form of mobility involves no particular physical home-base. 'Home' is embedded within a social network of relatedness rather than a specific geographic region or locale (Taylor 1992).

Defining the spatial *scope and shape* of Indigenous temporary mobility processes is a more fraught task and requires a critical reflection on conventional categorisations. Hugo (2007) and Taylor and Biddle (2008) have argued that policy-related demographic research must be grounded by a geography that is meaningful to the research subject(s). Most conventional geographical classifications (e.g. State/Territory, urban/remote) are blunt instruments in the task of improving current understandings of Indigenous temporary population dynamics. Indeed some serve only to entrench misconceptions and further alienate analysts and policy-makers from the rationalities that inform Indigenous mobility choices (Prout & Howitt forthcoming).

Rowley's (1970) 'remote/settled' dichotomy is one such example. On one level, it is simply a functional distinction based on calculable differences in population densities and service accessibility (Taylor 2002, 2006). On another level, it entrenches non-Indigenous interpretations of the socio-spatial landscape where cities (the hubs of modern progress) are central, while the harsh wilderness of the Australian outback is peripheral and—with the exception of profitable mining and pastoral ventures—largely antithetical to progressive economic development. Here, remote living is viewed as problematic not only because it undermines economic productivity, but also because it impedes cost-effective service delivery. Incidentally, much of this vast remote 'wilderness' is also often referred to as the 'Indigenous domain' (Trigger 1992). These perspectives run counter to those of many Indigenous peoples for whom inland Australia has been their home, their sustenance, and their identity for thousands of years. To the Pintupi resident of Kiwirrkurra, for example, local ancestral homelands are central and the nearest major service centre—some 700 kilometres away in Alice Springs—might be considered 'remote'.

The divergent conceptual vantage points here are not trivial. With regard to Indigenous spatial practices, these kinds of differences largely explain social policy responses that are incompatible with Indigenous lived experience. Perhaps most importantly though, in the case of temporary mobility, discernible patterns of movement do not readily correlate to conventional remoteness classifications. Similarly, State/Territory administrative boundaries have had little bearing on the intentionality of Indigenous temporary mobility practices.[5] By contrast, physical geography—in connection with colonial history—has fundamentally shaped Indigenous socio-spatial organisation, and thus mobility practices. Fig. 1 provides a visual representation of the sorts of ecological zones implicated in this process.

Prior to colonisation, climatic considerations and natural resource availability directly affected Indigenous socio-spatial organisation and informed cultural and economic practice. Ceremonial activity, hunting, gathering, and trading were inextricably linked to environmental conditions and the seasonal availability of natural resources (Bates 1985; Burns, 2006; Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006; Peterson 2004; Prout 2007; Sutton 1990; Young & Doohan 1989). In resource-rich and coastal areas that could support dense populations, mobility was more localised (e.g. Gale 1981; Smith, B. 2000, 2004). There were seasonal and ceremonial shifts between smaller, more dispersed band formations on various clan estates, and larger population gatherings along the banks of permanent water sources. In general though, these movements were contained within small regions. By contrast in desert regions, smaller, less-structured populations

Fig. 1. Geographical zones in Australia

Tropical North
Desert
Northern Hinterlands
Southern Hinterlands
Urban/Coastal
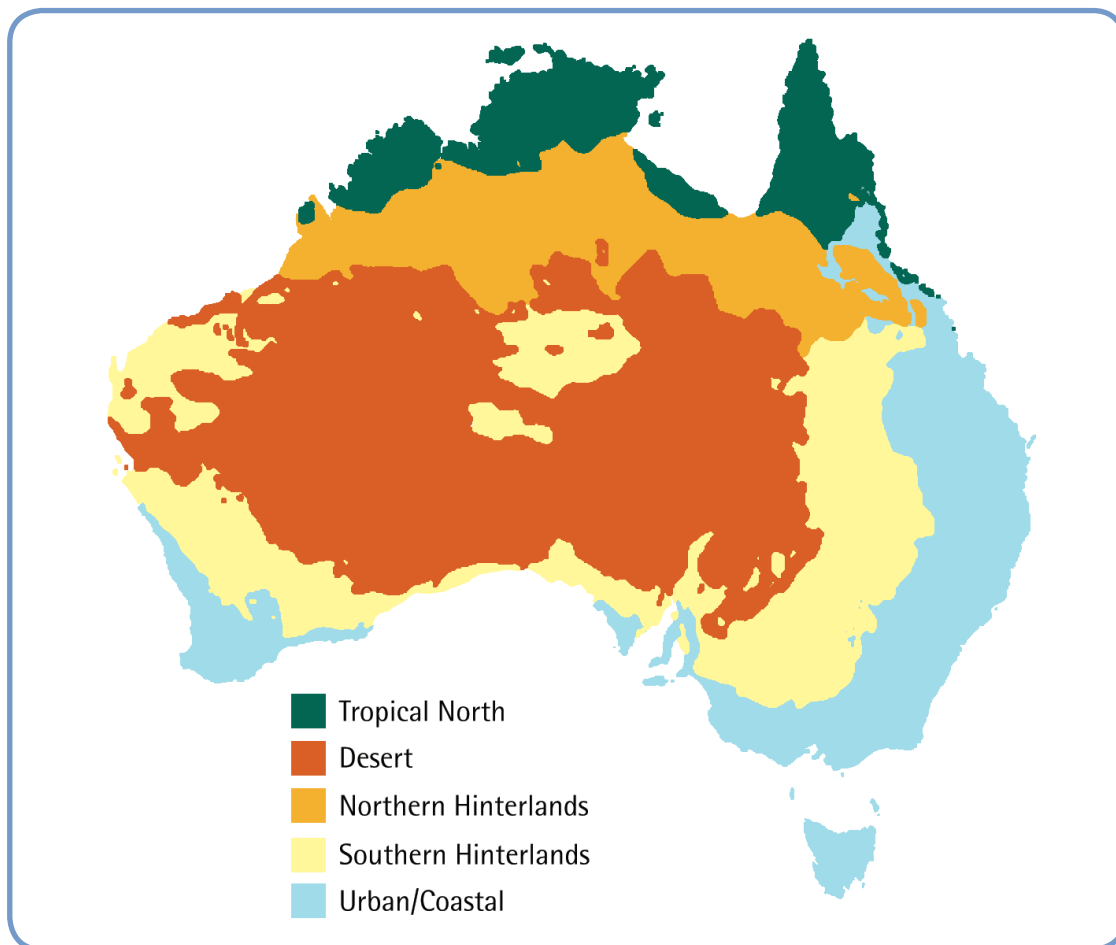
Source: Adapted from Stern, Hoedt, & Ernst 2008.

ranged more widely—at times temporarily abandoning parts of their country that were experiencing severe drought—to secure and sustain a resource economy and to maintain socio-cultural practices with neighbouring bands (Veth 2003).

Young and Doohan (1989) provide a detailed analysis of Indigenous mobility practices prior to colonisation. They explain that for Indigenous people in Central Australia, mobility was embedded in cultural practice as people's ceremonial journeys followed dreaming tracks that linked sacred sites. These sites were often water sources or resource-rich places, and thus also important economically. Most journeys were confined to ancestral territories within which particular groups had spiritual knowledge. Travel into the country of neighbouring groups was less frequent, but necessary in order to maintain reciprocal relationships in times of economic need (Young & Doohan 1989).

Within the context of varied mobility patterns across the continent, spiritual attachment to country was a profound force that firmly and uniformly rooted social groups within their traditional territories (Peterson 2004). Somewhat paradoxically, these highly mobile hunter-gatherer populations were also highly settled within their regions of socio-cultural belonging (Peterson 2004). Many remain so. Anthropologist Hugh Brody eloquently captures this spatial reality when he makes a global comparison between hunter-gatherer societies with their agriculturally-based 'farmer' counterparts:

> ... a crucial difference between hunter-gatherers and farmers is that one society is highly mobile, with a strong tendency to both small- and large-scale nomadism, whereas the other is highly settled, tending to stay firmly in one particular area or territory. This difference is established in stereotypes of 'nomadic' hunters and 'settled' farmers. However, the stereotype has it the wrong way around. It is agricultural societies that tend to be on the move; hunting peoples are far more firmly settled. This fact is evident when we look at these two ways of being in the world over a long time span—when we screen the movie of human history, as it were, rather than relying on the photograph (Brody 2000: 7).

However, contemporary correlations between physical geography and mobility practices do not simply reflect continuing pre-colonial forms of movement, but rather, environmental and socio-culturally specific responses and adaptations to the colonial project. As Keesing and Strathern (1998) explain, Indigenous experiences of colonisation depended on their physical location (which determined when the colonial frontier reached them); the environmental characteristics of their territories (which determined what kind of economic exploitation, if any, their land was adjudged suitable for); and how each group responded to settler presence. For example, Indigenous peoples whose homelands were located along the coastal inlet that is now Adelaide, or who occupied the hinterlands surrounding the Swan River in Western Australia, were devastated by the colonial frontier (Gale 1972; Green 1984). By contrast, Indigenous peoples in the less accessible desert regions remained relatively unaffected by the settling society until the 1960s (e.g. Long 1989).

In parts of Australia, attachment to country continues to have a strong delimiting effect on the spatial dimensions of Indigenous people's temporary mobility practices. In the resource rich tropical north, for example, anthropologists describe highly localised patterns of mobility that are based on, and contained within, an enduring system of clan estates mapped over the landscape (Altman 1987; Morphy 2008; Smith 2004).[6] In such locales there remains a deeply interwoven relationship between kinship and country that serves to consolidate the spatial dimensions of geographically contained and identifiable 'mobility regions'. There is intensive movement between outstations and their surrounding environs, and local townships. There are also less-frequent journeys to larger regional centres or major cities to access services. Memmott, Long & Thompson (2006) suggest that these 'mobility regions' could be mapped through an understanding of:

a)   the contemporary expressions of traditional land custodianship and economies

b)   the spatial arrangement of various language groups, and

c)   the location of variously-sized service centres relative to a and b.

In the nation's large central desert region and surrounding northern hinterlands, identification with ancestral homelands and the largely corresponding distribution of kin also plays a significant role in shaping the spatial bound of Indigenous mobility practices. In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of Western Australia, for example, spiritual attachment to country has a localising impact on mobility. Brooks and Kral (2007) argue that because of a relatively short experience of contact with non-Indigenous society, a history of unbroken contact with the region, and the fact that no non-Ngaanyatjarra settlements have been established on the Lands, connection to country exerts a strong pull to localised living for Ngaanyatjarra people.

The Ngaanyatjarra region is socially 'mapped over' by particular kinship groups and because of these powerful emotive attachments to place, Ngaanyatjarra people feel uncomfortable when away from country. A culture of connectedness is established and cultivated through births, deaths, and ceremonial activities that foster both a cohesive society and spatial consolidation. This spiritual attachment holds people within their traditional territories of belonging (Brooks & Kral 2007).

Using data from the Milyirrtjarra store in Warburton,[7] Brooks and Kral demonstrate, quantitatively, that most temporary mobility within the lands is intra-regional. Young (1990) identified a similar pattern of localised living among the Walpiri and Anmatyerre peoples of Central Australia. Their country, she explained, is demarcated by spiritual responsibility, common language affiliation, and the location of kin. 'Mobility regions' could be mapped by asking an individual which places they normally visit (Young 1990: 191).

However, evidence presented by Young and Doohan (1989) suggest that even 20 years ago in Central Australia, 'regions' of movement were not necessarily simply identifiable. They explicitly described the role of colonial policies and practices in altering the socio-spatial systems of organisation amongst the Walpiri, Anmatyerre, Arrente, Pintupi and Pitjantjatjara peoples of Central Australia. Through forced relocations and engagements with the mainstream economy, various groups were moved to distant territories. Some remained and intermarried. Others eventually returned. The overall impact though, was to expand networks of relatedness (within kinship structures) and spiritual belonging (on country). Young and Doohan (1989) observed that although their connections lay primarily within Central Australia, many Indigenous people in the area had multiple sets of roots with customary obligations to several regions and expanded kinship networks (see Palmer 1983 for a similar discussion relating to the Pilbara). These extended networks of relatedness and obligation are also clearly observable in Peterson's (2000) account of Central Australian *jilkaja* journeys.

Indigenous mobility patterns in the desert were always more spatially expansive than in the tropical north. However, the enlarged spheres of relatedness and belonging that have resulted from responses to colonisation, expand potential mobility trajectories and render particular 'mobility regions' in this vast portion of the continent less distinguishable.

In the southern regional hinterlands that border the desert, geographically contained 'mobility regions' are perhaps even less distinguishable. Some Indigenous groups within this zone may identify with a particular region and feel a sense of familiarity within it, but their choices of residence and temporary mobility practices are not confined to it. Rather, the location of family is the primary determinant of temporary mobility trajectories (Prout 2007, forthcoming a). In these more geographically accessible areas, where early administrative policies of separation and forced removal had profound and far-reaching impacts, familial networks may now be dispersed over vast distances.

As early as the 1950s, Beckett (1965) described individual mobility 'beats' amongst 'part-Aborigines' in rural New South Wales. He explained that these beats were 'defined by the situation of kin' and 'proximity was only a minor factor' (Beckett 1988: 131). Over four decades later in the same region, Burns' (2006) observations of the spatial dimensions of mobility in many ways paralleled Beckett's: the towns and communities that a person might regularly visit were not necessarily close together. Rather, the various flows of movement were dictated by the 'situation of kin', which had, as Beckett (1965) predicted, greatly expanded. Burns (2006) found that although there was a definite sense of belonging to the region, and a parallel sense of unease beyond it, this was not the primary consideration that shaped the spatial dimensions of Indigenous mobility. Here, the location of kin no longer mirrors traditional territorial arrangements and kinship networks are now the primary spatial delimiters of individual mobility trajectories. Further, as a result of both government policies and individual choices regarding engagement with the mainstream economy, these individual kinship networks do not *necessarily* neatly correspond to a geographical territory. Burns (2006) also noted that the factors that shape temporary movements appear more characteristically 'complex, varied and individualistic' in these regional hinterlands than they are in the desert and tropical north.

Prout (2007) made similar observations in Yamatji country, Western Australia, where early administrative policies of forced removal and relocation have profoundly influenced the contemporary spatialities of most Indigenous people. While some individuals feel a sense of belonging to the region, many visit towns and communities outside of the region more frequently than those within it. Their familial ties, which have expanded through forced and labour migrations, are stronger in these more distant locales. The spatial dimensions of these mobility trajectories cannot, therefore, be accurately described as a geographically bounded circuit of movement. Through marriage choices, some individuals in the region have close family as far south as Esperance, as far east as Wingellina and as far north as Wyndham. While much mobility is contained within Yamatji country, movements are not necessarily undertaken in a geographical sequence from nearest to farthest town and back. Individuals 'stop' only in towns where they have strong and amicable familial ties. In many such cases, it is difficult to distinguish whether a person's sense of belonging to the region is derived from a spiritual attachment to country, or the reality that their kinship networks lie primarily within the region.

These distinctions were also unclear in Birdsall's (1988) analysis of Nyungar 'runs'. In one of the only mobility studies located in Australia's densely populated coastal zone, Birdsall (1988) also described 'lines' of mobility running up and down the Western Australian coast. However, the towns that formed the line were not geographically sequential or spatially proximate. Rather, they were determined by the specific location of family members. Lines developed as family members sought to return to the northern homelands from which they were forcibly removed as children from the southern institutions into which they were placed. These journeys have, in some cases, taken several decades and networks of kin have established themselves in various towns along the way (Birdsall 1988). In these more densely populated, urbanised and coastal contexts, familial associations seem to have become the primary delimiters of individual mobility trajectories (Birdsall-Jones & Christensen 2007; Gale 1972, 1981, 1987). Because familial networks in these parts of the country have, in many cases, been adapted and reconfigured in response to historical administrative practices and policies, individual mobility trajectories no longer necessarily correspond directly to the geographical bounds of ancestral belonging or language group affiliation.

However, many factors related to Indigenous temporary mobility practices in more densely populated coastal zones remain unclear and warrant further investigation. For example, do urban-based Indigenous populations engage in frequent temporary mobilities beyond city hinterlands? If so, for what reasons? If they generally remain within these regions, why? Are there differences in the temporary mobility practices of those who are descended from local Indigenous populations and those who have migrated to the cities and their hinterlands in recent decades or years?

In the early 1970s and 80s, Gale (1972, 1981) undertook research regarding Indigenous populations in Adelaide. She found that Indigenous people in the city arranged themselves spatially, and identified themselves culturally, according to their kinship affiliations and places of origin. She also noted considerable intra-urban mobility, particularly when Indigenous singles and families first arrived in the city. They would initially move and live between relatives until housing became available. Those who had been in city areas longest and had more secure housing were less mobile. One 20–30 year old study, however, is hardly a robust record from which to draw contemporary inferences from. Until more data is available about Indigenous populations living within these highly populated coastal regions, it is difficult to make substantive claims about their mobility practices.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

There is wide consensus within the Australian literature that position within the life cycle has a significant bearing on Indigenous temporary mobility practices. As Taylor (2008a) has compellingly argued, though, Indigenous life cycles do not necessarily correspond to conventional Western categorisations by age. For

example, teenage Indigenous boys who go through customary Law make the transition into manhood at a younger age than in Western society. Many Indigenous women also often become mothers at younger ages than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and are grandparents in their early 40s. In relation to mobility, therefore, conventional age/life cycle categorisations are not sufficient as an explanatory framework (Taylor 2008a). In addition, Indigenous life cycle events appear to impact the *reasons for* and *nature of* movement more than its *frequency*. Indeed, the mobility/age profile is much flatter for the Indigenous population than for the non-Indigenous population.

However, the literature consistently identifies a peak in temporary mobility among young adults (roughly 17–25 year olds). Across time and vastly different geographical and socio-cultural regions of Australia, the reasons for this youth mobility appear remarkably consistent. Mobility increases during this phase of the life cycle as young people begin to independently explore and contest their identities in relation to the state, their cultural contexts, and broader social norms. Here, mobility acts as a metaphorical vehicle through which young adults can explore and establish their own networks of relatedness and belonging.

Anthropologists working on the Cape York Peninsula have described a 'floating' Indigenous youth population (Finlayson 1991; Martin & Taylor 1996; Smith 2004). With kinship ties in two or more locales, and in the absence of notable responsibilities that might anchor them to a particular place, Indigenous youth on the Cape commonly engage in what Smith (2004) and fellow anthropologist Nicolas Peterson refer to as 'existential mobility':

> Whilst floaters are typically more peripheral [socially], exploiting relatively weak kin ties for shelter and resources, younger people in general are able to exploit opportunities of nebulous social inclusion by 'floating' from place to place, partly in an attempt to redress boredom associated with particularly pronounced exclusion from economic participation and meaningful social roles (Smith 2004: 252).

Smith (2002) also suggests that such movement amongst youth is, at least in part, an expression of personal autonomy and resistance to mainstream expectations of economic productivity.

Finlayson (1991: 216) identified a similar group of 'young, restless travellers' in Kuranda, Queensland. These 'floaters' moved about for excitement and adventure, and to seek out partners. And, in northeast Arnhem Land, Morphy (2007b: 42) describes the *dhukarrpuyngu* ('people of the track'): young men and women who are not resident in any one particular locale but move between the households of their more sedentary relatives.

In the vastly different socio-cultural and environmental context of Yamatji country in Western Australia, there is a similar trend in youth mobility (Prout 2007). It was a pronounced feature of young adulthood in generations past, and remains so for the present youth generation. Both groups refer to such practices, then and now as 'just cruising around', 'seeing what was happening' and 'visiting' (Prout 2007, forthcoming a). Burns (2006) also observed a clear pattern of youth mobility in western New South Wales, contrasting it with earlier generations who were fully engaged in employment-related mobility within the pastoral industry. Birdsall (1988) described Nyungar youth mobility as often highly secretive and directed in large part by the forming and disintegration of romantic relationships.

Most case studies of Indigenous temporary mobility specifically identify this pattern of intensive contemporary youth mobility. Such mobilities are widely accepted within Indigenous contexts as a natural part of the life cycle. However, similar patterns of almost perpetual mobility amongst adults are not as universally tolerated.

In some contexts, they are the norm:

> To 'stop' is an apt verb to describe this element of Warlpiri residency patterns which are processual. The continuous flow of people is halted each night when people 'stop.' Warlpiri people move, almost nobody lives in the same place with the same people permanently; rather people follow their own paths, which continually criss-cross those of others forming flows of people through camps. Motion is an integral element of Warlpiri life, and 'stopping' aptly characterises residency patterns in a life where they change on a regular basis, both in terms of *where* one stops and in terms of with *whom* one does so (Musharbash 2003: 128–9).

However, in other contexts, individuals who perpetually move are less accepted. They may be described within their socio-cultural networks as drunkards (Birdsall 1988), troublemakers and wanderers, or bad parents (Morphy 2007b). In the latter case, 'bad parenting' might be associated with frequent, 'troubled' mobilities that affect an individual's children. While many parents with school aged children deliberately reduce their temporary mobility practices, parenthood is not necessarily a barrier to frequent movement. In some cases, children are granted considerable autonomy regarding their residency, mobility, and school attendance choices. In other cases, children accompany their itinerant parents or relatives, or are left in the care of their more sedentary grandparents or great-grandparents (Finlayson 1991; Martin & Taylor 1996; Prout 2007).

Most mobility studies also identify a 'core' group of older Indigenous people who are firmly integrated into a particular community or town (Finlayson 1991; Finlayson, Daly & Smith 2000; Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006; Prout 2007). They are often focal points for younger, mobile family members (Gale 1981). Middle-aged grandparents who are taking on greater child-rearing responsibilities with their grandchildren (Finlayson 1991; Henry & Daly 2001; Martin & Taylor 1996; Smith, D. 2000) are often part of this more sedentary 'core'. In northern Australia, the 'core' commonly includes senior men and women who are associated with particular outstations (Morphy 2008; Smith 2004). In urban and regional areas, the 'core' is often comprised of familial matriarchs who bare responsibility for two or more younger generations of kin (Birdsall 1988).

Somewhat paradoxically though, many 'core' individuals engage in temporary movement. While they may be permanently associated with one particular locale, their roles within their families and communities may require considerable temporary mobility (Birdsall 1988; Morphy 2007c; Smith 2002). As Morphy (2007c) notes, focal individuals in northeast Arnhem Land are often also responsible for ceremonial organisation and may thus often be away from home. Indeed the overwhelming frequency of Indigenous funerals throughout Australia means that some senior Indigenous people have become almost perpetual mourners, moving from one funeral or sorry camp to the next (Prout 2007).

There are also focal men and women whose social status is embedded in the control of vehicle use between settlements and outstations (e.g. Smith 2002). These individuals are thus highly mobile as they broker movement of kin and resources between these various locales in order to enhance and expand their sphere of influence. Senior men and women may also be engaged in managerial or advisory roles that require regular short-term travel. In addition, health complications can prompt increased mobility amongst older people as they frequently travel between medical appointments in larger centres and their home town or community. Such movements often have flow-on effects as family travel to 'keep company' with them (Coulehan 1995; Prout 2007).

Gender differences receive more subtle articulation within the available literature. There are hints that young men are more frequently and expansively mobile than young women. In cities and to an extent in regional hinterlands, there also appears to be an orientation towards matriarchal socialities that 'genders' mobility practices. The only two researchers to have examined aspects Indigenous mobility practices in

Australia's urban/coastal zones both describe a 'displacement of Aboriginal men' from the city (Birdsall 1988; Birdsall-Jones & Christensen 2007; Gale 1981). They suggest that senior women have become the focal points of Indigenous households while men's roles have become increasingly marginal[8]. It is unclear whether this displacement results in increased mobility among Indigenous men in urban contexts. For women, it has several mobility-related corollaries. Some senior women are highly sedentarised in particular towns and communities with other family members maintaining obligations and exercising rights to continually call on them. Others remain firmly associated with a particular town or community, but are highly mobile, visiting their children (particularly daughters) to ensure that they are being good parents and are safe and well (Beckett 1988; Birdsall 1988). In some cases, grandmothers' mobilities reflect obligations to both their children and to their own mothers, who may be frail or in poor health. In these contexts, women appear to be engaged in the majority of socio-culturally oriented mobility: that which is purposed to develop and enrich individual and group Indigenous identities. Such gendered trends are not so clearly articulated in the mobility literature from the desert or the tropical north.

MOBILITY AND THE STATE

The literature conceptualises the relationship between Indigenous temporary mobility and the governing state in three primary ways. Some scholars describe temporary mobilities that are *endosocial*. That is, they are unrelated to, unseen, and unaffected by (or simply adapted according to), the practices and policies of the governing state. Other studies focus on the more effectual relationship between temporary mobility and the governing state, noting considerable movement to engage with mainstream markets and access services and facilities. Both of these observations and explanations identify important components of some temporary mobility practices. However, neither is singularly sufficient to explain the totality of the relationship between temporary mobility and the state. The final conceptualisation that emerges from the literature is perhaps the most holistic. It describes Indigenous temporary mobilities as physical manifestations of the 'enduring and transformed' (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006) elements of Indigenous socio-cultural practice and lived experience.

ENDOSOCIALITY

> … much Aboriginal travel does, metaphorically, take place with their backs to the world, turned in on their own domains. This is true of Aboriginal people throughout the continent, although to different degrees. Aboriginal endosociality is partly a product of the same racism that gave rise to the myth of walkabout but it is also a product of the distinctive culture with its egalitarian ideology, its emphasis on the relational constitution of the person and the importance of place in the constitution of personal identity. Together these factors continue to underwrite frequent mobility in the Aboriginal domain (Peterson 2004: 235).

In the above quotation, Peterson (2004) offers a stark image of Indigenous temporary mobility in relation to the state. He describes mobility that is characterised by socio-cultural inwardness, resistant or impervious to external influence.

Elements of many Indigenous temporary mobility practices are unrelated to, unseen by, or suggest a resistance to and/or disinterest in 'the outside world'. The preceding discussion of the dimensions of temporary mobility clearly established that social and cultural obligations and conflicts drive much temporary mobility. And, regardless of the underlying rationale for movement, the scope and shape of almost all contemporary Indigenous mobilities is delimited by territories of ancestral belonging and/or networks of relatedness. As Friedman (1997) has argued in the native Hawaiian context, this confinement

of movement within networks of familiarity and relatedness is indicative of endosociality. Much ceremonial movement is also endosocial in that it is unrelated to, and often unseen by, mainstream Australia (Peterson 2000, 2004; Young & Doohan 1989).

Indigenous temporary mobility can also reflect and engender disinterest in or alienation from the state (Hamilton 1987; Prout 2007). Historically, government health, housing, and education services have been symbolic conduits for the expression of colonial rule. Consequently, some Indigenous people have relegated mainstream social and economic institutions to the realm of 'whitefella business'—an area of governance in which they have little desire to participate. Frequent Indigenous mobility produces characteristically sporadic interactions with such institutions. This deliberately passive engagement perhaps reflects a defiance or resistance to the perceived social control that such institutions attempt to command over their lives (Prout 2007).

All of these socio-spatial dynamics indicate a strong association between Indigenous temporary mobility and endosociality. And yet, on its own, Peterson's assertion—that endosociality underwrites frequent mobility in the Indigenous domain—is too limited and simplistic to fully explain Indigenous mobility in relation to the state. It sets up an arguably false dichotomy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous 'domains'. This dichotomy cannot accommodate Indigenous responses to colonial and globalising forces or the ongoing selective integration of elements of mainstream society and culture into Indigenous mobility practices (e.g. Altman & Hinkson 2007b; Baker 1990).

ENGAGEMENT WITH MAINSTREAM SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS

A number of studies have identified frequent Indigenous mobility that results from the need or desire to access retail, social, or medical services that are not available in one's home community or town (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006; Prout 2008; Young & Doohan 1989). As subsequent discussion will explain, this kind of mobility is mediated by the size of the settlement in which an individual lives, its proximity to larger regional centres or cities, the types of services available at both source and destination locations, and the needs and desires of the individual.

Scant qualitative evidence also suggests that engagement with the formal economy, either directly or indirectly, can engender Indigenous temporary mobility in several ways. During the first half of the twentieth century, seasonal work—particularly on cattle stations—generated considerable temporary mobility for many Indigenous people in different settings right across the country (Burns 2006; Fink 1960; Hamilton 1987; Prout 2007; Sansom 1980). While this labour force was largely made redundant in the late 1960s, some seasonal employment-related movement still takes place. Short-term contractual jobs in the mining, pastoral and transport sectors can prompt back-and-forth movements of the worker and/ or their family, between the home community and the job site, for the duration of the contract. Similarly, those who migrate toward larger urban centres to pursue professional appointments expand the mobility networks of their more transient relatives (e.g. Gale 1981, 1987; Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006; Prout 2007).

A range of additional temporary mobility dynamics that emerge from engagement with the formal economy do not appear to have been critically researched. One example is the apparently significant temporary mobility, particularly in the Northern Territory, generated by the production and sale of Indigenous art and goods (Metta Young, pers. comm. 2008). Another is the considerable Indigenous temporary movement associated with either voluntary or paid positions on various managerial boards and committees (Metta Young, pers. comm. 2008). Their roles on various boards and committees often require senior Indigenous men and women to travel to meetings at which they represent their communities, providing expert

advice regarding best practice in service delivery and/or advocating for additional resourcing. If brought into the public consciousness through well-grounded research, these associations may disarm persistent misperceptions that Indigenous temporary mobility is economically counter-productive.

A number of studies have also discussed the effects of CDEP schemes on Indigenous temporary mobility (Brooks & Kral 2007; Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006; Smith 2002). These studies suggest that the income generated from CDEP work and the location of projects can stimulate increased travel. They also contend that the schemes generally serve to entrench localised mobility practices. Brooks and Kral (2007) for example, describe CDEP as the glue that binds Ngaanyatjarra people to the region and enables them to remain on country. If abolished, they predict that travel amongst the people of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands would increase dramatically. Smith (2002: 7) also suggested that the CDEP scheme in the Coen region, whilst increasing intra-regional temporary mobility, effectively encouraged 'regionally enclosed' mobility. Essentially, robust CDEP schemes allow people to remain on country whilst participating more meaningfully in the formal economy.[9]

MEDIATION BETWEEN THE ENDURING AND THE TRANSFORMED

Elements of some Indigenous mobility practices seem to be characterised by endosociality, and others are undoubtedly the product of an active engagement with mainstream markets and social institutions. In almost all cases, however, Indigenous temporary mobilities reflect a mediation between the 'persistent aspects of cultural production' and the 'broader emergent forms of post-colonial life' (Smith 2004: 239). As Taylor and Bell (2004b: 264–5) suggest:

> ... [mobility outcomes] also reflect the subtle interplay with culture and tradition that mould spatial behaviour to diverse circumstances and geographical settings. As elsewhere, it is this tension between the global and the local, between the individual and the group, between culture and modernity, and ultimately between space and time, that holds the key to understanding of mobility amongst Indigenous peoples.

Of course, in drawing these distinctions to illuminate tensions and interplays, one risks setting up false dichotomies, particularly between culture and modernity. Indeed as Young and Doohan (1989: 25) note, the two components that make up contemporary Indigenous mobility—both traditional functioning and organisation, and adaptations to colonialism—are so 'interlinked that it is impossible and indeed unrealistic to separate them'. There is, however, a sense in which Indigenous temporary mobility practices clearly reflect an iterative negotiation between what Memmott, Long and Thompson (2006) refer to as the 'enduring' and the 'transformed' aspects of Indigenous lived experience.

These interplays and negotiations, in some instances, have clear spatial characteristics: individuals and groups move physically between the various places and spaces that affirm their socio-cultural identity and provide opportunities to participate in traditional economic practices, and those places that fulfil their needs and desire to access mainstream services and opportunities. The mobility between various outstations in Central Cape York and the township of Coen (Smith 2002, 2004) is one such example.

To suggest, however, that smaller settlements are always the sites of enduring socio-cultural practice and larger settlements, the transformed, is too simplistic. It risks feeding unproductive discourses about Aboriginal authenticity (e.g. Jacobs 1996; Morgan 2006; Sansom 1982). It could be argued that all socio-cultural practices, regardless of where they are enacted, are in a constant state of transformation. Further, temporary movement to larger settlements, in many cases, fulfils the dual purposes of accessing mainstream markets and institutions and fulfilling enduring socio-cultural obligations of calling upon, and thus maintaining, kinship networks. Regardless of the precise spatial manifestations, the literature

Fig. 2. Temporary mobility push–pull factors
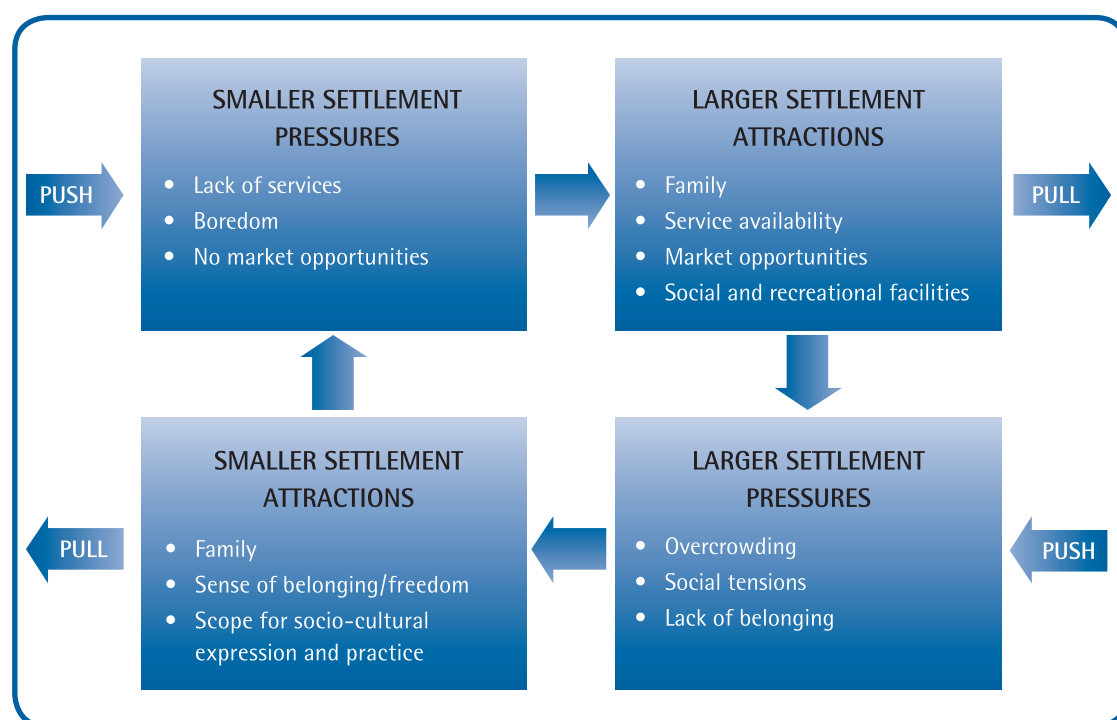
Source: Adapted from Taylor 1988: 220.

clearly asserts that Indigenous mobilities are often a physical expression of a constant state of negotiation between the endosocial aspects of lived experience, the expectations of the state, and a desire to actively participate in elements of mainstream society and culture.

THE STRUCTURAL SETTING OF MOBILITY

The preceding discussion has identified geography, demography, historical policy, and socio-cultural specificities as central components to the contextual setting of Indigenous temporary mobility practices. Given that Indigenous temporary mobility practices relate to the state in distinctive ways, the contextual setting of movement must also include structural considerations such as settlement size and distribution, and the relative localised penetration of globalising mainstream economic markets, transport infrastructure, and communication technologies.

STRUCTURAL GEOGRAPHY

From census data, Taylor (2006) has identified a trend of increasing Indigenous in-migration to regional services centres with populations between 10,000 and 50,000. He has also highlighted a pattern of growth in Indigenous towns such as Wadeye and Cherbourg, which contrasts with the decline in other small, predominantly non-Indigenous towns throughout rural Australia (Taylor 2006). Beneath this overarching narrative of in-migration to regional centres and growth in Indigenous towns, there are a range of temporary mobility practices taking place up and down the settlement hierarchy (e.g. Young 1981). These mobilities are shaped by a series of push and pull factors as summarised in Fig. 2.

As Fig. 2 shows, flows of movement towards larger settlements are often motivated by the need or desire to access services (e.g. banking, retail and health), alleviate boredom, and visit family. However, the stresses associated with concentrated communal living such as overcrowding and fighting, combined with a longing for family and the freedom of socio-cultural expression available in more intimate and familiar settings, push (and pull) individuals back to smaller settlements. In these smaller settlements, individuals are often more able to fulfil ceremonial obligations, affirm socio-cultural identity, care for country, and/or escape conflict that often erupts in larger social settings. However, the lack of services and potential for boredom creates a push toward larger settlements, and the cycle continues. As Smith (2004: 250) notes, these push and pull factors demonstrate 'the continuity and simultaneous transformation of many factors apparent in pre-colonial mobility practices interwoven with a series of new forms and motivations'.

The length of time a person may remain in any one of these settlement types depends upon their original motivation for travel, the distance from origin to destination, and the circumstances they are faced with at their destination. In some cases, individuals who intended to visit only for a short time, or even just to 'pass through' remain for 20 to 30 years. In other cases, short-term visits become even more temporary than originally anticipated.

These flows of movement are not restricted to step-wise moves up and down the settlement hierarchy, or movements between small towns and large regional centres. In central Cape York, the small town of Coen is a service centre for the surrounding outstations. Residents of these smaller homelands come to town for supplies, to gamble, and to visit with kin and return to their respective outstations to fish, hunt, and escape conflict and unhealthy lifestyles 'in town' (Smith 2002, 2004). Coen, however, is a small settlement of approximately 300 residents, with a grocery store, basic amenities, a police station, a primary school, and a primary health care centre. Those requiring or desiring a level of service and/or retail options beyond those available in Coen must travel further south to larger regional service centres such as Cairns. These more distant travels are less frequent but may last longer. Both Prout (2007) and Burns (2006) documented such movement to access these more specialised and varied services in the regional services centres of Geraldton, and Dubbo, Orange and Newcastle respectively.

By contrast, in the Georgina River, Mt Isa frequently draws Indigenous people from the smaller nearby town of Dajarra and Indigenous communities on the eastern border of the Northern Territory who come to the town to shop, access the hospital and visit kin (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006). Mt Isa's proximity to surrounding communities means it exerts a great pull on residents of nearby towns and Indigenous communities for ease of access to services. However, such mobility is often more temporary in nature—perhaps even just one or two days.

Regional services centres such as Mt Isa, Broome, and Dubbo clearly play a significant role in the structural geography of Indigenous temporary mobility. Existing research suggests that when Indigenous people require a higher level of service than those available in their towns and communities of residence, their preference is often to travel to a regional service centre rather than a major city (Burns 2006; Prout 2007). Regional centres have the full range of services required—hospitals, quality high schools, and a full range of retail and recreational facilities—and are often within the geographical bounds of familiarity for outlying towns and communities. By contrast, major cities are often less familiar and therefore less appealing.

Memmott, Long and Thompson (2006) describe a trend of increasing Indigenous in-migration to Mt Isa, particularly from Alpurrurulam in the Northern Territory. They also noted that while older people—many of whom had moved to the town to access health services—were determined to return to their home communities as soon as possible, many of their younger kin stayed in Mt Isa for longer periods, even years. Prout (2007) also alluded to a pattern of movement from the outlying towns and communities in Yamatji

country towards Geraldton. Some had moved to pursue professional appointments. Some were pushed toward the regional centre because of concerns about the poor quality of education their children were receiving in their home towns and communities.

Largely though, the literature emphasises the temporary nature of much movement towards major regional centres, noting the counter-forces that draw people back to their communities of origin. Most trips were between two days and two weeks: to visit, shop, and perhaps attend a specialist medical appointment. Even where moves toward regional service centres became increasingly long-term—usually for health or family reasons—migrants rarely felt 'at home' in these larger localities. Rather, they identified with their smaller communities of origin and, the elderly in particular intended to return there either 'soon' or 'eventually', depending on their circumstances.

ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

Economic context is closely linked to settlement size and location and also highly relevant to the setting of Indigenous temporary mobility. While disengagement from the mainstream economy and job market clearly underpins much temporary movement, the association between the formal economy and Indigenous mobility is nuanced. There are a range of structural economic factors that affect Indigenous temporary mobility practices. For example, a thriving informal Indigenous economy may heighten mobility, particular in the dry season. A strong CDEP program may have a localising or containing effect on temporary mobility, allowing people to remain more permanently on country. If members of a community have migrated away from their hometowns or communities to pursue employment or education opportunities elsewhere, this may have expanded the mobility trajectories of their relatives who remain. All of these possibilities must be considered in attempting to understand and characterise Indigenous temporary mobility practices in any given region at any given scale.

The advent of electronic banking and the proliferation of Centrelink offices in smaller settlements have also dramatically changed the landscape of temporary mobility related to the formal economy (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006). In decades past, the administration of welfare payments had a strong structuring effect on Indigenous temporary mobility. Welfare cheques were mailed to individuals, which meant they had to report to, or remain in, particular locales to collect them. There was considerable travel to and from particular events and communities, sometimes involving long detours, to collect their payments (e.g. Young 1990). Such movements are now unnecessary as payments can be accessed electronically in various locations. However, just as movements related to the collection of payments have diminished, so too has the need to be in a particular locale to collect them. This can have a more freeing impact on individual mobility practices.

TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSPORT

The accessibility of motor vehicles since the mid twentieth century, and communications technologies (e.g. mobile phones and faxes) more recently, have also radically transformed the setting of Indigenous temporary mobility (Altman & Hinkson 2007b; Cowlishaw 1999; Hamilton 1987; Young & Doohan 1989). Cars, planes, phones, faxes and improvements to their associated infrastructure bases (e.g. roads and telecommunication networks) have dramatically shrunk both time and space and enabled individuals to more efficiently coordinate and undertake movement. They have enhanced Indigenous people's capacity to move more rapidly, more often and more distantly than ever before. They have also mitigated many of the climatic obstacles that historically impeded movement. This shrinking of time and space has only intensified over time, as cars and phones have become increasingly accessible to more and more Indigenous people.

When Indigenous people first began earning wages in the mid to late 1960s, they pooled their resources to purchase vehicles (Altman & Hinkson 2007b; Hamilton 1987). A robust 'vehicular culture' has developed over the ensuing decades as evidenced through disproportionate investments in vehicle acquisition and

maintenance despite the often prohibitive costs, particularly in isolated contexts (Lawrence 1991). Such is the value of being able to be mobile and, in some cases, to regulate the movement of others for social gain (Smith 2002).

This 'vehicular culture' is one of the common underlying threads that link Australia's many socio-culturally diverse Indigenous peoples. A widespread emphasis on and interest in 'the motorcar' exemplifies the central place of mobility in Indigenous lived experience. It is fundamental to their past, their present and according to Smith (2002), their future. In describing the aspirations of the central Cape York Indigenous population, he identified a common 'underlying stress on the continuing importance of mobility, emphasising garages, petrol and diesel, all aspects of the region's vehicular culture' (Smith 2002: 3–4). He added:

> Working in the region for the past seven years, it has become obvious to me that Aboriginal understandings of development, alongside most aspects of Aboriginal life, remain fundamentally linked to continuing mobility (Smith 2002: 4).

However, the current climate of global financial crisis and unstable fuel prices, coupled with persistent Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage, will aggressively test the present union between Indigenous mobility and vehicular cultures. Given that much temporary mobility already maximises available resources (i.e. cars are almost always full and travel costs are already shared collectively) choices will become starker. Either many Indigenous people will have to make significant spending cuts in other areas in order to maintain current vehicle-based mobility practices, or, vehicular travel will decrease. Either way, global oil prices are likely to radically transform future Indigenous temporary mobility practices.

Over the last 50 years, there have also been dramatic changes to human communication practices. Access to telephones and faxes has certainly increased Indigenous people's capacity to organise logistically complex ceremonial activities (Young & Doohan 1989). However, there is very little available research that examines the impact of emerging communication technologies (mobile phones, email, web-based virtual networking programs) on Indigenous temporary mobility practices. Anecdote suggests that these communication technologies rarely alleviate the need or desire for face–to–face interaction. However, there is certainly no recent research to either support or refute these claims.

Given these sweeping changes over time, it is somewhat remarkable that certain aspects of Indigenous temporary mobility practices have remained consistent over time. For example, contemporary descriptions of kin in facilitating and commanding temporary movement could in many cases be lifted from the pages of studies dating back to the 1950s. The principles of reciprocity, collective responsibility, and kin-based networking remain essentially the same. On a more basic level, temporary mobility practices persist despite numerous administrative attempts to constrain and confine them (Prout & Howitt forthcoming). Though a somewhat obvious point to make, it is a foundational consideration when approaching the issue of future policy responses to temporary mobility.

POLICY OPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

While health, education and housing policy sectors have Indigenous sub-sectors (or Indigenous-specific strategies) in most States, Territories and at the Federal level, there is no Indigenous mobility policy sub-sector or strategy to assess or build upon. Historically though, Indigenous-specific policies and legislation have clearly been informed by particular interpretations of Indigenous mobility and have subsequently influenced Indigenous spatiality in very tangible ways (Prout & Howitt forthcoming). Future efforts to intentionally and systematically address Indigenous temporary mobility in policy contexts must therefore begin with a more reflexive assessment of the potential implications for Indigenous spatiality of planned Indigenous-specific policies in programs across various sectors.

What, for example, will be the likely demographic impacts of tying welfare payments to school attendance? The Federal Government currently plans to implement this policy in at least six trial sites in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and has already begun to do so in four Cape York communities (Behrendt & McCausland 2008). With the stated aim of improving Indigenous student education outcomes, the policy effectively operates by imposing sanctions on the guardians of truant and transient students.[10] To begin with, there are logistical complexities associated with, firstly, attempting to cater to additional (and potentially behaviourally-challenging) students in school facilities that are already resource-poor and, secondly, determining where welfare sanctions should be imposed when care for children can often be spread across several guardians (e.g. Henry & Daly 2001). The policy also raises a further important question related specifically to the current analysis: is wholesale population sedentarisation a just and desirable policy outcome? It would no doubt reduce some resource wastage and improve service continuity in the health, housing and education sectors that continue to apply conventional delivery frameworks when servicing highly mobile populations (Prout 2008). However, policies that conceptualise Indigenous temporary mobility practices a behavioural risk factor that must be curbed, or an obstacle that must be overcome, betray partial and fragmented conceptualisations of these population dynamics. They are therefore unlikely to lead to improved outcomes and a greater sense of wellbeing for Indigenous peoples.

The research cited throughout this paper suggests that some temporary mobility is born out of a sense of alienation from mainstream social and economic institutions. It follows then that the more widespread uptake of well-canvassed approaches to appropriately engaging with Indigenous peoples (e.g. Belfrage 2007; Beresford 2001; Beresford & Gray 2006; Bond 2005; de Plevitz 2007; Gray & Beresford 2001; Partington & Gray 2003; Pholeros, Rainow & Torzillo 1993) would naturally reduce these kinds of movements. However, the available data also indicate that much temporary mobility is related to the promotion of cultural security, the execution of protective behaviours and the preservation of emotional wellbeing. It is, in essence, a highly adaptive behaviour that is often fundamental to socio-cultural identity and security (Beckett 1988; Birdsall 1988; Hamilton 1987; Peterson 2004; Prout 2007; Smith 2004; Young & Doohan 1989). Many mobility studies describe temporary movement as an enduring kind of social lubricant that enables individuals and groups to avoid and resolve conflicts (see Brady 1999; Prout 2007), and to escape the negative aspects of mainstream acculturation—such as drinking and gambling—that are often associated with life in larger settlements and centres. As Smith (2002: 18) explained in the Cape York context, temporary mobility allowed individuals to:

> ... remove themselves from the stresses of town-life for shorter and longer periods, and which also provided the means to secure a better diet, decrease expenditure and improve incomes, cut down on their own drinking and that of relatives and begin to explore longer-term means to shift the trajectory of their lives and those of their families.

When the state intervenes to deliberately emplace structural impediments around Indigenous mobility, and Indigenous people are forced to live more permanently in cohabitation with other Indigenous groups, anti-social behaviours can increase and well-being can plummet. In the mid 1990s, in response to the recommendations of a report, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health reduced and removed grant components to provide vehicles to the Coen Region Aboriginal Corporation as part of the outstation movement in central Cape York (Smith 2002). Movement in Coen and its surrounding outstations would now be increasingly difficult. Smith (2002) notes that there was a resultant increase in alcohol consumption and violence (including domestic violence) in Coen during this time. As Brooks and Kral (2007) note, many Indigenous people prefer to frequently visit one another rather than all live in the same community because of the conflict

the latter arrangement can engender. Indeed, Walter (2004) suggests that for many Indigenous people, being personally mobile, not being institutionalised, and not experiencing trouble within kinship networks are fundamental components of the concept of good health.

Aside from these considerations, there is also a long historical record of policies, legislation, and practices that have sought to more directly control and contain Indigenous mobilities. Generally speaking, the results have been widespread physical alienation of many Indigenous children and adults from their kin and country: both primary cultural moorings. These policies also engendered more movement over increasingly longer distances as family groups were 'disrupted and scattered' across regions (Young & Doohan 1989). The two most pervasive themes of the existing literature, summarised in the preceding contextual analysis, are the highly adaptive and persistent nature of Indigenous mobility practices through time, and the pressing need for policy responses that engage with these dynamics rather than seek to erase them. How then, do policy-makers move beyond programs, initiatives and practices that either ignore Indigenous temporary mobilities or attempt to eradicate them? How do they develop service continuity to fluid populations; how do they manage population influxes and exoduses from particular locales; how do they determine the appropriate mix and location of services for Indigenous populations?

CONTEXTUAL RESPONSES

One of the central corollaries of the preceding analysis is that the answers to these questions will vary across space depending upon the context and setting of Indigenous temporary mobility practices. It is therefore unproductive to generate prescriptive and generic policy responses. Temporary mobility practices are not necessarily contained within existing administrative jurisdictions such as State and Territory borders. Indeed movements often transcend these boundaries. For these reasons, the literature advocates regionalised—rather than State/Territory or National—responses to temporary mobilities (Finalyson, Daly & Smith 2000; Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006; Prout 2007; Young & Doohan 1989; Young 1990). These regions may be determined through an understanding of the physical and structural geographies of temporary mobility, and/or aggregated individual mobility networks that often correspond to these contextual factors. Young (1990) suggests that these Indigenous-defined mobility networks can be determined by asking individuals which places they usually visit, and then mapping the aggregated responses for each settlement or community, be it a small outstation or a city suburb.

The answers to complex policy questions will also vary across sectors. Temporary movement presents unique challenges for health, housing, education, and other social services. Within this reframed, regionalised scale and geography therefore, policy responses must be uniquely negotiated by individual sectors. These responses may range from simple administrative adjustments—such as improving intra-departmental communication and record transferring systems—to radical restructuring of the style and methods of service delivery. For example, in small communities in the tropical north, schools years might be adjusted so that concentrated instruction takes place in the wet season when mobility is dramatically decreased, and longer holiday periods correspond with the high mobility dry season (Schwab 1998). Alternatively, schools might become more mobile to match particular movement patterns (e.g. Fogarty 2005). In regions where particular schools may form part of a clearly distinguishable mobility circuit, a more streamlined structure might be trialled whereby each school becomes a campus linked by a common administration within which the movement of students is more easily accommodated.

Some potential initiatives to address Indigenous student mobility canvassed in the existing literature—such as creating electronic portfolios that students take with them from school to school (e.g. McRae et al. 2000; Wyatt Carbines & Robb 2004)—seem fanciful in most contexts. Few schools that experience significant student turnover are resourced with human and physical infrastructure at anywhere near the level that is required for such an undertaking. Other potential responses seem more readily adoptable.

As Memmott, Long and Thompson (2006) have suggested, temporary movement is often fundamental to Indigenous cultural learning and yet detrimental to mainstream learning. There is perhaps, though, an opportunity to merge the two types of learning by using mobility as a mainstream education technique (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006). Students could be tasked with recording their mobility experiences as they unfold, inquiring about the significance of their movements from older family members; in essence, using their travels as research opportunities. Reporting these narratives back to teachers would increase literacy, provide a bridge for teachers between the worlds of their students inside and outside of the classrooms, develop students' critical thinking skills, and move mainstream education beyond the walls of the school.[11]

In the health sector, efficient electronic record systems are commonly cited as an essential strategy for effectively servicing mobile populations. Other strategies for intentionally engaging with fluid local population bases in more sparsely settled regions include equipping a base of local Indigenous health workers with broad and general skills, and linking them via teleconference to specialists when specific, complex cases present (Prout 2007). Clearly, Indigenous mobility practices require unique and innovative responses across policy sectors. However, each service sector faces similar data deficits that, if improved, could significantly improve the ways in which various sectors respond to changing and emerging population needs.

IMPROVING DATA COLLECTION

As previously discussed, statistical measures of Indigenous temporary mobility are scant and underdeveloped. So too are the methodologies to produce such data. The national five-yearly census has very limited data application with regard to Indigenous temporary mobility. It does not attempt to measure these population dynamics, and it is not designed to enumerate what is referred to in the literature as 'service populations'. Household surveys can be effectively designed to estimate service populations (e.g. Brooks & Kral 2007; Taylor 1998; Warchivker, Tjapangati & Wakerman 2000). However, because they are resource and time-intensive and require established trust relationships between the respondent and the survey administrator, they are only realistic possibilities at localised scales.

As instruments for measuring the temporal dimensions of population flows (quantitative data regarding frequency and duration) and the factors that shape temporary mobilities (qualitative data), household surveys are questionable at any scale. Such surveys rely on participant's memories to quantify the frequency, direction, and scale of their movement. Particularly mobile individuals are unlikely to be able to recall all such movements—especially over lengthy timeframes. Further, because movement is such a natural process that may receive little conscious consideration from such individuals, asking them to systematically recount such details can be irritating for respondents. Household surveys also require the pre-emptive construction of imposed categories of 'reasons for movement' that will likely mask or reduce the complex realities. In essence, surveys produce general, though far from robust, quantitative and qualitative data regarding Indigenous temporary mobility in any given region.

Administrative data is one alternative to the census and household surveys in building a more robust baseline of data regarding the volume, frequency and scale of Indigenous population flows in particular areas. Understanding the potential of such data to identify and describe real 'service populations', a number of reports and reviews have recommended improvements to administrative data systems (Bourke, Rigby & Burden 2000; Groome & Hamilton 1995; KPMG Consulting 2002; Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). It is somewhat surprising then that so little administrative data seems to be systematically and carefully collected and analysed as part of compulsory reporting processes. Many services have poor records of the number, characteristics and particulars of Indigenous people who access

their service. As Memmott, Long and Thompson (2006: 106) suggest: 'One would have thought that such information would be critical to ensuring ongoing funding, justifying expenditure to support requests for additional funds'.

Service populations

The concept of the service population is well established in the temporary mobility literature (Bell 1998, 2001; Bell & Ward 1998, 2000; Taylor 1998; Young 1990; Warchivker, Tjapangati & Wakerman 2000). Essentially it recognises that the pool of individuals who access and use services in a particular location is greater than the total resident populations of that locale. For example, in their survey of Oak Valley community population in South Australia, Palmer and Brady (1988) found that although the average resident population was 69 people, over the course of one year, at least 286 different individuals had resided in the community. Similarly, in their population survey in a remote Central Australian community, Warchivker, Tjapangati & Wakerman (2000) found that although only 174 individuals had been present for all four surveys a total of 422 different individuals were enumerated in the community over the course of the year. In his analysis of Indigenous temporary mobility, Taylor (1998) constructed three population types: a base or de facto population of usual residents, a potential population that includes all possible visitors to a locale or region, and a service population that exists somewhere between these the two.

In the context of Indigenous temporary mobility, the broad concept of a service population and its mobility dynamics has a range of implications and applications. It is useful for shires, community councils, and housing and infrastructure providers, who need to devise human and infrastructure plans that consider the use of facilities by non-residents and can cope with population peaks and troughs in specific settlements (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006). Pholeros, Rainow & Torzillo (1993) for example argue that it is critical that essential service providers know the size of the potential service population of any particular locale, and any patterns of flows through it, in order to design housing and health hardware that can cope with the maximum load identified. One strategy for more systematically incorporating Indigenous temporary mobility into funding allocation frameworks is for governments to better resource local community councils and outstation resource centres (in smaller settlements), and shires (in larger settlements) to proactively collect data that may provide an indication of population flows. Such data may include power and water usage patterns, tenancy or store data from community organisations (e.g. Brooks & Kral 2007), or Aboriginal hostel usage data in larger centres (e.g. Taylor 1998).

Within any given locality, health and education services will have unique service populations, with particular mobility dynamics, that are not necessarily the same as those relevant to housing and infrastructure providers. In the context of these services, the 'service population' is a more useful measure than an Estimated Resident Population count as a basis for planning service delivery, because it shifts the focus of delivery from servicing *locations* to servicing *peoples*. The service population comprises both 'residents' and 'visitors', eliminating these highly problematic and arguably irrelevant distinctions. The following two sections canvass a number of potential improvements to, and applications of, administrative education and health data to assist policy-makers in actively engaging with Indigenous temporary mobility dynamics.

Education

All public, private and independent schools in Australia collect some kind of data regarding student attendance and enrolments. These are not pure measures of mobility. Student absences, for example, may indicate either transiency or truancy. Enrolments and exits data provide a more direct measure of mobility. However, if a student leaves one school and does not enrol in another for the duration of their travel, they are simply marked 'absent' within the school at which they are enrolled. Further, if both enrolment and attendance data are consistent, it is impossible to determine from numbers alone whether this reflects a

consistent school population or simply equal in-flows and out-flows. Nevertheless, systematic tracking of student attendance and enrolment data at school sites can provide some measure of Indigenous temporary mobility amongst school service populations. For example, in 1999 one Northern Territory school conducted a student mobility-specific analysis using administrative data linked to individual student records. In that year, they recorded 407 enrolments and exits for a net gain of seven students. In 2000, they recorded 435 transactions (enrolments and exits) for a net gain of 13 students. From their analysis, the school estimated that their student population effectively replaces itself every 12–15 months (KPMG Consulting 2002).

The available literature, however, suggests that there remain significant questions about the integrity of existing basic attendance and enrolment data that are locally constructed at each school site and then aggregated and compared at larger temporal and geographical scales (e.g. Bourke, Rigby & Burden 2000; KPMG Consulting 2002). These data are not necessarily collected, or updated, in the same way or at the same time intervals across geographical and administrative jurisdictions. Absences may be defined, recorded, and stored differently from school to school, system to system (state/private/independent), and jurisdiction to jurisdiction, rendering comparisons virtually baseless. For example, some schools where Indigenous students are in the minority (particularly in urban settings) do not disaggregate administrative data by Indigenous status. This may contribute to recorded differences between Indigenous attendance levels in remote and urban settings (Bourke, Rigby & Burden 2000).

In addition, 'explained' and 'unexplained' absences are often defined differently across school networks. Some schools mark children as in attendance if they are away from school, but involved in a culturally educational activity (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). Some students also change their names depending on where they are staying and whose care they are in. These name changes can potentially lead to active enrolments at more than one school and consequently skew attendance data. Incentives also affect administrative data collection procedures. If school resourcing is determined primarily by enrolments, administrators may be less inclined to 'exit' students who have been absent from school for a considerable period, but whose patterns of mobility indicate that they are likely to return at some point in the future. Conversely, if school evaluations are based on attendance measures, administrators may be more inclined to update their enrolment records more regularly since absences are measured as actual attendance against enrolment records. These strategic practices, which may vary according to the discretion of each administrator, affect the integrity of both data sets.

Intentionally engaging with Indigenous temporary mobility practices in education policy frameworks will require a commitment across States and Territories to implement the recommendations of the numerous reports that have advocated for more consistent definitions and procedures in the collection of student enrolment and attendance data. It will also require that *all* education departments build a mobility measure into existing funding indexes, as in Victoria and South Australia. Such a measure, which may see additional or specialised resources being directed to schools with highly transient student populations, would provide incentives to school administrators to record accurate mobility data and develop innovative programs or initiatives to engage with highly mobile students.

Health

Both public and Indigenous-specific health agencies also collect demographic data regarding all patients who present to their services. These data could potentially provide a robust measure of the size of the actual population that each facility services. In many cities, regional centres, towns and settlements, this service population is considerably larger than the resident population. Indeed Memmott, Long and Thompson (2006) found that health services in the Georgina River district service just as many 'visitors' as they do 'usual residents'.

Outpatient data could also potentially be analysed to map the spatial dimensions of the movement of those who access a given service but identify their 'usual residence' as within the jurisdiction of another service. This could provide some measure of the spatial dimensions of mobility and, if analysed longitudinally, a proportion of the total movement through a particular locale.

The ethics of measurement and surveillance

In improving the quality and focus of administrative data to better quantify the frequency, volume and scale of Indigenous service population dynamics, policy makers must, of course, grapple with the complex and culturally sensitive ethics of measurement and surveillance. Taylor (2008b) notes that for many Indigenous people, the very concept of measurement is closely associated with past oppressive administrative practices and policies (see also Smith 1999). Tracking Indigenous mobility processes through administrative data, without the knowledge or consent of those individuals whose movements are being traced, has the capacity to be construed as an exercise in surveillance: further entrenching Indigenous peoples as the subject of the 'colonial gaze'. In negotiating this ethics of measurement, policy makers could draw from parallel and productive contemporary dialogues between academic and Indigenous communities about the authorisation, design, conduct, interpretation, dissemination and ownership of research and data involving Indigenous peoples (e.g. Backhouse 1999; Hodge & Lester 2006; Howitt & Stephens 2005; Ivanitz 1999; Louis 2007; Menzies 2001; Miller & Rainow 1997; Reed & Peters 2004; Smith 2001).

Of course, improving the collection of administrative data to use as measures of Indigenous temporary mobility and service populations is not an end it itself, but rather an important step in the overall goal of determining appropriate, regional, sector-based policy responses to these population dynamics. Once the issues of power and control in data collection, protection, and ownership have been addressed, administrative data can be placed within the broader body of contextual knowledge regarding temporary mobility (described throughout this analysis) to determine appropriate policy responses. In combining qualitative narrative with a quantitative context regarding service population flows, policy-makers will have a far more robust foundation from which to engage with these complex Indigenous population dynamics.

SETTING THE AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE IN POLICY AND RESEARCH

By systematically and comparatively drawing together the existing disparate Australian Indigenous mobility literature, this paper has developed a comprehensive contextual picture of contemporary Indigenous short-term mobility practices. It has demonstrated that although complex, contingent, and individualistic, these population dynamics are rational and purposeful. It has also demonstrated that some aspects of Indigenous temporary mobility practices are incalculable. The duration and inception of many movements are often unpredictable, and the demographic and spatial dimensions may defy simple categorisation. Conversely, the factors that shape mobility are strategic, patterned, and largely, knowable. Understanding these factors provides unique opportunities for better engaging with the unpredictable components of these population dynamics in policy contexts.

Clearly though, there are fundamental information deficits regarding Indigenous temporary mobility practices that must be addressed in policy and research contexts. There are, for example, few statistical measures of Indigenous temporary mobility. Those that do exist are not built into conventional measurement frameworks, and are based on often unreliable data extracted from existing administrative records. Improving the way these data are collected and used is essential to making these movements, in the words of Morphy (2007c), more 'legible to the state'.

The analysis also revealed a significant paucity of research regarding urban Indigenous temporary mobility trends. Most existing Indigenous mobility studies are concentrated in the arid desert lands of central Australia, and the tropical north. Only one analysis over the past 20 years has examined Indigenous mobility processes in a densely populated coastal region, and even that analysis was part of a broader anthropological study concerning family and social identity amongst Nyungar people (Birdsall 1990). As a consequence of this skewed research record, the characteristics of mobility and movers in urban areas are largely unknown and obscured. Temporary mobility becomes, perhaps inaccurately, associated only with central, northern and more sparsely populated regions of Australia. Similarly, although most mobility studies identify a 'core' of Indigenous people who are relatively immobile or sedentary within their communities, very little is known about these individuals and what draws them to less mobile lifestyles. Further research that explores the characteristics of these individuals and what factors shape their spatial practices is critical to developing a more nuanced and holistic picture of Indigenous temporary mobility practices.

Finally, the analysis identified significant research gaps concerning temporary mobility engendered by mainstream employment and economic engagement. Although there is considerable anecdotal recognition that such mobilities are commonplace, no research has expressly sought to document these kinds of movements. Indeed, given that much of the existing research derives from anthropological inquiry, the literature is biased toward explicating the socio-cultural drivers of movement, with a limited analysis of the broader structural setting of mobility. The consequent tendency is to strongly associate Indigenous temporary mobility with disengagement from the formal economy and mainstream social services. While there is undoubtedly a relationship between economic disengagement and temporary mobility practices, the available literature does not provide an adequate base from which to make substantive claims about the strength of this association.

These information and research gaps are significant. Perhaps the most glaring omission in the existing literature, however, is any systematic exploration of existing effective strategies for actively engaging with and efficiently servicing highly mobile and transient individuals. As Young and Doohan (1989) have noted, Indigenous temporary mobility practices will always pose practical challenges for service delivery, no matter how well understood they are, because there are aspects of these population dynamics that are contingent and thus 'unknowable'. How those 'unknowables' are innovatively and flexibly integrated into service delivery frameworks therefore becomes increasingly significant.

Almost 20 years ago, Young and Doohan delivered a foundational report that canvassed many of the challenges associated with delivering fixed services to mobile Indigenous populations (Young & Doohan 1989). Many of the concepts and arguments presented subsequently by Young (1990), and repeated throughout this analysis, have circulated sporadically in scholarly and bureaucratic debates and dialogues for almost three decades without ever being systematically addressed in practice. At least in part, this policy paralysis is likely due to an uncertainty about how, once better data is available, services might be systematically restructured to better engage with Indigenous temporary mobility practices. Exploring questions of best practice is therefore perhaps the most innovative and productive way forward in both policy and research regarding Indigenous mobility practices. Where, for example, are the small-scale programs and initiatives that are successful in engaging with Indigenous temporary mobility practices, and what makes them effective?

As Hunt (2008) has stressed, there has been an enduring focus within the media and public discourse on the failures of governments, and Indigenous peoples themselves, to 'close the gaps'. There has also been an obsession with new 'ideas' in Indigenous affairs. Such emphases, Hunt argues, can obscure the highly productive and positive work of many successful (and often chronically under- or sporadically-

funded) initiatives in Indigenous affairs. In the context of Indigenous temporary mobility, it seems both economically and culturally wise to build upon 'what works' as both a means of improving service delivery and as a unique window of understanding regarding these population dynamics.

The notion of exploring best practice also seems inextricably linked to facilitating greater engagement of Indigenous perspectives regarding many of the issues discussed throughout this analysis. Indigenous mobility practices have been the subject of ongoing policy interventions but problematically, as Taylor (1989) has noted, Indigenous people have rarely been engaged in discussions about and explanations of the relationship between mobility and policy. As an understanding of Indigenous mobilities grows within any given geographical area, so too will the possibilities of framing service delivery policy and practices in ways that more closely match the needs and aspirations of Indigenous clients. A future of co-existing spatialities, marked by efficiency and equity in service delivery policy and practice, is fundamentally predicated on a methodology that intentionally listens to and engages with the voices of those at the margins.

NOTES

1. 'The state' is an admittedly simplistic way of encapsulating all levels of government, their administrative practices and jurisdictional influences. Whilst some may argue that this is a falsely reductionist frame of reference, it is the lens through which many Indigenous people understand and interpret mainstream intervention into their livelihoods and domains.

2. See series introductory note.

3. It seems appropriate to describe these studies as non-Indigenous attempts to understand Indigenous mobility since they are almost exclusively (with the exception of Foster et al. 2005) designed, interpreted and presented by non-Indigenous researchers.

4. Birdsall (1988) adopted aliases for some of the towns in her fieldwork region in order to preserve the confidentiality of her research participants.

5. There are perhaps two noteworthy exceptions here. First, divergent policies regarding 'native administration' in Queensland and the Northern Territory during the early 1900s altered traditional mobility practices of Aboriginal groups in the Georgina River district (Memmott, Long & Thompson 2006). Second, many anecdotal reports suggest that there is currently significant temporary movement away from the Northern Territory as a result of the administrative restrictions imposed by the year-old NTER. (For a comprehensive critique of the rationale for, roll-out and implications of the NTER see Altman & Hinkson 2007a).

6. Somewhat surprisingly, virtually no research has been undertaken into mobility in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

7. Brooks & Kral (2007) innovatively analysed 'cash advance' records from the store to determine the approximate volume of visitors to the store, and their communities of origin, over a one year period.

8. Birdsall-Jones & Christensen (2007) suggest that in part, this shift in roles was engendered by socioeconomic transitions that occurred most markedly during the Assimilation era—with men increasingly away from their families, working on stations, railways, and other unskilled labour roles while women remained in towns with their children in order to adhere with colonial expectations of regular school attendance. They also describe an enduring gender role dichotomy of women/family, men/country that serves to further alienate Aboriginal men in 'settled regions'.

9. There is an ongoing and highly public debate about whether CDEP schemes actually facilitate meaningful mainstream economic engagement for Indigenous people.

10. Although the policy will apparently make concessions for mobility, it is unclear how these concessions will be operationalised.

11. This kind of information exchange would of course require clear and mutually agreed guidelines about the protection and ownership of culturally sensitive information and Indigenous knowledges.

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