

**ROUTES AND BRANCHES:**  
**RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY AMONG ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN**  
**WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**by**

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## **PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

“G’day, cuz, how ya goin’?” is a customary greeting between Murdis, Wiimpatyaa, or other Aboriginal people of western NSW. If the person being greeted is unknown, the greeting is usually followed by “Where ya from?” *Routes and Branches* was conceived as a result of my reflections not only on where Aboriginal people in my study area were from, but also, where they had been, where they were going, and why. These questions are at the heart of many quality of life issues for Aboriginal people in western NSW, as elsewhere.

This thesis arose from my many years’ engagement with Aboriginal communities in far western NSW. Mobility was clearly an issue with positive and negative ramifications both for members of these communities and for service providers. I am grateful to the communities, organisations and individuals with whom I have worked for providing me with the motivation and the basis for a study which I hope will, in turn, provide a more informed approach to policy formulation and service delivery, and thus improve the circumstances of Aboriginal people in the study area. I would particularly like to acknowledge the former ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council and the Community Working Parties in my study area for supporting my research.

This study was made possible by the participation of over two hundred informants who were kind enough to contribute their time, thoughts and experiences to this study. Collection of survey data relied upon the help of a team of dedicated, enthusiastic and able research assistants. I am grateful to Bilyara Bates, Barry Edwards, Blackie Gordon, Trish Johnson, Betty Pearce and Bruce Shillingsworth for their diligence in interviewing members of their communities. The value of their contribution to this study is incalculable.

Pre-testing of the survey instrument was undertaken with the help of a number of Aboriginal residents of Armidale who originated within my study area. Thanks to Lorina Barker for co-ordinating her contacts within the community, and thanks also to the community members who assisted me to refine the survey instrument.

I shall be eternally grateful for the patience, energy, enthusiasm and sheer hard work of my supervisors, Dr Barbara Rugendyke, Professor Jim Walmsley and Dr Fran Rolley. Their thoughtful advice was of tremendous value in shaping this

study, and their unwavering support and encouragement throughout the period of my candidature provided inspiration.

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I am grateful to Sarah Martin for reviewing Chapter 5 and Appendix F. Sarah's knowledge of the history of Aboriginal and European contact in western NSW, and her understanding of Aboriginal culture in the region, are unparalleled. Her critique was essential in ensuring that these sensitive and subtle areas were safely negotiated.

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In particular, I wish to thank Michael Roach, cartographer in the School of Human and Environmental Studies at UNE, for preparing the maps in Chapters 1, 4, 6, 8 and 10. His willingness to help, and the accuracy and timeliness of his work, were of tremendous assistance.

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Thanks to my family and friends for not asking too often how my thesis was progressing, and for still being there at the end of the process. Thanks especially to Cliff, who drove thousands of kilometres, shouldered more than his fair share of our practice workload, learned to cook, tolerated the periodic disintegration which I understand is common in PhD students, and kept me going when all I wanted to do was run away to art school. His support, both moral and practical, made this thesis possible.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study of residential mobility among Aboriginal people was undertaken in ten communities in far-western and north-western NSW. Over the last century, the implementation of Aboriginal affairs policy in this area has resulted in the wholesale disruption of ties with traditional country, and episodes of forced mobility. More recently, rural restructuring has radically diminished the economic base which formerly sustained Aboriginal people through the availability of pastoral employment.

The research was prompted by casual observation of mobility in the study area, and its service-related consequences, over a period of several years. The study sought:

1. To examine, describe and explore reasons for the spatial and temporal patterns of contemporary mobility among Aboriginal people in the study area
2. To explore the historical and contemporary influences, including availability of services, resources and facilities, on these mobility patterns;
3. To assess the cultural and practical importance to Aboriginal people in the study area of the ability to move.

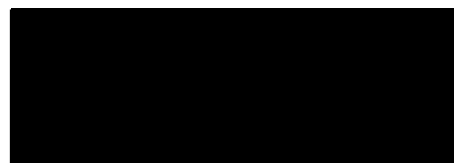
The results of the study indicate that Aboriginal people in the study area are more mobile than non-Indigenous study area residents, but less so than Aboriginal people in less remote parts of NSW. Mobility is increasing over time. Levels of mobility vary with age, family structure and with socio-economic variables, including labour force status and housing tenure. Lack of permanent employment, and less secure forms of housing tenure are associated with high levels of mobility. The leading reasons for movement are family and housing related.

Mobility patterns conform to a number of types: movement for opportunity, to larger centres such as Broken Hill, Dubbo or Orange; movement from larger centres or within the study area to be with family; return to country; and long-standing movement patterns within the study area associated with familiarity

Movement is affected by provision of services, facilities and resources and vice versa. Provision of employment opportunities and Aboriginal-identified social housing are particularly influential in this regard. Development of economic and human services policy in the absence of an understanding of these influences is likely to have adverse outcomes in terms of place attachment and mobility for Aboriginal people.

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Judith Burns

## **GLOSSARY**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEDP	Aboriginal Employment Development Policy
AFVRS	Aboriginal Family Voluntary Resettlement Scheme
AHC	Aboriginal Housing Corporation/Co-operative
AHO	Aboriginal Housing Office
AIATSIS	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ALT	Aboriginal Lands Trust
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
APB	Aborigines Protection Board
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographical Classification
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AWB	Aborigines Welfare Board
BCP	Basic Community Profile
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CD	Census Collection District
CDEP	Community Development Employment Project
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSU	Charles Sturt University
CWP	Community Working Party
DoH	NSW Department of Housing
DSRD	NSW Department of State and Regional Development
FRAC	Family Resettlement Aboriginal Corporation
HFA	Housing for Aboriginals programme
HOAL	Housing on Aboriginal Land
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
ILC	Indigenous Land Corporation
IP	Indigenous Profile
IPTAAS	Isolated Patients' Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
LFS	Labour force status
MPRHC	Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation
MPS	Multi-Purpose Health Service

NATSIS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey 1994
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002
NFA	No fixed address
NILF	Not in labour force
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
n.s.	Not stated
RFDS	Royal Flying Doctor Service
RTA	Residential Tenancy Agreement
RTT	Residential Tenancy Tribunal
SD	Statistical Division
SLA	Statistical Local Area
SSD	Statistical Subdivision
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UAM	United Aborigines Mission
UFW	Unincorporated Far West

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