Chapter 1

Social Space and the Geography of Land Allocation Practice on the Southern Gulf Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula

1.1 Introduction

The Gulf of Carpentaria Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula extend over an area of approximately 50,000 square kilometres and has a population of about 2,600 people (ABS 2001), almost all of whom live in townships at Aurukun, Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw (Figure 1.1). More than 90% of these people are Aboriginal and have a lifestyle, which is markedly different from those found elsewhere in the Peninsula as well as in European Australia. A unique suite of cultural, geographical and historical circumstances has created an Aboriginal enclave in the Gulf Lowlands that sets it apart as a distinct region of North Australia. According to Von Sturmer comparable enclaves are

‘areas in which the dominant social life and culture are Aboriginal, where the major language or languages are Aboriginal, where the system of knowledge is Aboriginal: in short, where the resident Aboriginal population constitutes the public’ (cited in Rowse 1992, 18).

The Lowlands are biogeographically distinct from the rest of the Peninsula, and are characterised by broad river floodplains, low relief, and seasonal inundation and extreme flooding from monsoonal rainfall that isolates the region by road from the rest of the world for about six months in any seasonal cycle. The Lowlands also contain a number of landscapes that have been cited in the academic literature for more than 70 years because of their cultural diversity. Historically, this diversity has been because of the variety of adaptations by local people to their physical environment, to successive church and State administrations, and to the pastoral and mining industries (for instance Chase and Sutton 1981; Gould 1991; McConnell 1931; Sharp 1937, 1952, 1958; Strang 1994, 1997; Suchet 1996; Sutton 1978; Taylor 1984, 1988; Thomson 1939; Von
Figure 1.1 The Gulf Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula (Connell Wagner 1989)
It is a fragmented landscape, which is partitioned into many ‘clan estates’ that can encompass hundreds of placenames, that refer to locales of personal, clan or community significance, and throughout which numerous languages and dialects are spoken.

Within each estate there may be a number of homeland or outstation areas that are the property of kin-related people who share locally recognised rights of occupancy or land use. These rights are mediated by traditional custom or local practice; by historically contingent practice arising from life in mission settlements at Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw or Aurukun and alienation from their traditional country; and, by currently evolving practices which have arisen as a result of increased local autonomy in land management since the transfer of local government powers to these communities in the 1970s and the 1980s, and the introduction of ‘Native Title’ legislation by Federal and State governments in Australia in the 1990s. The latter laws provide some recognition of forms of Aboriginal land tenure that existed prior to the European occupation of Australia. The intercalation of these influences has led to a variety of local land allocation practices since the early 1990s.

This thesis proposes that there is a geography that is implicit to Aboriginal landscapes that allows an explanation of variation in local land allocation practice of large areas of North Australia. The aim of the thesis is to review and explain the geography of local land allocation practice in the 1990s and early 2000s in the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama communities through the identification, representation and analysis of social spaces in each township and in the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape. I have described the cultural, social and geographical differences between the southern and northern Gulf Lowlands elsewhere (Monaghan 2004) and will summarise them in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Two premises underlie my research. The first is that places in a landscape are historically realised phenomena. That is, whether directly occupied or acknowledged from a distance, places are loci of social reproduction and hence the creation of social space. In the sense of this thesis, this means that the reproduction of local land tenure or land use values either through exchange or
inheritance, and in turn the influences of local homeland group, community, or regional government land values; or, of larger scale social phenomena such as migration, or colonisation or sequestration of land on these local values, are identifiable in the landscape. The idea of place as

‘a constantly becoming human product as well as a set of features visible on the landscape’ (Pred 1984, 1).

underlies a body of scholarship that relates sociological theory on the relationships between practice and social structure (Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Casey 1993, 2001; Giddens 1985; Foucault 1972) with geographic concepts of time and space (Adams 1998; Bauman 1993; Lefebvre 1991; Pred 1984, 1986; Soja 1985, 1996). Structuration theory suggests that individual actions at work, or in the family or in the community, are affected by, and in turn affect larger scale 'projects' such as the intentions of local groups of people who are returning to live in their traditional homeland or of regional planning agencies. This dialectic between individual or local action and larger scale social structures is historically and geographically contingent. For instance, on the Gulf Lowlands it is embedded in the influence of differing Church and State administrations, and of the cattle industry, as well as traditional land affiliations. It also depends on the 'biographies' or life histories and personalities of individual people (after Pred 1984), and the connotative values of the places that form their 'social and geographic sphere of knowledge' (after Young and Doohan 1989). Places have 'signification' and 'significance' (after Bourdieu 1984, Lefebvre 1991). The first property refers to their representational role and to the affective values or sense of belonging that they have for people; and the second to their importance, in a scientific sense, as indicators of social process and hence realisations of social space.

This thesis also proposes that there is a spatial dialectic to land allocation practice on the southern Gulf Lowlands; in that the geography of the township, where people live and socialise, reflects the geography of the landscape. This dialectic also reflects the status and influence of people in community life and the kind of practices that they employ to gain access to their traditional country. There are
considerable differences in these geographies between communities, and there are numerous differing geographies within each township that reflect local political life and the relationships that people have with the landscape.

The second premise of my thesis is that key determinants of social structure, such as clan affiliation or kinship relations, can be mapped in geographical space. Individual, homeland group or community scale constructions of social space can be represented in cartographic models of the township and of the landscape. Relative changes in their topological properties over time such as in their accessibility and openness or their closure to other people, or their homogeneity or heterogeneity in terms of their occupation by socially related groups can be analysed, in order to make inferences about the social processes and land allocation practices that have generated them. This latter premise provides a practical basis for understanding the considerable range of aesthetic, social and cultural or economic values that apply to many places in Aboriginal landscapes.

A practical need to understand and represent social and geographical relationships on the southern Gulf Lowlands arose out of my work on community land information systems (CLIS), which were commissioned by the Community councils in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama. Each system is based on inventories and maps of the topography, the natural resources, and the infrastructure such as roads, tracks, fence-lines and boreholes; and traditional and historical places that are of cultural significance to each community. This information had been gathered from historical archives and ethnographies, from aerial photographic interpretation and digital image analysis, and from fieldwork in Pormpuraaw from 1992 onwards, and in Kowanyama from 1996 onwards. These inventories provided information for the assessment of the cultural, biological and economic values of community lands as a basis for land use planning (Monaghan and Taylor 1995; Monaghan 2001; Monaghan 2003a; Monaghan 2003b, Monaghan and Taylor 2003). As with other Aboriginal areas of North Queensland, major Native Title and land management issues arose in this period, and the need for each CLIS to include cartographic representations of local notions of ownership, that could be integrated with datasets of the physical landscape and its resources, became essential for affirmation of ownership of land by local people in
homeland or outstation planning, and in regional land resource assessment and land planning strategies that have been introduced by State and Federal governments since the early 1990s. I had two six month periods of study leave from my position as a lecturer in Spatial Analysis at James Cook University, in Pormpuraaw in 1996 and in Kowanyama in 1997; and, a period of seven months in the employ of Kowanyama Aboriginal Council as relief manager of the community Land and Natural Resource Management Office in 1998. Two months in 1999, and another period of nine months working on projects in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in 2001 and 2002, and of four months in 2003, also allowed me to further develop these representations. In all I have spent almost seven years working and living on the southern Gulf Lowlands. At present, I have been acting as Manager of the Kowanyama Land and Natural Resource Management Office (KLNRMO) since March 2004. My main role as Manager has been to help steer the community through the changes in community governance that are arising from Native Title negotiations in Kowanyama and from the decision by the Queensland government to abolish Aboriginal community council structures that were set up in the 1970s and 1980s and to replace them with Shire administrations like those that are found elsewhere in the mainstream in rural Queensland.

The remainder of this chapter provides an introduction to land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands region and describes the concept of social space from sociological and geographical perspectives, and its applicability to land allocation studies in Aboriginal Australia. It then goes on to describe the specific research aims and concludes with an outline of the organisation of my thesis.

1.2 Land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands

Land allocation is the practice of partitioning landscapes either for differing land uses or for allotting ownership or ‘title’ to areas of land. Any analysis of current land tenure or land use patterns on the Gulf Lowlands requires two views of the landscape. One is abstract (after Lefebvre 1991) and consists of a legal
framework of reserved lease areas set up by the Queensland government in the later nineteenth century, and over which a number of Land Acts that supervise conditions of tenancy and of use have been since been imposed. These Acts have been used to prescribe areas of pastoral, mining, national park or Aboriginal land use in the region. The other is of a physical landscape where indigenous systems of social organisation that permit how, and by whom land may be used; and of clan affiliation that assign responsibility for areas of countryside to landholding groups or individual people, are embedded in physical markers in the landscape, such as lakes, lagoons and trees. Social organisation and clan affiliation are reproduced through kinship, and a totemic system and mythology whose elements including clan totems and personal names, and ‘creation stories’ are embodied in the same physical features and places in the landscape. Their spatial distribution is regarded as inalienable and eternal, and has probably remained unchanged for millennia (Sharp 1937). Kinship or marriage, and clan or ritual affiliations, determine rights of occupancy within any generation. Knowledge of the seasonal distribution of water, of flora and fauna, and of other natural phenomena in the landscape is also selectively distributed through the same mechanisms (Taylor 1984).

Traditionally, indigenous land allocation has had discretionary elements that have made it adaptive to changes in demography, and rights of occupancy and of land use can change within and between families or local landholding groups from generation to generation (Sutton 1996, 1998; Sutton and Rigsby 1987; Taylor 1984; Von Sturmer 1980). The system is also egocentric. Any individual can hold a suite of kin and clan relationships with other members of their community, and of rights of access to the landscape that may be unique to that person alone. For instance, Sutton (1978) has described society amongst the Wik Ngathan people in the Cape Kerweer area of Aurukun as ‘a set of individual – centred personal networks’. This sense of a personal position in a landscape is a feature unique to Aboriginal landscape organisation. It still survives in other remote areas of North Australia such as Arnhem Land and the Kimberleys, mostly on former Aboriginal reserves and in areas where coincident State-allocated mining, grazing or national park leases have permitted its co-existence.
The Gulf Lowlands was first surveyed by Europeans in the 1860s, and were reserved by the Queensland government as an ‘Area for the Occupation of Aboriginal people’ in 1897. Church missions were introduced at Kowanyama, formerly the Mitchell River Mission, in 1903 and at Pormpuraaw, formerly the Edward River Mission, in 1939. The earlier missions were established to protect Aborigines from the genocidal behaviour of pastoralists and miners who were then attempting to ‘settle’ the Far North Queensland frontier (Strang 1994). The Edward River Mission was set up at the request of local people who wished to ‘come in’ from the bush and who had invited the Anglican mission at Kowanyama to establish a settlement for them (Taylor 1984). All of the Gulf Lowland missions came under direct Queensland State government control in the late 1960s. Each community obtained a ‘Deed of Grant in Trust’ (DOGIT) over large areas of land in 1968. Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama received DOGIT status over 4,800 and 2,500 square kilometres of land respectively. These formed reserves for the exclusive occupation of the Aboriginal people within each community, and came under the direct control of the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DAIA).

Ideologically, the intention of the DOGIT system was to alienate Aboriginal people from traditional affiliations to their land and to assimilate them into mainstream Australian society. The rationale of the DOGIT system is explained in more detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The system intended to promote a landscape of small townships, based on the missions, and locally managed enterprises such as cattle operations, of the kind that might be found elsewhere in rural Queensland (Taylor 1984; Kidd 1997). Locally elected Aboriginal councils were introduced in 1968 to provide models for the acculturation of local people into the practices of mainstream civic life. They were intended to perform the functions typical of a small Shire council with two notable exceptions. They could not raise local taxes, and they had no jurisdiction over DOGIT lands outside of the township. They were also under the direct supervision of the local DAIA manager. In an Act of Parliament of 1984 the Queensland government gave greater local control over the management of community land use by transferring the trusteeship of DOGIT lands ‘in perpetuity’ to the locally elected Aboriginal councils, and by arranging for the departure of the DAIA.
administration from DOGIT communities. This Act took effect from 1987. It permitted community management of the use of DOGIT lands but did not remove the powers of the State over the allocation of pastoral, mining or forestry leases within DOGIT areas.

Land allocation practices in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in the 1990s and the early 2000s have to be considered in the context of the Community Councils who received ‘deed title’ in 1987 to areas of land that in many places are also subject to notions of tenure and of rights of use by local homeland groups who have returned or who aspire to return to live in their traditional country. At a regional scale, these practices also have to be considered in light of the differing ideological views of DOGIT tenure and of the autonomy of Community councils, and of the role of local homeland groups in land allocation, that are held by government agencies in mainstream Australia.

1.2.1 Local land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands

The social structures such as kinship and clan and language affiliations that underpin traditional landscape organisation still remain core features of community life on the Gulf Lowlands. For instance, Pormpuraaw had a population of 633 people in 2001 (ABS 2001) of whom 559 are local Aboriginal people. They form three exclusive groups of Wik, Kuuk Thaayore, and Olkola and Bakanh language speakers, and small numbers of Kunjen and Yir Yoront speakers. Overall, at least 11 dialects are spoken in the township. The population is organised into at least 17 different clans or traditional landholding groups, which are actively recognised and declared in daily life in the community. The main focus of community political life is on the establishment of homelands. As in the rest of Cape York Peninsula, there has been an increase in recent years in the number of small homeland settlements that have been established away from the township for family groups to live on. These settlements are usually established in places where the occupants have traditional rights of access, which are generally recognised by the rest of the community.

Community political life is volatile, highly personalised and never dull, and much of it is conducted through the medium of the Community Council. Some people
in Pormpuraaw regard the Council as the arbiter of all land issues. Other people view it as an artificial creation, the relic of a colonial jurisdiction, and only recognise their own kin group or clan affiliation as the operational unit for decision-making on land issues. Nevertheless, some of these people use the Council as a vehicle for satisfying their aspirations, by lobbying Council members or by gaining membership on the Council. Other people of the same ilk act independently of the Council and assert their interest in land by universally declaring whatever rights they feel that they may have to land to other people in the township who may have some clan or kinship ties to the same area. Such declarations may be affirmed by the rest of the community or be disputed in cases where a competing set of rights may exist. Similar polities are found in other communities throughout North Australia, and have been collectively referred to as elements of the ‘Aboriginal Domain’ (for instance Martin 1997; Rowse 1992; Trigger 1988). This domain is characterised by an ‘assertive egalitarianism’, and is

‘highly factionalised and characterised by the complex, highly fluid and often cross-cutting allegiances which individuals have to groupings based on families, clans, ancestral lands and so forth, as well as contemporary forms such as indigenous organisations. A defining characteristic of this domain is an emphasis on the primacy of the ‘local’ over that of the ‘community’ or the region ….’ (Martin 1997, 176).

The 'Domain' is also a feature of civic life in Kowanyama where its interests are mediated through a Land and Natural Resource Management Office (KLNRMO) which was established by the Community council in 1990. A Counsel of Elders whose members represent the traditional land interests of Kowanyama residents also supervises this office. Kowanyama has a population of about 1200 people (ABS 2001) who are largely divided into four main language groups, Kokoberrin, Kokoberra, Yir Yoront and Kunjen and a small number of Olkola speakers. Unlike Pormpuraaw, where the township population has its land interests almost entirely contained within the DOGIT, there are many Kokoberra, Kokoberrin and Olkola and Kunjen people in Kowanyama whose traditional country lies outside of the DOGIT and hence the responsibility of the Community council.
Homeland groups can be cohesive in terms of having a strong territorial focus. They may comprise members of only one or two clans, or they can be more disparate and have members from many clans. In their most secular form, where they are referred to as a ‘mob’ in Aboriginal English, they may comprise many families or economically sharing households who have common language or broad territorial interests. The role of the group leader, or 'boss', as a broker in reconciling secular and traditional interests, is important in such homeland groups. Their authority may not be entirely based in traditional clan or kin affiliations, but may be more due to their personal charisma, or prestige due to their influence with the European administrators or service deliverers who support Aboriginal communities (after Rowse 1992), or because they are, or have formerly been community councillors. There are also leaders who exercise leadership in the traditional sense because of their ritual knowledge of the landscape (after Hiatt 1986; Tonkinson 1988). Other aspiring homeland leaders may include Aboriginal people from other communities who have no stake at all in community land, or no local constituency or landholding group to operate in, but who have positions either as councillors or in community administration that give them some influence in community decision-making. They may make long-term investments in community land by marrying themselves or their children into local homeland groups. These ‘wayfarers’ (after Gerritsen 1982 cited in Rowse 1992) also tend to be well educated and articulate in both Aboriginal and mainstream English. They may not figure prominently in the public negotiation of land issues within the community but are quietly influential in the Community council in determining land use or homeland development policy.

Sometimes, two or more jurisdictions can appear to be at work in community life at any time. Many prominent local people, in particular those involved in lobbying for a homeland, may keep themselves aloof from proceedings at public meetings in the community, irrespective of whether homeland issues are being discussed, or representatives from a government land or natural resource management agency are being received.

‘Aboriginal decision-making and relative autonomy or domains of relative autonomy tend to be concentrated in areas conceived of by outside interests

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largely as private affairs not as part of the public domain, and these are areas 
such as entertainment, gambling, sport and religion or ceremonies or whatever. 
In reality, though, these areas may be the very ones that contain focal and basic 
stages on which Aboriginal public, political and economic life is lived out and in 
which they exercise what to them may be quite critical areas of relatively 
autonomous decision-making. In other words, they are not a side show; they 
might be core activities for people, and core activities for whole communities’ 

1.2.2 Regional scale views of the DOGIT tenure and of local land allocation 
practice
Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama have enjoyed a far greater degree of autonomy in 
the administration of their lands since the mid-1980s than have many of the 
Aboriginal communities on the eastern coast of Cape York Peninsula. Some of 
these have had large areas of their traditional lands, reefs or islands excised as 
nature conservation reserves, either within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park or 
the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area, and are thus under the 
direct jurisdiction of government agencies. The Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama 
communities are remote and are located in places of little grazing or mineral 
value and hence historically have had little competition for their lands or natural 
resources. However, in 1990 the Commonwealth government, through the newly 
created Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Commission (ATSIC), established 
an Aboriginal authority, the Cape York Land Council, to develop policy and 
coordinate management of land and infrastructure issues in Aboriginal 
communities throughout the Peninsula. At about the same time, The Cape York 
Peninsula Land Use Study (CYPLUS) was set up by the Queensland and 
Commonwealth governments for the assessment of the natural resources and the 
biological conservation values of the Peninsula (Connell Wagner 1989; CYPLUS 
1993, 1996). The aim of the study was to prepare plans for future land uses and 
for infrastructural development of the whole region in order to preserve perceived 
natural wilderness values and to enhance economic opportunities for its residents 
in light of these values (CYPLUS 1996).

There are at least three mainstream views of the role of DOGIT community 
councils in land use planning that have prevailed in the above, and in other 
subsequent regional land management strategies. The first is that DOGIT 
councils are very much alike, and operate in similar ways to mainstream local
government bodies, and are thus amenable to regional policy and planning processes. The second is that they represent a diverse range of political interests within their local 'Domain', and their 'modus operandi' may thus differ from community to community; alternatively, they are seen as token administrations that have little autonomy or influence in community or regional land affairs. The first of these views acknowledges the Queensland government's intention that the DOGIT provide a framework for the assimilation of remote Aboriginal communities into the mainstream. The second view acknowledges the influence of a local 'Aboriginal Domain', and sees the DOGIT as a container of diverse, and traditional or historically contingent land interests. The third view is that DOGIT tenure and the Community council have no relevance at all in land issues, and those homeland groups, who are identified through common language, and clan and kinship affiliations within the local Domain, are the agents of land affairs. The latter two ideologies have been reinforced by the recognition in Australian law of 'Native Title', and the existence in certain circumstances of traditional rights to land tenure and natural resource use by Aboriginal people, under the Native Title Act (Commonwealth 1993, 1998).

1.2.2.1 The Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study
The first stage of the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study (CYPLUS) proposed essentially that all future development of the region be undertaken within a biological framework that recognised 'biodiversity' and 'ecologically sustainable development' as the governing criteria in regional land assessment (CYPLUS 1993). These criteria are not always compatible with notions of land ownership or of social justice as perceived by Aboriginal communities (Cordell 1995). The study did not directly include the considerable cultural diversity of the landscapes in the region, or the significance of the landscape to local landowning groups, as objective criteria within the assessment. The words 'culture' and 'tradition' were frequently cited in the first CYPLUS report (1993) but were only ever accompanied by vague definitions of their meaning. Poor communication of the plan and its concepts led to some local suspicion about the motives of CYPLUS. Gulf communities are aware of the loss of control over land and of access to natural resources that has occurred on the east coast of the Peninsula where the concept of 'biodiversity' has formed a major part of the rationale for the
imposition of 'World Heritage Area' jurisdictions over areas that are also subject to local notions of tenure and use (Monaghan 2004). Communities have also had an abiding suspicion of environmental management agencies ever since the unsolicited declaration of national park areas by the Queensland government that occurred in parts of the Gulf Lowlands in the 1970s. At the time, many people in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw regarded CYPLUS as a veiled 'land grab' (Monaghan 2004).

An acceptance of land as a social justice as well as an environmental issue was more apparent in the second stage of the CYPLUS project (1996). By then, the 'Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody' (Johnston 1991) and the 'National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children from their families' (Wilson 1997) had clearly identified the relationship that exists between land and personal well-being and health, education, and law and order issues in Aboriginal society. The Kowanyama community refused to participate in any form of consultation with CYPLUS and declared that the community already managed their own lands and natural resources adequately by the principle of 'self-governance' and under the supervision of traditional landowners (Sinnamon 1997). They were not prepared to negotiate their land tenure or land use rights under the CYPLUS terms of reference. The Pormpuraaw community listened politely but it was apparent after a visit there by the CYPLUS consultation team that the latter still had not communicated their aims clearly. In the days after the visit the Pormpuraaw community was engaged in a number of public and private meetings where priorities for homeland construction were discussed between councillors, traditional landowners and people in the township at large. There was a sense of urgency to these proceedings, almost as if the construction of bunkers or air-raid shelters was being negotiated (Monaghan 2004).

1.2.2.2 The Cape York Land Council
Whilst at first CYPLUS did not adequately acknowledge the importance of the 'Domain' and of local interests in the operation of the councils in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw, or of the differences in styles of governance that can occur between communities because of the local characteristics of the 'Domain', these
features are well understood by the Cape York Land Council (CYLC). It does not accept the DOGIT council as an arbiter of land affairs or of the interests of traditional owners and wherever possible they engage directly with the 'Domain' in each community. The Land Council adopted for itself the role of advocate for the Aboriginal people of the Peninsula. For instance, in 1996 it assumed representation of Peninsular communities in negotiating a 'Heads of Agreement' with a number of bodies including the Cattlemen's Union, and the Australian Conservation Foundation, to reconcile Aboriginal, conservation and pastoral interests in land use on the Peninsula. This was undertaken without consultation of the Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw community councils. Since then both communities have, as far as is possible, excluded the Land Council from any involvement in their land planning or land management activities. The Land Council and its agencies have also tried to take an active role in land management issues within communities, wherever any local people have accepted their agency, and to coordinate homeland development plans and to directly supervise their construction and maintenance. These assumed roles are facilitated by the Land Council’s occasional status as the Native Title Representative Body for the Peninsula under the Native Title Act (Commonwealth 1993, 1998). This means that the Land Council is required to validate all Native Title claims before they proceed to the National Native Title Tribunal or the Federal Court for adjudication. This role can give the Land Council particular influence in negotiating access to potential homelands for those community residents whose traditional country lies outside of the DOGIT area.

Since 1991, there has been an increasing recognition of 'Native Title' in Australian law and of the existence of indigenous land allocation systems that are independent of those employed by the State. The 1993 Act acknowledged the possibility that Native Title may exist on unallocated State lands. The Gulf Lowlands had been extensively prescribed, even in DOGIT areas, as pastoral leasehold under State Land Acts (Queensland 1910, 1962). The effect of these pastoral leases on their right to make a claim for Native Title was challenged by Wik people from Aurukun and Kuuk Thaayoore people from Pormpuraaw in the High Court of Australia in 1996 in an action largely assisted by the Land Council. The High Court judgement recognised the right of the Wik and Thaayoore peoples
to make a claim of Native Title over areas that had been declared pastoral leases by the State government in 1910, because they had never been occupied at any time by any prospective leaseholder. Native Title was recognised in the spirit of the 1993 Act and in the sense that it is understood to have existed prior to European colonisation of the Gulf Lowlands. For the appellants from Pormpuraaw the judgement acknowledged title ‘by reference to their and their predecessors occupation in accordance with a system of rights, duties and interests exercised, acknowledged and enjoyed by Thaayore individuals, families, clans and groups in accordance with their fundamental laws and customs’ (High Court of Australia 1996).

The consternation that had occurred in the Pormpuraaw community following the visit of the CYPLUS team on 11 December 1996 was contrasted by local reaction a couple of weeks later on 23 December 1996 when the Federal High Court allowed the Wik and Thaayore appeal. There was barely a murmur in the township. Wik and Thaayore people went about their daily business as normal. The 'status quo' had not changed. In effect, the judgement acknowledged a ‘State within a State’ where two land allocation systems, and land tenure and land use protocols, one derived from the Australian state and the other from local practice, existed alongside each other. The judgement also implied the primacy of local notions of tenure over those that had been granted to each community council with the transfer of the DOGIT in 1987. It enhanced the potential for local homeland groups to exert their influence in the allocation and use of their traditional lands.

1.3 Social space and local land allocation practice

Changes in the nature of DOGIT tenure since 1987 and the introduction of Land Claim and Native Title legislation in the 1990s have both practical and strategic connotations for the future geography of the southern Gulf Lowlands. From the point of view of practice, any agent, either in Kowanyama or Pormpuraaw, has a potentially wide range of relationships and protocols on which to draw to promote their land interests: whether through their clan or homeland group, or the Community council, or through the regional Land Council or other government
agency. Some agencies, such as those government departments who coordinated the CYPLUS project, wish to see the present pattern of small rural townships administered by a Community council to remain with the landscape planned and administered within a regional framework. Others, mainly local people, wish to see the development of the hinterland around each township for the first time since colonisation, with a constellation of small homeland settlements and tourism, cattle or fishing enterprises that are administered by each homeland group and which are serviced by the community. Others wish to see a landscape of dispersed local homelands that reflect traditional notions of land ownership and where the present townships have little influence in servicing or planning for their needs. These needs are addressed instead through local Aboriginal corporations and are coordinated by a regional Aboriginal agency. These scenarios are not mutually exclusive and it is possible that any amalgam of them may yet develop on the southern Gulf Lowlands.

Simple traditional and non-traditional dichotomies are inadequate for illustrating or explaining the diverse range of land relationships that exist at present and that may exist in the future on the southern Gulf Lowlands. According to Merlan (1989) a number of basic questions need to be asked in a situation of this kind where relationships between Aboriginal people and the State are being examined. They include the following

‘How does one deal with the changing inter-relations amongst practises and their recontextualisations? Why are some practises more resilient than others?’ (Merlan 1989, 5).

Any area of the southern Gulf Lowlands may be subject to a number of potential land allocation strategies at any time. An infrastructure programme to support homeland development; a national park or conservation area nomination; a pastoral lease allocation or an application for a mining exploration permit, may include the interests of State organisations, of community councils, and locally of homeland groups or of individual people. The strategies employed by any of these bodies depend on practices that not only use differing protocols for making land tenure and land use decisions but can also embody differing views of the economic, biological conservation or cultural values of the same landscape. The
notion of ‘social space’ provides a framework within which the interaction of the above land interests may be examined.

Social space is a sphere within which the distribution of political or economic power is contested. It is often represented metaphorically, for instance relative economic status or educational merit are sometimes described in terms of ‘social distance’ or ‘proxemics’, such that people in a society can occupy positions above or below each other, or inside or outside of socially prescribed spaces, depending on how much they own or how prestigious their qualifications are (Bauman 1993; Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Foucault 1972; Giddens 1985; Lefebvre 1991). Social space coincides with geographical space in Aboriginal townscapes and landscapes in North Australia in ways that allow the identification of social ranking in patterns of land tenure and natural resource use and of differences in land allocation practice. My view is that there is a set of topologies that are unique to Aboriginal landscapes, which vary according to local historical and geographical circumstances, and that may be represented cartographically in order to determine the properties of social space in North Australian landscapes. This point of view has grown out of my reading of the literature and out of the research that this thesis goes on to describe. The start of my research was not so positive in outlook. Originally, I intended to look at the wet and dry season mobility characteristics of people within the townscapes and landscapes of the southern Gulf Lowlands as a way of understanding local land allocation practice. My first attempts at understanding the social organisation that underlay land allocation in the region led me down some unproductive paths. Initially, I spent time in Pormpuraaw in trying to understand how social organisation in the form of kinship, and clan, and language or ‘tribe’ affiliation were reflected in daily behaviour and in decision-making. Questions of who spent time with whom and for what reasons led to many sleepless nights as relationships that seemed to be clear to me on one day dissolved the next. It was an exhausting but stimulating time.

Three issues became apparent to me in that time in Pormpuraaw. The theoretical models of kinship and social organisation around which I was trying to organise and understand my observations only offered a partial explanation for the
differing types of behaviour and practice that I saw. The ethnographic models, which provide almost the entire academic basis for explaining social organisation in Aboriginal society, were not comprehensive enough for my needs (for the Gulf Lowlands these include Sharp 1937; Sutton 1978; Taylor 1984 and Von Sturmer 1980). They are not meant to be so. Like other scientific models they are abstractions of a wide range of social behaviours, and attempt to answer other questions about Aboriginal society. Also, what people said to me about their roles and status in community life often did not correspond with their day-to-day actions. This disjuncture between what people say about themselves and what they actually do is not peculiar to Pormpuraaw. It is the way in which many people, Aboriginal or otherwise, represent themselves to the world and it does not imply that there is any intention to mislead others. Rather, the disjuncture between expected and observed behaviour appeared to indicate that there were elements of decision-making not reported because they were generally accepted or ‘taken for granted’ practices. I am not an anthropologist and thus do not have the ethnographic training or intellectual equipment to deal with the relationships between theoretical models and the practice that they describe and actual social practice or behaviour in daily life. Thus I had to change the focus of my research to one where I was more able to understand and deal with these apparent dichotomies.

My commitment to produce mappings of social relations in the community land information system in Pormpuraaw and my reading of ‘The Production of Social Space’ (Lefebvre 1991), ‘Postmodern Ethics’ (Bauman 1993), ‘The Logic of Practice’ (Bourdieu 1977) and ‘Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste’ (Bourdieu 1984) introduced me to the notion of social space and to the realisation that social organisation in daily community life and in the broader land allocation issues of the region might be represented and analysed spatially. So, I took the opportunity to apply my skills as a geographer and spatial analyst to map then current (later 1990s) and pre – 1987 social relations in the townscape and in the landscape of Pormpuraaw, from material on social organisation in ethnographies and surveys by Sharp (1937), Taylor (1984), Reser (1988) and Taylor and Anderson (1996). This took the form of three sets of maps. One map of the township showed the family, clan and tribal affiliations of each household.
The other two showed the same properties for each ‘traditional’ place that has been recorded in the landscape on the basis of the kinship and clan affiliations of each member of the community for those locations, and for each homeland that has been established there since the late 1980s. The structure of the mapping is such that maps of social organisation or land affiliation can be produced at any level of aggregation from personal to family or clan or language group representations. These social relationships and the maps that represent them are reproduced in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

The patterns of social organisation, and of land tenure and use, which were evident in the above preliminary mappings, were largely dependant on the historical and geographical contingencies of the location of people’s country in relation to the township. I realised that they might provide an insight into explaining the distribution of homeland sites and the nature of current land allocation practice in Pormpuraaw. The complementary spatial relationships revealed in the separate models of social space in the town and the landscape implied correlations between social organisation in each sphere, and the relative disjuncture in landscape and townscape space gave some insights into what appeared to be a spatial praxis that may account for the apparent contradictions between the behaviour expected of people because of their social status or because of the statements that they make, and their actual actions. Thus it became easier to comprehend some of the ‘taken for granted’ ways in community life.

Two related geographical properties – the location of the township in relation to traditional homeland country and the accessibility of the latter in the wet and dry season – appeared to act as significant constraints on the distribution of homelands in Pormpuraaw in the later 1990s, and also on the kinds of authority that were exercised in land allocation in the community.

1.3.1 The geographical properties of indigenous social space in rural North Australia

Anthropological studies define a duality in the form of possessory or tenure, and usufructory or natural resource use rights in traditional Aboriginal land allocation systems in Australia. Land ownership, or primary or formal rights to country, is
vested in individuals who are linked to tracts of landscape by clan or totem affiliations (for instance Sharp 1937). Land or natural resource use, or informal or secondary rights to country, are allocated on the basis of kinship relations. In terms of kinship and clan affiliation Stanner (1965) has provided a widely accepted spatial definition of traditional land organisation and of Aboriginal spatiality in a paper entitled ‘Territorial Organisation : Estate, Range, Domain and the Regime’. He identified sociological and ecological components to traditional land allocation.

‘The ‘local’ in local organisation actually has a dual reference. It refers on the one hand to territorial organisation and on the other to social organisation. Territory and locality are not the same. The relations between a group and its territory are among other things ecological relations. The relations between members of the group in respect of the territory, in itself, or as a locality of a larger entity, are among other things social relations’ (Stanner 1965, 1).

Stanner’s definitions of territoriality and sociality reside in different spatial units, in the foraging or land use ‘range’ and in the clan ‘estate’, respectively. The range is ecological, and is based on the concept of ‘carrying capacity’ and the logistical organisation of people so that land use may be optimised to the seasonal availability of food. The estate is social, and is to a large degree genealogically and ritually determined, and is found within clan formations, and is related to the tenure of specific places and tracts of landscape. Stanner described a topology of ‘spaced estates’ with ‘overlapping ranges’ which, depending on the state of social relations at any time, combine to form ‘lifespaces’ for the people who occupy them. Invariably, a person has one primary right to country, their estate; and, informal rights of access to the many estates that may constitute their range, through kinship relations. Maddock (1972) contrasted the range and the estate in Stanner's model in terms of ‘universality’ and ‘particularism’, respectively. The range is connotative of ‘mutuality and hospitality’ and the estate of ‘exclusion, ritual and ownership’. Geographically, range or land use rights tend to be associated at a regional scale with tribes or language groups, and clan or land ownership rights with local landholding groups who occupy smaller discrete areas within the tribal polity. Traditionally, these relations were conducted within the same geographic space, but because of their separation from their traditional country by mission life or by sequestration by the State they now occur for many
Aboriginal people in two different geographic contexts, the township and the landscape. Giddens (1985) has referred to spatial and social dislocation of this kind as ‘time-space distantiation’.

The colonisation of Cape York Peninsula and the imposition of European State tenures there in the later 19th century led to the re-assignment of Aboriginal people such that their country lay within an Aboriginal reserve (later DOGIT land), on a pastoral property or in proximity of a town. Over the same time Aboriginal people were also moved from pastoral properties into church missions that had been set up in the reserve areas or to towns further afield in the region. This tenurial enclosure of land or relocation of people did not occur simultaneously. It happened over a period of about 60 years in the southern Gulf Lowlands and is described in Chapter 2 of this thesis. These differing forms of ‘time-space distantiation’ have created a diverse political economy in present day Aboriginal land affairs with the emergence of a variety of ways in which people now map themselves to their traditional country and assert their land use rights.

Differences between traditional and historical, and recently emergent land allocation practices have been expressed in terms of ‘classical’ and ‘post-classical’ modes of land organisation (Sutton 1998). The former are largely based on ethnographic models of kinship and land affiliation developed in Australia between the 1920s and the 1970s. The latter have been recorded in work for ‘Native Title’ claims since the early 1980s in the Northern Territory and since the early 1990s, elsewhere in Australia (for instance Merlan 1998; Smith 2000; Taylor 1999). Post-classical models still maintain the duality of land use and land ownership rights described by Stanner for classical land allocation systems but their spatial and environmental corollaries in places and in totems in physical phenomena in the landscape (as described for instance in the Kowanyama region by Sharp 1937; and in the Pormpuraaw region by Taylor 1984 and Von Sturmer 1980) have changed. Agnatic descent systems based on family and ties of kinship to named and historically recent apical ancestors, have now broadly replaced those traditional systems where membership was based on totemic affiliation to places in the landscape and cognatic descent from the phenomena such as heroic ancestors, flora or fauna that are also represented by those totems.
in creation stories of the landscape (as described for instance in the Kowanyama region by Taylor 1999). Nevertheless, post-classical descent systems continue to be based on schemas that map people to specific places or areas in the landscape.

The greatest influence on Aboriginal people-place relationships and on the ways in which the political economy of land allocation is practiced in North Australia has been in the process of ‘centralisation’ that took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a consequence of the establishment of church missions, pastoral properties, mining enterprises and small towns.

1.3.2 Centralisation and Aboriginal land relations
The most clearly separable social spaces, in North Australia are those that are occupied by Aboriginal and European Australians respectively. There are distinctive ‘spatialities’ (after Soja 1985) to be found on Cape York Peninsula in former mission and reserve settlements (Taylor 1979; Strang 1994, 1997), in areas that have been sequestered for mining (Suchet 1996), on cattle properties (Strang 1994) and in small, predominantly Aboriginal towns such as Coen (Smith 2000), Laura, Chillagoe and Normanton in the Peninsula region, and further afield in European towns such as Cairns, Ingham or Townsville. Smith (2000) examined the ‘centralisation’ of Aboriginal groups into the Coen township and identified it as a place of historically realised social relations and connections between these groups which had not existed in pre-colonial times. Merlan (1998) has investigated those urban spaces created and occupied by people in Katherine, a Northern Territory town with a large Aboriginal population. She identified social patterns in that townscape, in differing senses of belonging and notions of tenure or control over areas of the town and its hinterland, that are related to historical Aboriginal experience of the region, and to the geographic proximity of traditional homeland country to Katherine.

‘There is some relation between present patterns of Aborigines’ use of town spaces and the modes of identity formation involved in high-level socio-territoriality and the differentiation of places in Aboriginal terms’ (Merlan 1998, 207).

The effects of geographical proximity to traditional country on moral authority or sense of ownership by people in town can be summarised in terms of core-
periphery relationships. Such relationships are frequently used in human geography, economics and sociology to describe socially ranked geographical space, for instance, the relative advantages of proximity to market or to the centre of political power. Stanner (1965) described the consequences of early colonial settlement by European Australians on Aboriginal society in terms of a ‘super waterhole’ effect. Those indigenous people whose country lay in close proximity to a newly established mission or pastoral property received greater benefits than did people with country on the periphery of, or, beyond these settlements. The latter became marginal to the benefits that might otherwise accrue to them, such as a secure supply of rations from the new landholders. The development of core and peripheral populations around newly introduced European colonial centres is a phenomenon that has been recorded as recently as the 1970s and 1980s in the Bloomfield area of Eastern Cape York Peninsula (Anderson 1988). Kuku Yulanji people had been encouraged to relocate from a number of dispersed camp sites into new mission settlements from the late 1950s onwards. Camp-based ‘mobs’ or landholding groups persisted as the main feature of social organisation in re-settlement at Wujal Wujal, where they were evident as clusters of economically related households, each with a clearly anointed leader or ‘boss’. Inequalities between mobs were apparent following this process of centralisation with those who had traditional tenure of the country in which the new settlement was located having greater access to community resources and greater influence in decision-making than other mobs who came from further afield (Anderson 1988). Expressions of territoriality that are analogues of traditional tribe or clan organisation of the landscape have also been observed in other Aboriginal townships, with people who share these relationships living in households in close proximity to each other (for instance Bell 1993; Memmott 1991, 2002; Moran 1999).

Another geographic constraint to the exercise of authority over traditional country that has to be considered in the southern Gulf Lowlands, and in many other areas of North Australia, is the seasonality of the landscape. The Gulf Lowlands is a monsoonal environment with contrasting wet and dry seasons where thousands of square kilometres of the landscape may be inundated by wet season floods for between four and seven months in any year. By contrast in the
dry season, surface water reserves are considerably depleted and confined to water holes and lagoons around the landscape. This seasonality determines the accessibility of country from the township, in particular in the wet season; and the amount of space that is available in either season for setting up a homeland, or area within which a group of people can camp and hunt and fish for a few days. Available space can be defined ecologically by the distribution of areas of permanently dry ground in the wet season and by proximity to a waterhole in the later dry season. Some tracts of country, even if they are in close proximity to the township, are only accessible for a few months in any year.

Thomson (1939) in a paper entitled ‘Seasonality and Human Culture’ described a highly mobile population in pre-colonial years on the Gulf Lowlands with people camping in large groups around permanent waterholes and with individuals and families making frequent moves between camp sites in the later dry season. Single families moved to small campsites in the wet season where they resided until the onset of the dry season. For the most part, places in the landscape had either exclusive wet or dry season roles. Thus, there was a seasonal contrast between a landscape of open and public space, of ‘range’ type relations (after Stanner 1965) in the dry season and of private and closed spaces, or ‘estate’ type relations, in the wet season when the availability of space was more constrained by flood waters. Traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyles are long gone from the Gulf Lowlands but the seasonal mobility patterns described by Thomson (1939) encapsulate a wide range of spatially explicit cultural, social and economic behaviours that, as this thesis will demonstrate, still exist today in forms that have been translated into township life. The mobility patterns that Thomson described were largely based on predetermined routes between dry season water holes. Any of the many thousands of waterholes in this landscape is a node in a network of primary tenure or ‘estate’ and secondary resource use or ‘range’ rights to these places and to the surrounding landscape. Traditional mobility patterns provided a spatial expression of social relationships in the landscape with many routes, or sets of personal or kindred rights to country, possibly converging or diverging at any waterhole. As well as providing food and water, waterholes are also significant landmarks in the mythological landscape and are often the location of conception centres where unborn babies are stored; or ‘increase’ sites from where
natural resource productivity and the environment is managed by ritual or by ceremonies. Waterholes are also frequently the foci of present day land use and homelands interests and are places referred to in day-to-day life in discussions on these issues in the community.

Land affiliations continue to be acknowledged in present day community life in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, where they are evident from day-to-day in personal relationships, and in reciprocity and sharing obligations between kin-related people. They are also sometimes evident territorially in patterns of household occupancy in these townships. In some respects the social spacing of kin-related people in southern Gulf Lowland townships may be conceived of as a ‘virtual landscape’ in which the social relations that were once expressed spatially in ‘estate’ and ‘range’ in the landscape are now expressed in social life and in neighbourhood and household residency patterns. The landscape is often directly referred to or aspired to in daily practice in township life, whether through assertion or negotiation to set up a homeland site, or through personal affirmation of ‘belonging some place’. Some of the land relationships on which these expressions of moral authority are based are more attenuated than others depending historically on how long people have been separated from their traditional homelands, or on the seasonal accessibility of those homelands from the township. Some people still maintain continuous contact with the landscape through hunting and fishing, or through their work, as a community ranger or in community cattle operations, or through visits to their homeland. Some people have detailed knowledge of particular areas of the landscape to which they are affiliated. Others have a high level knowledge of the landscape which may extend over a large area and which may also include knowledge of the rights of tenure or resource use of other people in the region. Other people, who have more extreme experiences of ‘time-space distanitation’ because of their family history or personal lifestyle, have little or no direct knowledge of the landscape but learn about it from their peers or from the geography of social relations in that part of town where they live.
1.4 **A Conceptual framework for the cartographic representation of social space**

I propose to model the influence of centralisation and the relative locations of the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama townships, and their seasonal accessibility from the landscape, on present day land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands. The first question that I ask in this thesis is whether there are distinctive expressions of territoriality in the demography and layout of Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw townscapes that reflect the accessibility of traditional country from the township in each community: and then if so, how closely do they correspond to realisations of social space, in terms of homeland occupation and natural resource use in the landscape during the 1990s and early 2000s. The second question that I then ask is how closely do the estimates of the social, environmental, and land use properties of the landscape that are made by people in statements about land and natural resource management and planning in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama correspond to the realisations of social space that are identified in answering the first question.

The above two questions take hypothetical or implicit and practical or explicit approaches respectively to an understanding of the geography of land allocation practice on the southern Gulf Lowlands. My thesis is that at the convergence of these two approaches the features of a spatial praxis to decision-making can be identified which provide some explanation for the diversity of present day land allocation practice in the region. I propose that one dimension of this praxis which is represented in implicit space, is partly based upon historical and geographical contingencies of the location of the community and its boundaries and the accessibility of traditional country from township of residence and embodies some of the ‘taken for granted ways’ in decision-making that I discussed earlier on in this chapter in relation to my first experiences of them in Pormpuraaw in 1996. The other dimension in explicit space embodies those tribal and homeland group and personal views of the world and statements or assertions about ownership and land use that are made by people in community life. Implicit and explicit criteria intercalate in so many ways, both socially and spatially, in land allocation practice, that coherent frameworks are required for interpreting
the interactions between them. Conceptual frameworks for representing social space have been proposed by Bourdieu (1977, 1984), Bauman (1993), Casey (1993, 2001), Foucault (1972), Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1985, 1996). Of these authors, only Soja is a geographer; Casey is a philosopher and the remainder are sociologists. Most of their work is based on the architecture and the built environment and the urban spaces of European or North American cities. Nonetheless, these authors provide a methodological basis for the cartographic techniques that are developed in this thesis for representing and mapping the implicit and explicit properties of social space, and for the identification and interpretation of local land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands.

The works of Lefebvre and Bourdieu are axiomatic to understanding social space but they are also difficult to read whether in the original French editions or in English translation. Both authors are exponents of the post-structuralist school of scientific method and are concerned with issues of social process rather than the classification of social phenomena which for instance has been the goal of planning or human geography studies where, for instance, chloroplethic maps have been used to illustrate the spatial distribution of social or economic attributes of human populations and as media for explanations of human behaviour. A wide range of issues is covered in their works and the language that they use is both technical and dense and many re-readings of key passages are required to fully appreciate their content. Key terms that are used by both authors to describe the properties of social space are often used in different, sometimes contradictory, contexts. This apparent inconsistency in meanings is probably intended to illustrate the prismatic properties of social space, which can be viewed from many perspectives and points of view, and which are not reducible to a discrete set of categories or independent values. I have attempted to draw out the implicit and explicit properties of social space from their and other authors’ works; even though there is no direct reference to these specific properties made by any of them in either a geographical or a sociological sense.

1.4.1 Implicit or ‘taken for granted’ Space

Henri Lefebvre gave formal definitions of the properties of social space in ‘The Production of Social Space’ (1991). He describes geographical space not as a
‘passive container’ of social relations but as an active medium where society is actively constructed and where differing types of social practice may be deliberately created and shaped, and reproduced or amended from generation to generation. Lefebvre conceptualised social space in terms of a triad comprising spatial practice or perceived space; representations of space or conceived space; and, representational spaces or lived space.

The spatial practice of society or perceived space is relatively easy to recognise and decipher because it is evident in the physical traces of town and land-scapes. For instance, much of it can be read in a topographic map in information on roads and infrastructure, or on the distribution of residential and commercial areas, or the location of institutions such as churches or schools or hospitals. It describes present, depending on the currency of the map, or historical states of the distribution of power and authority, and of access and amenity across geographical space. Conceived space is the domain of technocrats, planners, and scientists or artists who have a particular vision of how a city or landscape space may be organised (Lefebvre 1991). Their laws, values or assessments or representations of space are attempts to order social practice (the perceived space). Such representations have their own suite of ideology, power and knowledge embedded within them that may find ‘objective expression’ in monuments, towers, factories, office blocks and ‘the bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space’ (Merrifield 2000, 174).

Conceived space is immanent in western Cape York Peninsula in land tenures such as pastoral leases and national parks, in regional planning strategies such as CYPLUS, and in those differing perspectives of the DOGIT tenure, described earlier in this chapter, that are held by the mainstream in Australia. Lefebvre regarded the architectural manifestations of such space (buildings) as 'phallic, arrogant and bureaucratic' (1991, 53) and as products of capitalism. Lefebvre is widely regarded as one of the foremost Marxist theorists of the 20th century and
he imbues geographical space with the same order of significance that the
distribution of economic capital has in explaining social practice in classical
Marxist theory. Space ‘internalises’ social processes and relations, it is a
commodity that can be bought and sold, created and torn down, used and abused,
or speculated and fought over (Merrifield 2000).

Lefebvre (1991) provides two cartographical perspectives of conceived space,
from his work on social space in European landscapes and townscape that can
be translated to represent regional or State, and local or Aboriginal views of the
Gulf Lowlands landscape. Absolute space contains physical markers or places
that function as landmarks or totems in local knowledge systems, onto which the
land ownership and land use values of individual people, families and
landholding groups or traditional clans are mapped. Absolute space contains a
set of topologies or integral spatial relationships that define the rights of access
and natural resource use that prevail for any place. Any person has their own
personal mapping or representational space in this landscape that connects at
various places to other personal mappings of kin-related people. Absolute space
is exhaustive and in principle, there are no gaps or common land under
Aboriginal tenure systems on Cape York Peninsula, and every place, or the right
to use the properties of a place has an owner (Sharp 1937; Taylor 1984; Von
Sturmer 1980).

Abstract space is the view of the landscape held by the State (Figure 1.1). On
cadastral maps the landscape is geometrically partitioned into DOGIT, pastoral
leasehold or national park lots over which various laws and controls prevail to
maintain their boundaries. Or, it is partitioned on thematic maps into areas in
terms of their economic or scientific value (for instance, Connell Wagner 1989;

Lefebvre has proposed that absolute (Aboriginal) and abstract (European) spaces
can intercalate in many ways to function as ‘complex spaces’ at different places
in the landscape. The topologies of these spaces will differ according to the
coincident land allocation strategies that are in play by the different agents who
aspire to supervise land ownership or use, whether they represent homeland
groups, pastoral enterprises, or community or regional government bodies. Some complex spaces may then function as ‘heterotopia’ where groups with separate interests co-exist. On the other hand other spaces of this kind may be ‘dystopia’ where co-existence is not possible, or, ‘utopia’ where an idealised but as yet unrealised view of the landscape and of social relations within it is held. Complex spaces are the lived or representational spaces of everyday reality whose properties shift and change as people respond to the political or social stimuli that act upon them.

Soja also proposes a trialectical model of social space where he refers to perceived and conceived space (Lefebvre 1991) as ‘firstspace’ and ‘secondspace’ respectively; and

‘... Thirddspace: a lived space of radical openness and unlimited scope, where all histories and geographies, all times and places, are immanently presented and represented, a strategic space of power and domination, empowerment and resistance’ (Soja 1996, 21).

Like Lefebvre’s lived space, thirdspace is one of infinite scope in terms of the number of representations or maps that might be required to demonstrate the dispositions and lifestyles of all of the people within it. Thirddspace is the domain of immediate lived experience and action.

‘If first space is explored primarily through its readable texts and discourses [for instance maps], and secondspace through its prevailing representational discourse [for instance local homeland aspirations and regional natural resource management policy], then the exploration of thirddspace must be additionally guided by some form of potentially emancipatory praxis, the translation of knowledge into action in a conscious – and consciously spatial – effort to improve the world in some significant way’ (Soja 1996, 22).

Soja sees a whole array of centre-periphery relations as the dynamic that drives social practice in thirddspace, much of which deals with the crises and dichotomies that arise out of such relations, whether momentarily or with longer-term strategies. Soja (1996) describes the human geography of Los Angeles in ‘Thirddspace : journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places’ and how problems of race, class, gender and other inequalities and oppressions are represented and dealt with in the numerous thirddspaces that are created by people in that city.
‘Power is ontologically embedded in the center – periphery relation and, hence, also in the ontology of Thirdspace’ (Soja 1996, 31).

Soja views thirdspace as part of a recursive loop which influences the generation of firstspace and secondspace, whereby personal actions influence larger scale social and geographical phenomena such as urban lifestyles, and attitudes to, or use of urban space. Soja compares the properties of thirdspace with those of Lefebvre’s ‘lived space’, and with the ‘heterotopia’ of Foucault which are described by that author as

‘the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs’ (Foucault unpublished notes, cited in Soja 1996, 15).

Centre-periphery relations are a recurring aspect of Foucault’s discourses on power relations in European society, in particular in his works on the role of State institutions in marginalising the poor, sick or insane from mainstream social life from the sixteenth century onwards. Foucault’s ‘discursive triangle of space, knowledge and power’ (Soja 1996, 15) has a historical focus and seems to accept geographical space as a background or constant on which power relations are conducted.

Bauman (1993) has described the alternate facets of social space firstly as ‘cognitive space’ which is the domain of knowledge of places and of the people who are related to them; then as a ‘moral space’ which encompasses locally recognised senses of ownership and as an ‘aesthetic space’ where values that are held by any individual within that spatial domain, and which entail personal enmities or affections for places or the people that are associated with them.

‘... we grasp physical space intellectually with the help of notions which have been coined originally to ‘map’ the qualitatively diversified relations with other humans’ (Bauman 1993, 145).

Bauman (1993), like Lefebvre (1991, 1996), was writing mainly about the effect of urban environments, where people live and work in cities, on social organisation and behaviour. Bauman contrasted The objects of cognitive spacing
are the others we live with', in the context of this thesis this definition may refer to the language groups or 'tribes' and clans and their territories that form the main categories of social identification for people on the Gulf Lowlands; with, ‘The objects of moral spacing are the others we live for’, such as the family or homeland group to which one belongs. According to Giddens (cited in Cassell 1993), 'place is a moral sphere'; it is where the consequence of personal or group actions can be seen and moral authority over it is gained by general acceptance of prevailing patterns of ownership or use of that geographical space. For instance, Blomley (1998) has described the politics of property improvement and the 'gentrification' of certain inner city areas of Vancouver in terms of the competing views or representations of these neighbourhoods that are held by their new and longer term residents. Resistance to newcomers is reflected in a variety of hostile attitudes by longer term residents to specific buildings and places that have been transformed and claimed by developers; for instance, the development of loft-style apartments for the ‘upwardly mobile’ in former warehouses or civic buildings which once formed landmarks in local indigenous geographies.

‘Defence of social space boils down to the struggle for mobility for oneself and for the limitation of such rights of others’ (Bauman 1993, 160).

Places are also described by Werlen (1993) and Delle (1998) as comprising three related phenomena in elements of material, social and cognitive space. Material space comprises the physical landscape and the places within it. Social space, referred to as 'moral space' by Bauman (1993), then defines

'how access to material space is allocated to members of any social group and defines appropriate behaviour within certain material spaces' (Delle 1998, 38).

Cognitive space is the 'mental process by which people interpret social and material spaces' (Delle 1998, 39), how they react to them, and the ways in which individual people represent them either verbally, cartographically or textually. All three elements combine to create ‘spatialities’ (Soja 1985, Delle 1998) or ‘affective spacings’ (Bauman 1993) that, like 'thridspace', (Soja 1996) 'lived space' (Lefebvre 1991) and 'heterotopia' (Foucault cited in Soja 1996), define specific behaviours and social relations at any location.
‘Spatiality and temporality, human geography and human history, intersect in a complex social process which creates a constantly evolving historical sequence of spatialities, or spatio-temporal structuration of social life which gives form not only to the grand movements of societal development but also to the recursive practices of day-to-day activity ... The production of space (and the making of history) can thus be described as both the medium and the outcome of social action and relationship ... The realisation that social life is materially constituted in its spatiality is the theoretical keystone for the contemporary materialist interpretation of spatiality’ (Soja 1985, 94).

All [implicit] spatialities are the products of 'sedimentation' (after Pred 1986, Casey 1993) and are an accumulation of historical experiences. The evolution of a landscape or townscape can be represented cartographically as a set of 'time slices' or layers with each map representing the distribution of people and places, and of land ownership and land use values for a particular epoch or point in time. Successive time-slices, or historical states, can be conflated into a ‘time-line’ whereby the properties and values of any location in geographical space are integrated and evaluated and hypothetical models, based on properties such as the proximity or accessibility of the landscape, that attempt to explain the cause of present day social practice can be proposed and tested. Such analyses are reflective and describe the properties of implicit space and do not entirely explain the processes that are at work in the immediate present of ‘lived space’ (Lefebvre 1991), ‘thirdspace’ (Soja 1996) or ‘aesthetic space’ (Bauman 1993) and in what is referred to in this thesis as explicit space.

1.4.2 Explicit or ‘lived’ Space
Some of the most apparent characteristics of social life in a remote Aboriginal community are a high sense of physical proximity, people are everywhere and all around you, and one is rarely alone. Another is that an important feature of most dialogues, whether casual between friends or more formal in community meetings, is the affirmation in one way or another of personal identity, and of how that identity is relevant to the issues that are the subject of immediate discussion. Bourdieu (1977, 1984) and Casey (1993, 2001) provide frameworks for the explanation of social practice that see cultural forces i.e. the history and geography of a landscape [implicit space], as the background to a more active construction of social behaviour that is centred on individual social being or 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977, 1984) and the ‘implacement’, or location and
orientation of the physical body [lived space] at home or at work, at any point in time (Casey 1993, 2001).

From a sociological perspective, Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984) has described phenomena such as the differing assemblages of people, clans and homeland groups; and of Community and State projects involved in the creation of social spaces on the Gulf Lowlands in terms of ‘habitus’ or lifespace. He developed the concept in ethnological fieldwork in communities in North Algeria during the 1950s and 1960s and formulated it in ‘The Logic of Practice’ (Bourdieu 1977).

Any agent who is involved in land allocation issues on DOGIT lands has to work within the regulating principles or frameworks imposed by State or Federal government, by Community Council policy, and by traditional and historically contingent local practices. This ‘field of action’ contains a number of habitus.

The characteristics of any habitus include the dispositions or personality of each person and the features of their life history that determine, for instance, where their land interests lie and the ways in which their influence within the community may prevail. Biographical details of this nature may include things such as the personal networks they have with people in other Gulf or Peninsular communities, the amount of time they have spent working on pastoral properties or living in one of the cities on the East coast, or their level of education. These frameworks and dispositions provide a certain number of degrees of freedom within which agents can operate though Bourdieu (1977) suggests that there are no such things as free agents and that all social practice follows a practical logic, which is determined by the local habitus and the historical forces that underpin its actualization.

‘Individuals do not move about in social space in a random way, partly because they are subject to the forces which structure this space and partly because they resist the forces of the field with their specific inertia (goods, qualifications ....). To a given volume of inherited capital there corresponds a band of more or less equally probable trajectories leading to more or less equivalent positions (’field of the possibles’ objectively offered to a give agent)’ (Bourdieu 1984, 110).

Social space or ‘habitus’ on the Gulf Lowlands may also be conceived of, in both a statistical and a cartographic sense, as a three – dimensional geographical space bounded by local systems of social and spatial organisation that include kinship
and clan affiliation; and, by the DOGIT tenure and by the environmental
constraints on seasonal mobility and access to places in the landscape in the wet
and dry seasons. These are three axes of implicit space. Each of these is a
relational system, which has a topology, with its own metric that identifies the
position of an individual within that overall social and spatial order and which
describe specific classes of affiliation to land or rights of land use. The three axes
are what Bourdieu would call the ‘generative principles’ of this habitus which are
aimed at producing ‘objective structures’, such as homeland groups with shared
geographical, social and economic interests, and ‘durable dispositions’ or
procedures for determining homeland occupancy or land use, in the form of
locally acceptable land allocation practices. The intersection of membership
values between these three axes define sets of ‘objective classes’ that cluster or
disperse within this space depending on social practice at any time, and any of
which might emerge as an aspiring or active homeland group. The ‘trajectories’
referred to in the above quotation are properties of explicit space and include the
dispositions, or lifestyles and personal strategies, of individual people enclosed
within this habitus, which are continuously created and dissolved or re-created in
community life, which also define the ‘field of possibles’ or potential for
movement between classes.

‘The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material
conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produces habitus,
systems of durable, transposable dispositions .... Principles of the generation and
structuring of practices and representations, which can be objectively ‘regulated’
and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules,
objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious mastery of
the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively
orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a
conductor..... the practices produced by the habitus, as the strategy-generating
principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations,
are only apparently determined by the future..... they are determined by the past
conditions which have produced the principle of their production, that is, by the
actual outcome of identical or interchangeable past practices which coincides
with their own outcome to the extent (and only ‘to the extent’) that the objective
structures of which they are the product are prolonged in the structures within
which they function’ (Bourdieu 1977, 72).

The limits to habitus or social space are set by generative principles but these
may not be immediately evident as fixed rules or procedures in community life.
Bourdieu (1977) suggests that they are evident in the 'practical logics' or habits employed by agents, even in the most mundane tasks, in their daily life. These logics include ‘a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions’ that are a product of traditional and historical and also continuously re-created values and actions (Bourdieu 1984) that influence the choice of partners that people might take, patterns of sharing and reciprocity in community life, and mobility between township households for visits, for refuge, or for longer-term residence. These actions can have an underlying logic to them, which, in Aboriginal life, is largely based on the systems of kinship and clan affiliation that also underpin local land allocation practice. Practical logics include elements of both ‘taken for granted’or implicit ways and explicit or consciously determined behaviour.

‘All human behaviour is the product of the intersection of such conscious and unconscious patterns. For social analytic purposes, we can draw a contrast between what is consciously avowed as a principle of membership, self-identification or prescription for behaviour in a community (for example “share with your kinsmen”, ”honour your father and mother”, “don’t go near the men when they are talking business”), and what is passed on below the level of consciousness and cannot be expressed from within the community as a “principle”’ (Weiner 2002, 3).

Bourdieu attempts to derive a 'theory of practice’ that encompasses both subjective and objective explanations of human behaviour. Subjectivism locates the primary cause of human behaviour in individual free will, conscious decision-making and lived experience; whereas objectivism in human behaviour is explained in terms of laws or systemic models of human relationships (Painter 2000). The habitus embraces both approaches to social science and explanations of the motivations for human behaviour. The habitus is 'the mediating link between social structures and individual action' (Painter 2000, 242), or in the sense of this thesis, between implicit space and explicit space.

‘Habitus is that array of commonsense, taken for granted social ways whose structuration of our practice often escapes us’ (Robben 1989, 570).

Bourdieu never discusses the geography of social space but nonetheless uses spatial metaphors in his work to explain social differentiation, for instance in a description of a Kabila household
The low, dark part of the house is also opposed to the upper part as the female is to the male. Not only does the division of labour between the sexes (based on the same principle as the organisation of space) give the woman responsibility for most of the objects belonging to the dark part of the house, the carrying of water, wood, manure for instance: but the opposition between the upper part and the lower part reproduces, within the internal space of the house, the opposition between the inside and the outside, between female space – the house and its garden – and male space' (Bourdieu 1977, 90)

Bourdieu is talking of the embodiment of physical space in this passage and this is a theme that is addressed by Casey (1993, 2001) who provides a spatially explicit perspective of lived space and the habitus. Casey says that social space or 'the geographical self' is characterised by 'implacement' or the physical location of our bodies in space. Each person has a double horizon of implacement that is referenced to the immediate environment of their body and to the townscape or landscape in which it is located, with near and far horizons respectively.

Knowledge of place begins with the bodily experience of being in place and of the realisation of above or below, in or out, left or right, front or behind, up or down, near or far relationships which provide 'a spontaneous corporeal mapping or somatography' (Casey 1993, 29) whether the body is located in a building, streetscape or landscape. These dyadic relationships, such as near or far, take on particularly explicit social meanings in Aboriginal society where each person is also referenced to specific physical places in the landscape by kinship and clan affiliation systems. Casey (1993) describes three 'body-centred' topologies that link people in places. A feature of the here/ there dyad is the 'tensional arc' with another person (or 'somacentric here'). With minimal tension between the two ends of an arc, access or movement is easy and people or places can be seen to be as near or close by, irrespective of their actual physical distance apart.

'The intentional body, then is a desiring body when we experience ourselves so far from or near to things, a factor of attraction or repulsion is almost always involved' (Casey 1993, 59).

The body in place is also the fulcrum of a 'reachable arc', which includes the immediate social or geographical range of a person's interests at that place. There is also a 'horizontal arc' or 'ultimate perimeter' of places or people that form the
domain of total knowledge and relationships (Casey 1993). Social space cannot exist without numerous places which are spanned by the tensional, reachable and horizontal arcs that are created by the people who occupy them (Casey 1993). Casey (2001) proposes that place (person) and space (society) relationships of this order are mediated by the habitus (after Bourdieu 1977; 1984).

In summary, Bourdieu proposes that there are ‘modus operandum’ that determine social practices and behaviours which are reflexive and largely based on custom and historical experience; what is referred to as implicit space in this thesis. There are also ‘modus operati’ which people undertake from time to time and which are the short-term strategies and actions which are adopted when the conditions of the habitus change; what is referred to as explicit space in this thesis. I propose that these practices and actions are evident at three ‘levels’ of implacement or social space in the southern Gulf Lowlands region in the 1990s and early 2000s; in implicit space in patterns of household residency in the townscape, and in land use and homeland affiliation in the landscape; and in explicit space in the daily life of personal relationships and of work and recreation; and of day-to day community land management. There are topologies, or distinctive spatial patterns, at the convergence of these three axes of implacement that identify distinctive spatial praxes or ‘spatialities’ (after Soja 1985) that have been developed by people in each of the communities of the southern Gulf Lowlands in order to accommodate the DOGIT tenure in its land allocation practice, and moreover to maintain Aboriginal identity and the geometry of people-place relationships in the landscape which are central to indigenous perceptions of social space in North Australia.
1.5 **Specific research aims and organisation of the thesis**

The specific aims of my thesis are as follows

1. To determine the influence of centralisation, and of church and State administrations, on social structuration and the creation of implicit social space in the southern Gulf Lowlands.

2. To identify spatial domains in the social organisation of southern Gulf Lowlands townscapes that are connotative of implicit space and of local notions of authority over land tenure and natural resource use in the landscape.

3. To determine the relative influence of centralisation and of seasonally accessible space on homeland distribution and local land allocation practice in Pormpuraaw.

4. To contrast centralisation and seasonal accessibility models of social space in the townscapes and landscapes of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in order to explain the properties of ‘implicit space’ and their influence on the geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands in the 1990s and early 2000s.

5. To review the properties of explicit social space and identify the ways in which knowledge of the landscape is socially differentiated and transmitted in decision-making about land use and land ownership in community life.

6. To illustrate some of the ways in which people in the southern Gulf Lowlands combine and articulate the explicit and implicit elements of social space in their social practice; and, to identify the possible roles of human geography in ‘bridge building’ and in the communication of ideas and interests about land ownership and land use between mainstream and Aboriginal domains in Australian public life.
The above aims are addressed in the following chapters

2. Implicit Space: Land tenure and social space in the southern Gulf Lowlands

Chapter 2 describes the evolution of the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape from the early years of the 20th century up until 1991. It presents a regional level view of the intercalation of European and Aboriginal tenures, from the perspective of the coincidence of 'abstract' and 'absolute' spaces (after Lefebvre 1991), and their effect on the social structuration of the region by local people in the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama communities. A hierarchy of core and proximate relationships based on proximity of township to traditional country is proposed, and the geographical regions and the social relations, within which these productions of social space have occurred, are justified as an analytical framework for reviewing current land allocation practice in the early 21st century in the region.

3. Implicit Space: Territorial affiliation in southern Gulf Lowland townscapes

Chapter 3 looks at consequences of the ‘centralisation’ processes that have been described in Chapter 2 for social organisation in southern Gulf Lowland townscapes. The chapter investigates three properties of social space in the Pormpuraaw township. They are the relative visibility of traditional land affiliations in the social composition of the households and neighbourhoods of the townscap; the presence of homeland groups within the township; and, the effect of the proximity of traditional country to the township on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of urban homeland groups.

These alternate representations of social space are based on ethnographic models of kinship and clan affiliation (Sharp 1937; Taylor 1984) and a model of homeland group demography that is derived from a survey of the ethno-archaeological and anthropological literature. Pormpuraaw representations are then compared with social townscapes that have been described for Kowanyama (Strang 1994; Taylor 1979, 1984) and the significance of both townscapes as ‘implicit space’ or spatial analogues that may be representative of social organisation and territorial affiliation is then reviewed.
4. Social Space: Seasonal accessibility and homeland distribution in the Pormpuraaw landscape

Chapter 4 integrates ethnographic mapping of places in the landscape and ethno-archaeological models of seasonal land use with a biogeographic model of surface water distribution to compare the distribution and use of historical and present day seasonally accessible space in the Pormpuraaw landscape. The distribution of homelands within this space in the 1990s and early 2000s is then compared with the topological properties of social space in the Pormpuraaw townscape that has been described in Chapter 3, in order to determine the relative influence of centralisation and of access to seasonally available space on the present day geography of land allocation practice.

5. Implicit space and the geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula

This chapter looks at the geography of land allocation practice in Kowanyama. This analysis is undertaken within the spatial constraints of a model of seasonally available space in the landscape similar to that developed for Pormpuraaw in the previous chapter. Representations of social space in the townscapes and landscapes of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama are then compared in order to identify and explain trends in the geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands region in the 1990s and early 2000s. The chapter concludes with a review of the influence of the DOGIT tenure on local practice since 1987 as an illustration of implicit space and of the ways in which local and State, or ‘absolute’ and ‘abstract’ space (after Lefebvre 1991) have coincided to create ‘heterotopia’ and a suite of hybrid land allocation practices that are unique to the southern Gulf Lowlands in the 1990s and early 2000s.

6. Explicit Space: Social space and land allocation practice on the southern Gulf Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula

Chapter 6 looks at the properties of explicit social space and investigates how closely the modeled properties of social space and the land allocation practices that have been identified in this thesis correspond to actual local understanding of the physical and social properties of the landscape. The chapter identifies another
social and geographical dimension in community land management that depends on personal knowledge of the landscape and on the interpersonal relationships or ‘aesthetic spaces’ (after Baumann 1983) that people create for themselves in township life. This dimension requires a range of spatial referents or ‘landmarks’ and scales of geographical and social space, that reflects the life experiences of individual people, to be represented in community landscape mapping so as to help them estimate the social and geographical properties of the landscape. Local interpretations of such mapping also reveal some of the ways in which the person-place- social space relationships that are integral to Aboriginal land allocation systems are sustained from generation to generation despite the ongoing social change that has occurred in the region since ‘Mission time’.

7. ‘Our way’: reconciling implicit space and explicit space on the southern Gulf Lowlands of Cape York Peninsula

This chapter reviews those issues that this thesis has proposed as immanent to the present day geography of land allocation practice in the southern Gulf Lowlands. The implicit/explicit dialectic to social practice, and the inside/outside or centre/periphery suite of spatial relations that were created in the 20th century colonisation of the southern Gulf Lowlands and that are presumed to drive this dialectic are reviewed from the perspectives of

- the strategies or ‘practical logics’ that people use to accept, modify or deny technologies that are introduced by the mainstream in local land management; and,

- the influence of the DOGIT tenure as a technology for social change on local and mainstream perspectives of land ownership in the southern Gulf Lowlands in the early 2000s.

This thesis concludes with a review of the role of the geographer as both a researcher and service deliverer in Aboriginal land studies, and as a ‘bridge-builder’ in the integration of local Aboriginal and mainstream regional perspectives in land use planning in remote North Australia.
Chapter 2

Implicit Space: Land Tenure and Social Space on the Southern Gulf Lowlands

‘People wander about from the beginning of time and the Europeans come in and split it up’ (Colin Lawrence, Kunjen Elder).

This chapter introduces the history and human geography of Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw from the nineteenth century colonisation of the southern Gulf Lowlands onwards up until the later 1980s. State and Aboriginal organisation of the landscape are reviewed from the perspective of the coincidence of ‘abstract’ and ‘absolute’ spaces (after Lefebvre 1991) that are recorded in historical State cadastres, and in ethnographic and linguistic mapping respectively. It is then proposed that the intercalation of these separate cognitive spaces (after Bauman 1993) has created a socially ranked geographical space based on centralisation and the relative proximity of indigenous homeland country to the township.

2.1 Introduction

Amongst the geographic characteristics of the southern Gulf Lowlands that make it similar to other areas of the 'Top End' of North Australia, including Arnhem Land and the Kimberleys, is the absence of European towns. More than 90% of the population is Aboriginal and their demographic characteristics, in particular health and life expectancy, are akin to those of a developing country. The climate is highly seasonal with the 'wet' accentuating the remoteness of the area and the isolation of its communities from the rest of Cape York Peninsula for at least six or seven months each year. Land use is based almost entirely on open-range grazing. A report on ‘Wilderness Quality on Cape York Peninsula’ (Lesslie et al. 1992) shows the area between the Mitchell River and the Archer River as having one of the largest expanses of high value ‘wilderness’ on the Peninsula on the basis of distance from settlement and roads (Figure 2.1). Though the Peninsular Gulf Lowlands is one of the least documented areas of North Australia there are a
Figure 2.1: Wilderness Areas on the Gulf Lowlands (Lesslie et al. 1992)
Figure 2.2: Cape York Peninsula (Cape York Peninsula Development Association 2001)
number of other broad biogeographical and environmental, and social and demographic parallels that can be drawn with other regions of the 'Top End'. They are described in 'Monsoonal Australia: landscape, ecology and man in the northern lowland' (Haynes, Ridpath and Williams 1991), 'North Australia, The Arenas of Life and Ecosystems on Half a Continent' (Parkes 1984), and 'Ecology and use of Australian savannas' (Callaby 1980).

The southern Gulf Lowlands have been identified as one of four distinct biogeographical regions of western and northern Cape York Peninsula. The four regions, which were identified as part of a review of Aboriginal use, interests and management of coastal and sea country, are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARINE BIOREGION</th>
<th>RESOURCE USE REGION</th>
<th>COMMUNITIES</th>
<th>MAIN RIVERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gulf of Carpentaria</td>
<td>Southern Gulf Lowlands</td>
<td>Kowanyama, Pornpuraaw</td>
<td>Mitchell, Nassau, Staaten, Coleman, Melamen, Edward, Holroyd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Gulf Lowlands</td>
<td>Aurukun</td>
<td>Holroyd, Archer, Watson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arafura Sea</td>
<td>Weipa/ Napranum</td>
<td>Weipa, Napranum</td>
<td>Embley, Wenlock, Watson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Peninsula</td>
<td>Mapuna, New Mapoon, Injimoo, Seisia, Bamaga, Umagico, Kaurareg Islands</td>
<td>Ducie, Jardine, Doughboy, Skardon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Marine resource use regions in western and northern Cape York Peninsula (Monaghan 2004)

These regions were identified in terms of

Aboriginal ontology and the ways in which the social and cultural significance of the marine environment are expressed;

Aboriginal economy and use of the marine environment;
Coastal geomorphology and dominant coastal processes and landforms; and

Aboriginal and European tenures and related notions of ownership or rights of use of the marine resource.

(Monaghan 2004)

More importantly, in the context of this chapter each of the four regions have markedly different colonial histories and experiences of European colonisation, that have contributed to a distinct suite of natural resource management practices within each region and where local indigenous systems of governance are markedly different (see Monaghan 2004).

The southern Gulf Lowlands, between the Holroyd and Nassau Rivers, is sparsely populated and even though the exact population is hard to estimate, even from census figures, it is unlikely to exceed 1900 people. Most of them are Aboriginal and live at Pormpuraaw and at Kowanyama in the Mitchell River delta area. Their 2001 census populations are 683 and 980 respectively (ABS 2001). Of this population, there are about 30 European people resident at Pormpuraaw and about 60 at Kowanyama. People in Kowanyama generally refer to White Australians as ‘Europeans’. These people are engaged in administration, teaching and health and infrastructure services. The remainder of the population outside of these communities is mainly European and live on isolated homesteads which are the foci for open range cattle grazing operations.

At present, the entire area of the southern Gulf Lowlands is Crown Land that is administered by the Queensland government. Current land tenure, or, the main elements of abstract space within the area exist in the following forms:

Pastoral Leases under the Land Act (Queensland 1962);
Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) under the Community Services (Aborigines) Act (Queensland 1984 - 1991) and the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Land Holding) Act (Queensland 1985-1990);

Transferable and Claimable Aboriginal Lands under the Aboriginal Lands Act (1991);

National Parks under the Nature Conservation Act (Queensland 1992);

and

the Mineral Resources Act (Queensland 1989).

The last statute does not provide tenure but allows the exploration or extraction of mineral deposits over any of the above leases. The Amended Native Title Act (Commonwealth 1998) recognises in principle the existence of 'Native Title' or indigenous forms of land tenure within claimable areas that include DOGIT and National Park areas and some pastoral lands. The Act also permits Aboriginal people to negotiate 'Indigenous Land Use Agreements' and access to traditional land, for instance, on pastoral properties that may not be otherwise claimable under the Act.

Aboriginal and European occupation of the Lowlands are almost entirely exclusive of each other. The DOGIT areas of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama are located on the coast and extend for between 50 and 60 kilometres inland. Pastoral leases, which are mostly held by European Australians, then extend eastwards into the higher woodland country as far as and beyond the Peninsular Development Road (Figure 2.2). These leases include properties that range in size from 400 to 4500 sq km in area and their maximum term of lease under the 1962 Land Act is usually 50 years. The Alice River/ Mitchell River National Park, which was gazetted in 1977, occupies 370 sq km on the eastern boundary of the Kowanyama DOGIT. ‘Deed of Grant in Trust’ (DOGIT) areas were established around the former Edward River mission at Pormpuraaw, and the former Mitchell River mission at Kowanyama when the Queensland government
took over their administration from the church in 1968. Each ‘grant’ covers areas of 4800 and 2520 square kilometres respectively.

The remainder of this chapter provides a landscape perspective of the social spaces that were created in the colonisation of the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape during the 20th century.

2.2 Abstract space and absolute space on the southern Gulf Lowlands

The evolution of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama is described in this chapter under the following broad temporal categories – ‘Wild time’, ‘Mission time’ and ‘Department time’. These reflect the main institutional influences in the development of the region. They are also epochs which local people in the southern Gulf Lowlands refer to in recounting personal, community or regional histories. Wild time is also called ‘Bush time’ by some people or ‘Story time’ by others. Mission time is occasionally referred to as ‘Church time’ and Department time as ‘State time’. Both of the latter epochs are also referred to more specifically on occasions by the name of a corresponding priest or manager.

Pre-colonial or ‘Wild time’ territorial domains in the southern Gulf Lowlands region are identified from Aboriginal language boundaries that have been mapped in ethnographic studies (McConnel 1939; Roth 1907; Sharp 1937; Thomson 1972; Taylor 1984; Tindale 1974). The fragmentation of these domains by State leasehold boundaries, established by the Queensland government from the end of the nineteenth century onwards during ‘Mission time’, is reviewed from the analysis of historical maps (collated by McGhie Consultants Pty Ltd 1997).

There is no cartographic synthesis of these spatial relationships in this chapter as the quality of the maps precludes such an analysis; each map is treated instead as a historical text and is reproduced in its original form.

2.2.1 Wild time

Almost all accounts of social organisation in pre-colonial Aboriginal society refer to the clan as the basic territorial unit (for instance Edwards 1987; Hiatt 1966; Stanner 1965; Tindale 1974). A clan is a group of kin-related people who share a
common mythical ancestor or totem whose role in the creation of the landscape confers them with authority over a tract of landscape. In effect, they act as corporate bodies (after Von Sturmer 1980) in the administration of their ‘estates’ (after Stanner 1965). Generally, clans are exogamous and members tend to marry other people within the same geographic or linguistic region. The notion of language provinces as tribal and territorial units has long had a wide appeal for dealing with regional scale views of Aboriginal social organisation. These were the units that were recorded in early ethnographic maps of Aboriginal Australia and they have become the form of Aboriginal polity most generally recognised ‘by the dominant culture and its requirements for legal incorporation’ (Sutton 1991). This has been particularly evident in recent years in the process of mapping of territorial boundaries by Aboriginal people for Native Title claims to their traditional lands. For instance, the ‘Wik’ appeal to the High Court of Australia in 1996 contained part of a Native Title claim over a large area of western Cape York Peninsula that encompassed numerous different local clans and land affiliations. The claimed area was largely justified by the litigants on the basis that the numerous languages and dialects that are spoken in the area have a common linguistic root and that their speakers have concomitant cultural and social ties (High Court of Australia 1996).

Figures 2.3 – 2.7 show the distribution of language names in western Cape York Peninsula as recorded by Roth (1907), McConnel (1939), Thomson (1972) and Taylor (1984) from separate periods of fieldwork in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and by Tindale (1974). Tindale compiled his map largely from these earlier sources. There is some variation in the spelling of language names between maps. These can be due to mishearing in the field or misreading of field notes (Tindale 1974). Also, the orthographic process of defining spellings for Aboriginal phonetics has undergone a lot of change and development in the last half century and linguist do not always agree on correct naming conventions (Veronica Strang, pers. comm.). People also call each other’s language by different names. For instance, Kokoberra people at Kowanyama call one language group Kokomunjen whereas that group refers to themselves as Yir Yoront speakers. Migration of language also occurs. One family in Kowanyama are Yir Thangedl speakers at present, whereas two generations ago their forebears
spoke Kunjen. Meanwhile they have still retained their traditional country on the Mitchell River (John Taylor, pers. comm).

![Map of Southern Cape York Peninsula](image)

**Figure 2.3:** Distribution of Language and Tribe Names in Southern Cape York Peninsula (Roth 1907)

Tindale’s map (Figure 2.6) is the most widely used reference for Aboriginal tribal boundaries but should only be consulted for the relative distribution of tribes. For instance, Tindale places the Wik Mungkan group further to the east and north of where the current population of these speakers live, and he has placed the Kunjen further to the south and east of where these speakers acknowledge their traditional country to be located. Taylor's map (Figure 2.7) is the most recent and is the closest available approximation to the present day distribution of language speakers.

‘Tribes have a name, recognise a territory, have linguistic bonds and a common system of kinship’ (Tindale 1974, 32).
Figure 2.4: The Distribution of Language and Tribe Names in Cape York Peninsula (McConnell 1939)
Figure 2.5: Distribution of Tribal Names on Cape York Peninsula (Thomson 1972)
Figure 2.6: The Aboriginal Boundaries of Central and South Western Cape York Peninsula (Tindale 1974)
Figure 2.7: Distribution of Aboriginal Language Groups in Western Cape York Peninsula (Taylor 1984)
Birdsell (1976) in work in Western Australia has discussed tribes as endogamous breeding populations with complementary degrees of spatial specialisation. He describes a regular and cellular geometry in the population distribution of dialectically and genetically related tribes in the Western Desert. Peterson (1976) borrowed on Kroeber's culture-area concept to suggest that tribes have ‘manifest boundaries which usually reflect topographic or ecological determinants’. Stanner (1965) had looked at 5 and 9 month effective rainfall isohyets, and Birdsell (1958) at mean annual rainfall in order to obtain environmental correlates whereby tribal, and population and area relationships could be obtained. Stanner (1965) also looked at vegetation zones and Peterson (1976) at drainage basins as geographical units whose perimeters may also form distinct tribal boundaries.

Tindale's map (Figure 2.6) and Sutton (1978) show that the Gulf Lowlands region as a whole encompasses a remarkable number of languages compared to other areas of Australia; that there are distinct coastal and inland language groups within the region; and, that the distribution of coastal language groups accords with major river boundaries. Wik - related languages are located at the northern end of the Lowlands with a southern boundary at the Edward River. The Wik people in the area of the present day Pormpuraaw DOGIT, that is between the Holroyd and Kendall Rivers and the Edward River were known as Wik Ianyi to the northern Wik who live around the Archer River (McConnel 1939). This distinction refers to a phonetic difference in the way that certain words were used and pronounced (McConnel 1939). The Koko or Kuuk family of languages extend southwards from the Edward River to the Staaten River and as far east as Princess Charlotte Bay (McConnel 1939; Sharp 1937). In fieldwork along the Edward River in 1928, McConnel (1939) observed that the Kuuk Thaayore were 'practically strangers to the [Wik] Mungkan on the North bank'.

Yir Yoront [Kokomunjen] and Kuuk Thaayore languages are spoken in the country between the Edward and Mitchell Rivers with a boundary between the two at the Melamen Creek. Sharp described Kuuk Thaayore, Yir Yoront and Yir Thangedl people as
‘a distinct and fairly unified social and cultural grouping, a block of people closely associated with each other and clearly set off from surrounding tribes’ (Sharp 1937, 7).

Yir Thangedl, Kokoberra and Kokoberrin speakers live south of the Mitchell River. The Bosworth Creek, Gooseberry Creek, Topsy Creek and Nassau River separate their country respectively. Bakanh, Olkola and Kunjen speakers are found about 50 kilometres further inland of the coast along a north-south axis that may extend as far inland as the Great Dividing Range. Inland people occasionally refer to themselves as 'freshwater people' in order to distinguish themselves from 'saltwater' people on the coast.

There is a general agreement in the academic literature that a tribe comprises groups of clans who occupy contiguous areas and who speak the same language. Despite this solidarity, the clan is almost always regarded as the autonomous landholding unit, and there has never been any clear example of where the degree of governance over land that attaches to this institution has been translated to regional level corporate bodies such as a linguistic tribe (Edwards 1987). Indeed, Lauriston Sharp in fieldwork in the Mitchell River area in the 1930s rejected the notion of tribal organisation of land amongst Yir Yoront people. Sharp in a criticism of the 'stereotyped ethnography of Australia' summarised territorial organisation as follows

‘rights were not invested collectively but with particular individuals in the clan membership’ and where ‘… the Yir Yoront cannot even tolerate mild chiefs or headmen, while a leader with absolute authority over the whole group would be unthinkable’ (1958).

Language groups such as the Yir Yoront, Olkola and Kuuk Thaayore shared some clan estates in the Mitchell River area, and people from different language groups occasionally co-resided in camps at considerable distances away from their language province (Sharp 1937). For instance, Sharp recorded the presence of Kuuk Thaayore people, from north of the Coleman River, in camps in Yir Yoront country. Sharp described a landscape with relatively permeable territorial boundaries and did not see these language groups as distinct societies or landholding corporations. Thomson (1972) and Von Sturmer (1980), with
reference to Wik Mungkan and Kandju speaking people in the upper Archer River area of the Gulf Lowlands, make the point that geographically proximate clans either side of tribal or language boundaries often had more in common with each other, than with clans elsewhere within their own tribal area. Keen (1997) has summarised regional scale social organisation in Aboriginal Australia in terms of a series of interconnected communication networks based more upon kinship relations than upon separately bounded tribal domains, with relative ease of movement across some networks and with constraints in other networks or in particular directions between networks. Von Sturmer (1980) cites an example of Wik people staying with Thaayore people on a visit to the Edward River Mission from Aurukun in the 1970s as they shared ‘brolga talk’, a special language that accompanies a traditional story narrative, even though their own languages are otherwise mutually unintelligible.

There is little evidence of intermediate levels of social organisation between the tribe and the clan in the form of moieties, or sections or sub-sections on the Gulf Lowlands. Nevertheless, Sharp (1937) saw suggestions of endogamous moiety organisation amongst Yir Yoront people that might have formed part of a broader province between the Edward River and the Staaten River in the broad class of ‘Kuuk’ or ‘Koko’ language country, and which may have extended inland up to the Great Dividing Range and the headwaters of the Palmer and Lynd Rivers. At the time he thought it was a recent introduction from the South but discounted its existence in later writing (Sharp 1958). Alpher (1991) in a description of social organisation in his dictionary of the Yir Yoront language divides the Yir Yoront clans into the two Pam Pip and Pam Lul moieties that were originally recorded by Sharp (1937). Taylor (1984) could find no evidence of these moieties at Kowanyama. I have never heard any reference to them in my time in Kowanyama. McConnel (1939), Thomson (1972) and Von Sturmer (1980) also all discount the existence of moiety level organisation north of the Edward River in Wik country. McConnel (1939) and Von Sturmer (1980) did recognise some evidence of moiety influences from inland Bakanh people in the way that people organised ritual ceremonies in the upper Archer River country.
A minimum population of between 250 and 500 people has been suggested as an optimal size for maintaining the range of social relationships that ensure the viability of a language (Radcliffe-Brown 1952 cited in Sutton 1978). The linguistic diversity of the Gulf Lowlands region is matched by reports of very high population densities in the earlier years of this century, particularly in the Mitchell River area (for instance Roth 1907). Gilbert White, the first bishop of the Carpentaria Anglican diocese, reported in 1903

‘... an area of 500 square miles comprising the delta of the Mitchell River has been applied for as an Aboriginal reserve for a Church Mission: and should it be granted the Church will have an opportunity beginning work in the most densely populated Aboriginal centre in Queensland and probably the only one where the natives have not come in more or less disastrous contact with civilisation. The land is well supplied with native food of all kinds and the area is sufficiently large to support considerable numbers’ (White 1917 cited in Strang 1994).

Tramp (1935) estimated that there were 700 Aboriginal people in the Mitchell River area of present day Kowanyama in 1935. In the late 1920s, McConnel (1939) estimated 200 Wik people between the Holroyd and Kendall Rivers and the Edward River, in the northern part of the present day Pormpuraaw DOGIT. These figures do not differ greatly from the present day population levels that correspond to those areas. McConnel (1939) and Sharp (1937) felt that local populations were probably much higher prior to European contact and had been depleted by disease and by the depredations of White pastoralists who had started to colonise the area in the early 1890s. Sharp described the existence of what appeared to be recently deceased clan estates in his fieldwork between the Mitchell and Coleman Rivers and McConnell also recorded country around the Edward River which appeared to have been recently depopulated. Overall, Sutton (1978) has estimated population densities of between two and three people per square mile for the coastal areas of the Gulf Lowlands, which might have made this region one of the most densely populated areas of pre-contact Aboriginal Australia. A final point to consider in relation to the maps reproduced in Figures 2.3 – 2.7 is that the geographic area of language or tribal provinces is inversely related to overall population size in western Cape York Peninsula. Despite the larger area of their territory, ethnographies suggest much lower population sizes for inland tribal groups than for those on the coast. This is probably because of
the greater abundance, constancy and diversity of flora and fauna food sources on
the coast (Chase and Sutton 1981).

2.2.2 Mission time
The Gulf Lowlands was first surveyed and mapped in the early 1860s. The first
cadastral map of the area published in 1885 shows a 30 mile wide strip of land
along the Gulf coastline that had been set aside as a ‘Settled District’. This
corresponds approximately with the extent of the present day Kowanyama and
Pormpuraaw DOGIT and Aurukun Shire areas. In 1903 Gilbert White, the
incumbent minister at the Yarrabah mission near Cairns, persuaded the
government to set up the Mitchell River reserve area at the southern end of the
Gulf Lowlands between the Nassau and Mitchell Rivers (Figures 2.8 and 2.9).
'The Protection of Aboriginals and Prevention of the Sale of Opium' Act
(Queensland 1897) provided the mechanism to do this. As part of the title of the
Act implies the genocidal acts of pastoralists and miners against Aboriginal
people at the turn of the century was causing concern to the government of the
day. The other part of the title reflects some of the conditions at the time amongst
the European population on the Far North Queensland frontier. The Act was used
to establish the 'Settled District' as a 'Reserve for the Benefit of the Aboriginal
Inhabitants of the State' under the office of the Chief Protector of Aborigines. A
map of 1912 shows that by that date that the area between Topsy Creek and the
Mitchell River had been given over to the Anglican Church as the Mitchell River
Aboriginal Reserve (Figure 2.9).

Earlier attempts to set up a mission in the 1890s were resisted. Local Aboriginal
resistance to European occupation was recorded with one fatality in the Leichhardt
expedition of 1845 (cited in Taylor 1999), and again with expedition members
lost in an encounter between the Jardine Brothers on their journey northwards to
Somerset along the west coast of the Peninsula at the 'Battle of the Mitchell
River' in 1864 (Gribble 1933). In 1889, Europeans petitioned the government to
set up a mounted Native Police regiment at the Highbury pastoral lease. Both this
and the
Figure 2.8: The Area of the Proposed Aboriginal Mission at Mitchell River in 1902
neighbouring Dunbar pastoral holding, about 90 kilometres from the present day Kowanyama township, became bridgeheads for the suppression of local Aboriginal resistance to pastoral expansion in the lower Peninsular and upper Gulf country. Gribble made two packhorse expeditions from Yarrabah, near Cairns, to the Mitchell River area in the 1900s and describes the resistance he encountered to his Anglican mission from miners in Chillagoe and in Palmer River townships. On one occasion he had to dismount from his horse and to physically remonstrate with protesters in order to let his expedition pass.
Residents at Kowanyama still have many stories about conditions at this time (see Strang 1994). When I have accompanied local people on recreational or mapping trips around the country between the Coleman River and the Mitchell River, there are frequent references to the sites of massacres or to places where resistance to the invasion of their lands had taken place. In the evening, conversation around camp fires invariably turns to the events that took place at these locations and feelings of anger or grief are still palpable. From the 1890s onwards, ‘recalcitrant’ people in the Mitchell River district were taken away to the penal colony for Aboriginal people at Palm Island, near Townsville.

Plate 2.1: The Gribble Expedition on their return to Yarrabah from the Mitchell River (Kowanyama Collection)
Stories of the forcible separation of families and removal of women and children by police abound for the period until the 1950s.

Figure 2.9 illustrates the competing interests between the mission at Mitchell River and aspiring pastoral interests at the start of the 20th century. The occupation licenses referred to in this map were subsequently converted to pastoral leases under the Land Act of 1911 and appended to Koolatah and Rutland Plains pastoral leases and the reserved area reduced accordingly.

Early colonial history to the north of the Mitchell River is hardly recalled at all today by local people at Pormpuraaw and there is no oral history of Aboriginal resistance to colonisation of the kind that exists at Kowanyama. Reports from the office of the ‘Northern Protector of Aborigines’ in Brisbane describe frontier conditions in the area of the Mitchellton pastoral lease, which straddles the coastal reaches of the Mitchell and Coleman Rivers at the southern end of the present day Pormpuraaw DOGIT area. For instance, in a letter of 8 September 1921, from the Chief Protector of Aboriginals to the Under Secretary of the Home Secretary’s Department in Brisbane, concerning an application to take up a pastoral lease:

‘there are about 300 natives roaming on this country, and when the company starts operations the natives will doubtless be hunted off.... I would strongly urge that, before allowing anyone else to obtain possession this Department be first consulted as regards the need for reserving the area for native purposes’ (cited in High Court of Australia, 1996).

Lauriston Sharp who was engaged in fieldwork in the country between the Mitchell River and the Coleman River in the early 1930s talks of the area beyond the Coleman River as if it were somewhere ‘beyond the pale’. He had probably contacted Kuuk Thaayore people in the country between the Coleman and the Edward Rivers but repeats rumours of their taciturn nature and locally acknowledged powers of sorcery, and of suspicions of the practice of cannibalism.
Figure 2.10: The first declared reserve area in the Edward River District in 1915

Figure 2.11: The extent of the Edward River Aboriginal Reserve in 1942
(Sharp 1937). The latter rumour was probably taken from Roth (1907) who had misinterpreted the purpose of some of the mortuary practices in the area, such as the evisceration and desiccation of corpses, prior to their burial or cremation. Ursula McConnel made two packhorse trips southwards from the Archer River mission at Aurukun into Holroyd River and Edward River country in 1927 and 1928. She commented at the time that

‘There are no missions on the Edward and Holroyd rivers, and for this reason people in these parts live a natural hunting existence ….. The women are conservative, know no pidgin - English, and had never set eyes on a white woman before 1928’ (McConnel 1939, 99).

At the time that Sharp was writing, about a third of the population of the Mitchell River reserve were in the mission that had been set up by Gilbert White and John Chapman: first of all at Trabanaman on the coast at Topsy Creek in 1905, and then further inland at Kowanyama where it relocated in 1911 in order to obtain a more reliable fresh water supply (Done 1987). Some approaches had been made by people from north of the reserve to John Chapman, the church mission superintendent at Kowanyama at the time, to set up a mission in the Edward River district. After a couple of abortive attempts during the 1920s and early 1930s to establish a mission at Puyul, in Yir Yoront country immediately to the north of the Coleman River (Plate 2.2), Daniels, another Kowanyama missionary, found a site nearby the Edward River and a mission was set up there in 1939. Cadastral records show that the reserve was initially declared over the area of the Battersea lease in Yir Yoront country in 1915 (Figure 2.10). The reserve was extended in 1922, probably in response to the above request by the Chief Protector, to encompass the area between the Edward and Mitchell Rivers by including the Mitchellton lease, and coincidentally large tracts of Thaayore country. In 1942, the Queensland Department of Native Affairs moved the southern boundary of the Mitchell River Aboriginal reserve northward to the Coleman River so that it contained more Yir Yoront country. It also extended the western boundary of the Edward River reserve to the 30 mile ‘Settled District’ boundary of 1865 and thus encompassed all Kuuk Thaayore and also small tracts of Bakanh language country (Figure 2.11).
Freier summarises some of the circumstances that accompanied the last of these boundary changes

‘Geoffrey Philip, a Kokominjen man, served as a tracker with Constables Klupfel and Sammon of the Normanton patrol between 15 June 1941 and 3 August 1941. This patrol arrested Charlie T, Billy Flower, Jack Bruno, Santom, Tommy Fitztom and Bruce, consigning them to Palm Island, where they arrived on 9 September 1941. On Geoffrey’s own account this patrol was decisive in settling the bush dwellers at the Edward River Mission. Geoffrey operated quite independently of the white police for much of this time, accompanied only by Rolly, the Normanton tracker, as his “horsetailer”. Armed with double-barrelled police carbines and revolvers, and equipped with a set of chains and handcuffs, the khaki-suited pair were a highly mobile and visible presence as they traversed the country from the Coleman River into Strathgordon station. Geoffrey’s message to the Kokominjen and Thaayore people he encountered was simple: “The government has claimed this country”, and “I just want to put you back in the Mission”. Producing his revolver or “bulldog” as he called it, if there was any sign of a fight, he told the bush dwellers, “Bye and bye I’ll send you lot all to Palm Island”, if they did not co-operate. There was no disputing the reality of this threat’ (Freier 1999, 267 – 268).

In 1958 the area of the Edward River reserve was virtually doubled with the movement of its northern boundary from the Edward River to the Holroyd River, with the inclusion of extensive tracts of Wik country. Many Wik Mungkan people came in to live in the mission at around this time (Von Sturmer 1980).

Cyclone Dora devastated the Mitchell River and the Edward River missions in 1964. The palm thatch architecture, and the gardens and orchards of both communities were swept away. This was the end of an epoch still referred to by local people as ‘Mission time’ or ‘Chapman time’, or as ‘Cabbage Tree time’ in Kowanyama English due to the distinctive palm leaf architecture of both communities which disappeared in the cyclone. The Queensland government financed the start of the reconstruction of both communities that year, and eventually their administration was transferred from the church to the State in 1967.
The reserved areas around each mission were transferred as a ‘Deed of Grant in Trust’ (DOGIT), under the administration of the State government, to each community in 1968. Kowanyama, as the Mitchell River Mission was renamed in 1973, enclosed the reserve area, as defined in 1942, of 2520 sq km between Topsy Creek and the Coleman River. Pormpuraaw, renamed from Edward River mission in 1987, enclosed 4800 sq km between the Coleman and Holroyd Rivers, as defined within the 1958 reserve boundary.

2.3 **Land tenure and social structuration on the southern Gulf Lowlands**

Changes in Aboriginal social structure may have already been under way on the western side of Cape York Peninsula in the years immediately prior to the foundation of the Mitchell River mission in 1903. For instance, McConnel (1939) suggested that differences between her mapping of territorial boundaries (figure 2.4) and those of Roth (Figure 2.3) and Sharp may be significant and might be because of *the shifting sands of culture change*. Roth (1907) had observed in the Gulf and Mitchell River country at the start of the century that
'Local groups, bound together by a homogenous culture, and only slightly differentiated from each other in dialect are in the process of splitting off into distinct tribal entities' (cited in McConnel 1939,60).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is evidence that some areas were depleted of their population at around this time (McConnell 1939; Sharp 1937). Gribble’s account of resistance to his mission and oral histories in Kowanyama of ‘battles’ with early pastoralists and miners as early as the Jardine expedition in the 1860s (though this particular encounter is not recalled in oral history at Kowanyama) speak of some of the causes of this depletion. There is also linguistic evidence of the displacement of Olkola people from country between the Coleman River and the Mitchell River country by European miners in the later nineteenth century (Sommer cited in Strang 1994). A similar fragmentation of Aboriginal populations has also been observed elsewhere in Australia by other early ethnographers (Stanner 1965). As pointed out in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Stanner suggested that a 'super waterhole' effect might have been at work with groups coming into newly founded cattle stations and missions, or others displaced. A broad distinction, at first between ‘station natives’ and ‘bush natives’ (Gribble 1933) or between ‘wild blacks’ and ‘station blacks’ (Strang 1994) was one recognised by both Aboriginal and European people on Cape York Peninsula from the earliest years of the 20th century. Gribble (1933) records how it determined relations between those Aboriginal people who lived on the Koolatah, Rutland Plains and Dunbar pastoral stations, adjacent to Kowanyama, and those ‘myalls’ who lived in the bush in the lower Mitchell River country in the years prior to the foundation of the mission. Pastoralists actively discouraged contact between these two populations. The arrival of the church missions created another set of categories by which Aboriginal people classified themselves as either at the core, proximate to, or outside of the mission reserve. These populations are defined by their language affiliation and the geographical proximity of their homeland country to the township (Table 2.2). A peripheral status has been assigned to those tribal groups whose homeland country is beyond the boundaries of the reserve and present day Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama DOGIT areas.
Table 2.2: Territorial relations of language groups to reserve areas on the southern Gulf Lowlands

The missionaries at the Mitchell River mission had also made distinctions between insiders and outsiders whereby their most valued local supporters and servants, ‘kings’ or ‘captains’ in early 20th century Aboriginal English, were on the inside and ‘camp blacks’ and ‘wild blacks’ were on the periphery of mission life.

‘The missionary agenda for the people of the Mitchell River contained an incipient social structure with clear distinctions between the inside and the outside of the Mission. Rewards would be dispensed and punishments imposed relative to the standing of any individual across this divide’ (Freier 1999, 238).

The creation of an Aboriginal reserve on the Gulf Lowlands under the ‘The Protection of Aboriginals and Prevention of the Sale of Opium’ Act (Queensland 1897) and the subsequent imposition of mission and DOGIT boundaries over Aboriginal lands provided a structure for European administration of the region. Local people created their own domains within this framework and adopted a variety of forms of social structuration in living and working with each other and with their administrators. The core-proximate-peripheral terms in Table 2.2 are not actually used by local people but the implicit relationships that underlie these terms are still resonant in social relations and land allocation practice in the early 2000s.

The renegotiation of geographical space and process of social differentiation on the Southern Gulf Lowlands was also a local Aboriginal creation and a
response to the ‘dominant institutional projects’ (after Pred 1984) of the church and State. Foucault (cited in Rabinow 1991) provides a suite of concepts in the analysis of the nature of power and of government, and of their effects on European society that are applicable to the Gulf Lowlands experience. From a historical perspective, he describes the use of ‘dividing practices’, for instance the formal isolation of the sick, the poor or the insane in institutions as a form of social control by the State from the 17th century onwards. Also, the ‘subjectification’ that underlay these practices i.e. the categories into which people are placed, and by which they are identified, and how these affect their actions, and in turn their relations with other classes of people. These have parallels with the alienation of Aboriginal people from their country and their isolation in the State reserve system. Foucault also describes the role of ‘disciplinary technologies’ in social structuration. In the Gulf Lowlands these had included the use of the dormitory system to ‘Christianise’ young people; the operation of community work regimes and of attendant payment or ration systems, and the powers of banishment from the reserve for malcontents. In turn though, Aboriginal people on the Gulf Lowlands adopted their own systems of subjectification in order to objectify and to complement those introduced by the State. In effect they recreated their own social practices to fit the historical and geographical circumstances of each community.

The core areas (see Table 2.2) coincide with the hinterland of the mission settlements. The proximate areas are the successive later additions to each reserve area that have been described so far in this chapter. Trabanamam, the site of the first Mitchell River mission is in Kokoberra country and the present site at Kowanyama is in the marchlands of Yir Thangedl and Kokoberra country. Kokoberra people continued to be core people after the move to Kowanyama in 1911 as they were the largest group that lived in the mission. As well as historical primacy, their core status was probably also because of the continued use of their country for mission cattle operations after the move. Kokoberra country was ‘inside’ country. Kokoberra was also the language of the school dormitory in mission times and became a 'lingua franca' for most people who went through the mission school at Kowanyama, irrespective of whether students were local or
came from Pormpuraaw or from an Aboriginal camp on a pastoral property outside of the reserve areas.

Freier observes from an analysis of mission records how the Kokoberra regarded the mission as their own

‘The missionaries were not merely tolerated intruders but represented a valued resource that the Kokoberra were keen to cultivate and if possible monopolise’ (Freier 1999, 240).

‘In 1936 the Kokoberra were confident enough in their position of dominance to demand that they be given absolute preference for employment in the Mission’s cattle enterprise’ (Freier 1999, 274).

The boundary change from the Mitchell River to the Coleman River in 1942 and the inclusion of a greater area of Yir Yoront country within Kowanyama led to the removal of many Yir Yoront speakers from the Edward River mission at Pormpuraaw to the Mitchell River mission at Kowanyama. Yir Yoront people, who still lived a traditional ‘bush life’ in the Kowanyumal area between the Mitchell and Coleman Rivers which coincided with the area of the 1942 boundary change, had been removed by police to Kowanyama in 1937, and the Thaayore people who shared the country with them were allowed to remain behind (Ezra Michael, pers. comm). The evolution of Thaayore people as the core population in the Edward River mission occurred following changes to the reserve boundaries in 1922 and 1942, and the relocation of the mission from Puyal in Yir Yoront country to the site of the present day township in 1939. This left them with ‘territorial possession’ of the mission township, and with the greatest area of traditional country and the largest population in the reserve area. The extension of the northern boundary of the reserve from the Edward River to the Holroyd River in 1958 almost doubled its area and brought Wik people, some of whom were already resident in the mission, more formally into the reserve.

Those people whose traditional country lay beyond the ‘1865 Settled District’, on pastoral properties to the east of the DOGIT areas, periodically visited either Pormpuraaw or Kowanyama throughout the mission years. Many young Kokoberrin and Kunjen and a few Olkola people were also sent into the
Kowanyama mission school from Aboriginal camps on surrounding properties to live in the dormitory with other young local people. Those Kunjen people, whose traditional country lay outside the reserve area, started to migrate permanently to Kowanyama in the early 1960s. Bakanh and Olkola people started to move into either Pormpuraaw or Kowanyama in the later 1960s and early 1970s. Both manoeuvres were initiated by the introduction of compulsory school attendance for their children in the 1950s, and by the introduction of award wages in the early 1970s and the prohibition of subsistence payments to Aboriginal people in the cattle industry. They had previously lived in camps or ‘villages’ of between 20 and 50 people on the Strathgordon and Koolatah properties in Olkola country, on Strathwell in Bakanh country, on Dunbar in Kunjen country; and in smaller numbers, on Rutland Plains and Inkerman in Kokoberra and Kokoberrin country (Colin Lawrence, pers. comm). Most Kunjen country lies beyond the eastern boundary of Kowanyama though there are small areas inside it which means that in terms of the classification that is proposed in Table 2.1 that there are both proximate and marginal relations to the Kowanyama area amongst Kunjen speakers. The same situation applies for Bakanh people in Pormpuraaw.

The remoteness of the Southern Gulf Lowlands region and the nature of the ‘Mission time’ and ‘Department time’ administrations experienced there, which because of their isolation were quite different to those experienced by Aboriginal communities elsewhere in Queensland, facilitated this process of social differentiation.

2.3.1 Mission time on the southern Gulf Lowlands

The main aim of the early church missions to the region was one of protection and the saving of lives, rather than redemption and the saving of souls. The Anglican foundations at Edward River and Mitchell River were quite benign. They were not proselytising missions in the way that the Presbyterian mission under Mackenzie at the Archer River mission at Aurukun had been, and were more focussed on health and education and left local people to continue to use the bush to supplement mission rations. Almost without exception, older people at both Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw have a fond regard for Mission time. Gribble’s speech at the Mitchell River in 1905 shows the intent of his mission
and of Chapman's later missions in the Mitchell River and Edward River reserves.

‘First the Bishop says thank you that you looked after the little house I built last year, and kept it in good order. The missionaries have kept their word. We said we would be back in six moons and here we are. We are here to teach you about God the Great Father, who made you and the grass and trees and animals and the women also. We are very glad to hear you have not speared any cattle since our last visit (grins of conscious virtue on the part of the audience). We do not want to make you like the white men but good black men. Still walkabout, still catch possum and wallaby, still make good corroboree, but not kill cattle, not steal, not fight another tribe, not hit wife on head with waddy (symptoms of disapproval here among the men) and wife also, she not talk-walk at her husband (sudden revival of interest in the front rows and an emphatic click of approval). When you sick you come, we make you well. We teach children read and write in school’ (White 1928, 22).

It was a disciplined regime, with separate dormitories for school age boys and girls at Mitchell River up until the 1960s, and one with a clearly recognised hierarchy with the mission superintendent at the top. Control over young people continued after their schooling with some young women remaining in the dormitory until they married (Taylor 1979). When they were 14 years old young men were sent away from the Mission to camp at Scrubby Bore, a stockyard for the Mission cattle enterprise, about 20 kilometres away in Kokoberra country. They stayed there until a job as a stockman or drover on a surrounding pastoral property became available (Colin Lawrence, pers. comm). The missions were an important reservoir of labour for the cattle industry of Far North Queensland and many men and some women spent most of their lives working for subsistence wages in this industry and with only infrequent visits home during these years.

The mission settlements at Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw were organised into what are referred to locally as 'villages'.

‘Here all the natives live in separate villages, according to their particular tribes, and portions of good land have been allotted to each family, so that they can grow vegetables and become independent’ (Mansbridge 1939, 37).

A single ‘tribe’ or group of language speakers populated each village, or neighbourhood. On ‘feast days’ at Christmas and Easter, the Kowanyama
community would move in a procession stopping at the houses of Mission workers to sing hymns and then retire to their separate ‘villages’ where a beast would be slaughtered and consumed by each tribe. Residents there were occasionally allowed to ‘keep their own law’, for instance to resolve problems arising from occasional ‘tribal bloodletting’ in the community (Kenny Jimmy, pers. comm). This process of spatial and social differentiation appeared to have taken place with little direct intervention from the missionaries. The mission diaries for Mitchell River for 1936 describe an area being set aside from the rest of the community for newly arrived Yir Yoront people to build shelters for themselves (Oxley Library, Brisbane). Bottoms (1992) cites the reactions of some residents, mostly Kokoberra and Yir Thangedl people at that time, to the arrival of these people into the mission, for instance

‘Oh they was naked. When Chapman brought them in, children used to feel funny about it you know, them mission kids. They didn’t have a stitch of clothes at all, when them come into the mission. They wasn’t worry about it out there, because in those days they respect their elders you know, because no-one can’t laugh at each other, nothing to be ’shamed of’’ (Harry Daphne, cited in Bottoms 1992 and Strang 1994, 37).

These people had been forcibly removed from country north of the Mitchell River by police from Normanton (Ezra Michael pers. comm.) prior to its transfer in 1942 from the Mitchell River reserve to the newly established Edward River reserve and a clear sense of difference in status between longer term residents of the mission and the new arrivals is apparent in the above statement. Sharp lived amongst the Yir Yoront in the mid-1930s and described a society that was relatively undisturbed by contact with European Australians (1937, 1952). Their territory was around the Coleman River on the marchlands between the Mitchell River Mission and the yet to be established Edward River Mission. It is almost certain that not all of the Yir Yoront people went directly into the Mission when they were relocated south of the Mitchell River. A 1933 report from the Chief Protector of Aborigines (ABM 1933) says that 300 people lived in the Mitchell River Mission township and another 700 people were ‘living the nomadic life’ within the reserve area. It is most likely that core (township), proximate (reserve area) and peripheral (beyond the reserve) populations were a feature of Mitchell River Mission demography for about 50 years of the 20th century. It is equally
likely that the proximate population was comprised of some Kokoberra and more so Kunjen and Olkola as well as Yir Yoront people, each of whom followed their own trajectories from peripheral to proximate to core locations within the geography and social life of the Mission over the years.

Over the years mission regimes veered between Calvinist orthodoxy where the aim was the assimilation of the indigent population into the church and into European society, to more benign administrations. Anglican church workers in the last days of Mission Time in 1966 regarded Kowanyama as a kind of socialist utopia or ‘kibbutz’ with what they perceived as communal living in the township 'villages'; and, access to and use of their traditional country encouraged by the Mission (Barry Alpher, pers. comm).

The Edward River Mission was the last Aboriginal mission to be set up in Queensland when it was established in 1939. Chapman spent the first 15 years of its life in establishing its basic infrastructure. Like other church missions in North Queensland, there was little government support for the Edward River Mission and only the most primitive facilities existed in the early years. Chapman had started the mission by planting gardens of potato, yam, taro and cassava, and orchards of pawpaw and banana. Gribble, the first missionary at Kowanyama, and Chapman were both farmers from New South Wales who had pragmatic as well as spiritual goals for the missions that they set up, the foremost of which was economic self-sufficiency. The mission years at Edward River are barely documented. A colourful account of what life was like there in the early 1950s is given by Bob Norman (1976) in ‘Bush Pilot’. Some of it is worth quoting as it provides a glimpse of living conditions at this time and of the isolation of the Edward River mission.

Twenty-five years ago, in Cape York Peninsula, the Holroyd River [Wik Mungkan] and Edward River [Kuuk Thaayore] Aborigines were notoriously wild and still living in their tribal state. Most of the natives elsewhere had come in to the missions where their children were given schooling and the old people received medical care. The Holroyd tribesmen seldom came in, but when they did there were fights, spears were thrown, and everyone was glad when they left. ....
An urgent call for assistance from the Edward River Mission had been received by the Cairns Aerial Ambulance. Mr Chapman had taken seriously ill and required speedy transport to a doctor.

The only plane capable of doing the job was the Tiger Moth.... The only thing I had to worry about was I did not know where the Edward River Mission was located. It was probably somewhere on the river, but was it at the mouth or inland. No one could tell me for sure. It wasn't marked on my map. . . .

South of the river mouth I saw an Aboriginal carrying a spear. There must be others about - and wonder of wonders, there was an aircraft in the water. A Boston bomber, I guessed. . . . More natives were in view now. Ah smoke at last. Good heavens, I had flown right over the mission without seeing it. There was the strip - just as well, for I had only just enough fuel to get back to Mitchell River.

The blacks swarmed around the little aircraft, and I realised immediately they were not ordinary aborigines. Many towered head and shoulders above me, and they looked fierce fellows, too.

They led me along a shellgrit path through the swamps, past patches of taro, arrowroot, and bananas. Soon we came on to a high sandy ridge, and there were pandanus houses.

The natives took me to one where Mr Chapman lived. . . . He told me over a cup of tea that he had spent the major part of his life with the mission in the Gulf. He had been superintendent of Mitchell River nearly fifty years before, and it was during his term there that the Edward River tribes defiantly sent word ahead of them that they would march to Mitchell River and murder all the whites. . . .

Mr Chapman then sent word to the Edward River natives that he was coming up there. He did not say he was going to kill them, though that is what they thought. They all went bush when he landed from a boat except three old men who had been left to their fate because they were too old to travel. Mr Chapman promptly set about building himself a pandanus thatch house with an audience of three amazed old men. . . .

I asked Mr. Chapman about the Boston bomber in the water. "Yes", he said, "that happened during the war. Some American boys got lost and they were almost out of petrol when they landed here. They had no idea that there was a mission station nearby. It was an act of Providence that they landed right here, for had they landed a few miles north or south of here they would surely have perished from thirst".

They climbed out on the wing nearest the beach. The natives with their fishing spears gathered around, and the American lads thought their end was near. As they were waiting and wondering who was going to be first, I walked up and said, "Well, are you coming down?" "Waal, I'll be gol-darned," said one of them, "they speak American".
They hopped down and were surprised to find that a white man had spoken to them. "I say, buddy, where the heck are we?" "This is Edward River Mission."

"What part of Noo Guinea is that?" "This is not New Guinea, this is the Australian mainland, I told them. But if you come up to my house I will show you where you are on the map."

Chapman refers to the above airmen in his own diaries as ‘quite a nice lot of chaps’. His diaries for the years between 1939 and 1946 (Oxley Library, Brisbane) are a daily summary of the transactions of mission business and give very few insights into mission life in those years other than an occasional fractious relationship, as described above, between Thaayore people and groups of Wik people who came into the mission from time to time. Wik Mungkan people migrated into the community throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Around the same time, Yir Yoront people who had been living in their own village at the Edward River mission were moving south to the Mitchell River mission either by forced removal by the police or voluntarily, following recurrent quarrels with Kuuk Thaayore people (Alpher 1991; Taylor 1984) who, in a territorial and demographic sense, had replaced them as the ‘core’ members of the mission with the removal of the first mission from its first site at Puyal to the present day site in 1939 and with the 1942 boundary change from the Mitchell River to the Coleman River.

2.3.2 Department time on the southern Gulf Lowlands
With the transfer of administration from the church to the State in 1968 the missions became institutions under the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DAIA). Government administration had clear ideological goals for Department time, which are reflected in two ways; in day-to-day administration of the township; and in the management of land use and of local notions of land ownership in the landscape.

2.3.2.1 The township
The DAIA had been the Department of Native Affairs until 1965, and subsequently became the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) in 1981. The Department, under its various titles, administered what was generally known as ‘the Act’. This had its first inception in the 1897 Act with
successive amendments to 1934; then as 'The Aboriginals Preservation and Protection' Acts of 1939 to 1946, and then the 'Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs' Act of 1965, and ultimately as 'The Aborigines' Act, 1971 to 1984. These Acts provided the Department with instruments of total control over the daily lives of the entire Aboriginal population of the State until 1973, and from then onwards over ‘assisted Aborigines’, those people identified under the 1971 Act as living on State assigned reserves, such as at Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw.

Department time brought official assimilation policy whose aim was to encourage the integration of Aboriginal people into the lifestyles and values of mainstream White Australia. This was approached in two ways in Queensland. First, with a policy of neglect and deliberate pauperisation of those Aboriginal communities which were close to major population centres such as Yarrabah near Cairns, Palm Island near Townsville, and Warrabinda near Rockhampton and Cherbourg near Mackay (Kidd 1997). The Queensland government had a clear ideological goal to run down the reserve system at such locations and to assimilate their population into nearby urban centres. On the other hand, more remote communities, such as those around the Gulf of Carpentaria and on Cape York Peninsula, which were beyond any economic interest of White Australia, were instead encouraged to adopt those lifestyles and values that might be found in other small towns elsewhere in rural Queensland (Chase 1980; Taylor 1984).

Aboriginal Community councils were set up under the 1965 Act to allow local representation in community government on State reserves. The councils initially comprised four members and then five from 1971 onwards, and were under the supervision of the local Department manager. The manager was required to take minutes of each meeting, which were then sent to the Director in Brisbane, who then advised the manager directly on any action that needed to be taken (Kidd 1997). At first, two councillors were elected by a community and then from 1971 onwards three. The Department directly appointed the other councillors. The councils could introduce bye-laws subject to their approval by the Director in Brisbane (Taylor 1984).
Kidd’s (1997) history of Department time in Queensland describes an administration dominated by the three men who were its Director in the years between 1914 and 1986, each of whom established his own hegemony and total control of Aboriginal affairs in the State. Missions, which were called communities following the 1965 ‘Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander’ Act (Queensland), were places where every facet of daily life from birth to death was administered by the Department. People who lived on reserves and were thus ‘under the Act’ had to have ‘certificates of entitlement’ to live there, which up until 1971, could be revoked at any time by the Director. Prior to 1971, 'assisted Aborigines', in other words those who lived on reserves, could be subject to renewable six months detention for disobeying a manager's orders, or for leaving a reserve without permission. Greater freedom of movement on and off reserves was obtained in 1971, although visits by people from outside of the reserve continued to be arranged on a ‘permit’ basis until 1982 (Monaghan 2004). Some people who left their community to go and live or work elsewhere had difficulties in reclaiming their ‘certificate of entitlement’ and thus the right to return home (for instance see figure 2.12).

The above regime of surveillance and control implies that people were contained in their communities and that the DOGIT boundaries were continually monitored and policed. State reserves have been considered as ‘total institutions’ whose purpose was the isolation, incarceration and reform or transformation of inmates, and whose regimes were largely penal (after Goffman 1964 and Rowley 1976, cited in Rowse 1993). Trigger (1988) in a review of European - Aboriginal relations at Doomadgee, a DOGIT community on the southern coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, framed his analysis of their ramifications for Doomadgee society in terms of conditions of ‘Coercion or Consent’. He felt that though there was no direct coercion, as has been described for other Aboriginal communities elsewhere in Australia (for instance Rowse 1993), that it was always implicit in the institutions and social hierarchy of a mission life that was supervised by the Plymouth Brethren up until the early 1980s. This was not entirely the Kowanyama or Pormpuraaw experience. It seemed that despite the surveillance of the communities by Brisbane bureaucrats, their remoteness meant that local administrators could work quite autonomously with local people. The remoteness
of both places and the fact that all of their populations were from within the Gulf Lowlands, and that there were no people from outside of the region forcibly moved to either place, adds to the sense of the southern Gulf Lowland communities as a distinct enclave within Queensland. Local people in Kowanyama were as diligent as the bureaucrats in enforcing Department rules, and from time to time, in Council, in independently ordering the prohibition of people from the reserve (Billy Thomas, Colin Lawrence, Kenny Jimmy, pers.comm). Taylor (1984) reported compliance and even enthusiasm by people at Pormpuraaw for the Department administration and its goals in the 1970s.
Whilst working with Department officers, the local population maintained many of the elements of their traditional bush lifestyle in social practices in the township. For instance, Taylor (1984, 1988) documented ways in which the European presence and the values that the Department espoused were integrated into Edward River cosmology, and rationalised by local people in revised or new creation ‘stories’.

Nowadays, if someone behaves in an authoritarian manner in Kowanyama, they are likely to be reprimanded for ‘carrying on like a Department manager’. This retort is usually delivered in a spirit of good humour rather than anger. Many Department staff resigned and stayed behind in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in the employ of the local Aboriginal councils after administration was transferred to them in 1987.

2.3.2.2 The landscape
Overall, the involvement of locally elected DOGIT councils in the 1970s and the early 1980s was in affairs of the township, and not of adjoining DOGIT lands which remained under total control of the Department. The main land use was open-range grazing of a cattle herd which was managed by the Department.

The church missions in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama had let people use the bush whenever they wanted. Sometimes they were encouraged to do so if mission rations were in short supply, and often in the dry season families would camp out in their traditional country for weeks on end. The Department who actively opposed any Aboriginal interest in land ownership or in land use initiatives discouraged such activities (Monaghan 2004). For instance, attempts by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission (ALFC), a Federal government body, to buy a property at Archer River Bend for John Kooworta, the traditional owner of the land and a resident of Aurukun, were blocked by the Queensland government, which refused to transfer the lease to him (Kidd 1997). This led to Kooworta suing the Queensland government under the Racial Discrimination Act (Commonwealth 1975). Koowarta eventually won his appeal in 1982 but not before the State government in a last measure to deny him the land had gazetted it as a National Park (Kidd 1979). A number of other unsuccessful attempts to
purchase land for Aboriginal people in Queensland were also made by the ALFC. The Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC), the successor to the ALFC, acquired control over the Delta Pastoral Company, which had property in the Gulf country to the north of Normanton, by gaining a majority shareholding in the company and thus circumventing the need for State government approval. By 1985 the ADC had covertly purchased eight other properties for Aboriginal people in Queensland by using sympathetic White nominees in lease transfer applications to the State government (Kidd 1997).

Federal government pressure on the Queensland government to recognise Aboriginal land rights and to allow Aboriginal ownership of land increased after the introduction of the ‘Aboriginal Land Rights’ Act (Commonwealth 1976) in the Northern Territory. This Act provided Aboriginal people in the Territory with rights of freehold ownership of their reserve lands. The ‘Aboriginal Councils and Associations’ Act (Commonwealth 1976) was also introduced in 1976 to provide a legal basis for the incorporation of Aboriginal bodies on State reserves throughout Australia. The Queensland ‘Local Government (Aboriginal Lands)’ Act of 1978 provided a backstop for the Department to circumvent the 1976 Federal Government Acts by creating local government Shires and removing DOGIT or reserve status from Aurukun and Mornington Island reserves (Kidd 1997). Missionaries at both of these Uniting Church reserves, which had not been transferred to Department administration, had been actively encouraging the construction of outstations by traditional owners in their homeland country. In an attempt to overcome political criticism, the Queensland government introduced the ‘Land (Aboriginal and Islander Land Grants) Amendment’ Act of 1982. This Act granted trusteeship and administration of DOGIT lands to local community councils. Bob Katter Jr., the Queensland government Community and Family Services Minister of the day introduced a further amendment in the 1984 ‘Community Services (Aboriginals)’ Act to transfer administration of community townships and of surrounding DOGIT lands entirely to locally elected Aboriginal councils.

The 1984 Act provided the DOGIT councils with full local government powers except for the requirement of ministerial approval for their budgets. The councils
have no rate revenue base and rely on government grants for income. The ultimate right to allocate mining, timber extraction and pastoral leases within DOGIT areas was retained by the Queensland government. The reserve areas were subsequently transferred as DOGIT land ‘in perpetuity’, under a 1987 Order in Council amendment to the 1984 Act, to the same local Aboriginal councils. The grant gave them a basic right to supervise their own occupation of the DOGIT area subject to the leasing exclusions that were held by the State government. Meanwhile, the ‘Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander (Landholding)’ Act (Queensland 1985) also allowed either the State government or the DOGIT councils to issue perpetual leases for areas of Trust land to community residents (Monaghan 2004).

2.3.2.3 Katter time
Bob Katter Jr’s creation of locally autonomous DOGIT councils in the mid-1980s was a radical departure from previous Department policy. His own State parliamentary constituency included most of the Gulf Country and the western side of Cape York Peninsula, and he is well known in the remote communities of Far North Queensland and widely regarded there, as an advocate of their social and economic needs. At the time he was also a member of Sir Jo Bjelke – Petersen’s National Party government in Queensland. This was a government which comprised some elements of fundamentalist Christian, White race supremacist and economic libertarian values which were not unlike those that prevailed at the time within the Apartheid regime in the Republic of South Africa. This unusual mixture of political interests is reflected in Katter’s view of what the role of the newly found DOGIT councils was likely to be. Figure 2.13 is a copy of a Queensland government advertisement promoting his legislation and the new Aboriginal councils and explaining the role that he envisaged for them (The Queenslander, September 1986). Figure 2.14 is a copy of a Department brochure that encourages Aboriginal people to lease land under the 1985 Act. The people or corporate bodies who qualified under this Act were Aboriginal people who were resident in Trust areas. Aboriginal people with traditional title to their land but who were not resident in a Trust area did not qualify. Councils were empowered to provide perpetual leases to areas of land of one-hectare extent to any prospective applicant. Leases for larger areas of land were subject to the
Hon. Bob Katter, Jnr, MLA
Minister for Northern Development and Community Services, Qld.

Total security for Queensland’s aborigines and islanders

The great opportunity for Aborigines and Islanders to play an even more important part in Northern Development has arrived with Deeds of Grant in Trust.

The Aboriginal and Island people have at long last gained the security they need to start developing local industries and building up the business potential of vast areas of North Queensland.

The Deeds give secure title to what was reserve lands and the management is now-wholly in the hands of the elected councils.

There is no way that development can take place without security for all time is what has been achieved with the Deeds of Grant in Trust.

What it means to Queensland Aborigines and Islanders:

* security
* self-management
* ownership of your own land and house.

Business opportunities
* development opportunities
* contribution
* training

For the first time in Australia, Aborigines and Islanders will have complete security of their land and with it, the chance to secure their own homes and play a big part in the development of the North.

Queensland
A STRONGER STATE
A BETTER LIFE

Figure 2.13: A Queensland Government advertisement of DOGIT reforms
(The Queenslander 1986)
approval of the Minister. Leased land was to be excised from the DOGIT and from community control and, in principle, the Act also allowed lease holders to transfer or mortgage their interest thus creating the possibility of the government allowing the disposal of Trust land to non-qualified or even non-indigenous persons (Pearson 1989). The 1985 Act enshrined the mainstream assimilationist view that the principles of land allocation in DOGIT communities were to be similar to those in rural communities elsewhere in mainstream Australia.
Despite the notional autonomy that the 1984 and 1985 Acts and the 1987 Amendment gave to Community Councils, the promotion of the concept of 'black entrepreneurs' and the development of rural Aboriginal towns continued to be a social engineering goal of the State and of the Minister of the day (Monaghan 2004). The assimilationist aims of the State government had not entirely gone with these new creations as two clear goals foreseen for them were ‘ownership of your own land and house’ (Figure 2.13) and the opportunity ‘to start a business’ (Figure 2.14). More than half of the households in the Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw townships subscribed to Katter’s vision and offer of home ownership between 1988 and 1990. Some people were also encouraged by his Department to apply for pastoral leases on DOGIT land as well (Monaghan 2004). This led to the dilapidation of community housing stock over the years as the 1985 Community Services Act (Qld) excluded the maintenance of private property by Community Councils and consequent severe housing shortages have only started to be overcome in the early 2000s.

In the last days of Department time, Bob Katter Jr. articulated his personal understanding of European and Aboriginal land relationships on the Gulf Lowlands to a meeting of DOGIT councillors from Peninsula communities at Kowanyama:

'It's always a problem - this one, the Queensland Government Land Laws. I own pastoral rights on my land, I don't own mineral or quarrying or forestry rights on that land - they all belong to the Government and the Government can resume that on me as well which they can't do with Deed of Grant but if a bloke owns the grazing rights - that doesn't necessarily mean people are excluded from going on to it for traditional purposes - but I've got to be fairly blunt with you -------- (A Kokoberra Elder and Kowanyama councillor), if you're telling me the land should be kept for traditional purposes - I'd have to say to anyone who said that you've got rocks in your head and I most certainly won't be carrying those people on the tax payer's purse. If you want to have it all as recreational - then go ahead but don't expect me to be looking after you and paying for your recreational areas. God has given this land to you, you have a responsibility to use it in such a way that you look after yourself - somebody else doesn't come in with a handout you'll be on your knees for the rest of your lives. To quote -------- (A Bakanh Elder and Pormpuraaw councillor) when we were talking about self-management - we have to press ahead with this programme whether we like it or we think we are ready for it
or not - we've got to get our pride back - we can't just stay where we are ...
(Aboriginal Coordinating Council minute, December 1988).

Apart from demonstrating the still prevailing ideology of assimilation in State Aboriginal policy, the above statement also illustrates two contrasting local Aboriginal views of ownership over land on the southern Gulf Lowlands within the Minister's audience in the later 1980s. One looks to the local systems of social organisation and land allocation and the tribal perspective of the landscape or 'absolute space' (after Lefebvre 1991) and the other is modernist and based upon the 1985 ‘Act’ and looks at the DOGIT areas as 'abstract spaces’ that provide leaseholds which offer opportunities for occupation and economic development, such as might be available elsewhere in Queensland to an aspiring entrepreneur and applicant for a mining or a pastoral lease. These views of the landscape are not exclusive of each other and both of the Elders referred to in the above statement probably perceived differing types of interaction between these two conceived landscapes depending on location and their personal connections to country under traditional land affiliation protocols; and the influence of the Mission and Department years on their own personal biographies and lifestyles.

A change of government in Queensland in 1990 led to the introduction of the Aboriginal Land Act (Queensland 1991). This Act recognised the existence of 'traditional' and of 'historical' interests in land as criteria for Aboriginal people to obtain perpetual leases over 'transferable' land. Transferable land included DOGIT areas, the Aurukun and Mornington Island Shires, and other 'claimable' Crown land in rural areas such as certain national parks and vacant pastoral lases. This Act signalled the end of ‘Katter time’ and of the direct intervention by the Department in local land affairs in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, and the first opportunity in Australian law for local people on the southern Gulf Lowlands to assert their traditional authority over their lands.

2.4 Implicit space on the southern Gulf Lowlands

Because of their historical isolation by separate church and State administrations from the early years of the 20th century onwards, Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama
each has a distinct identity. Kowanyama people experienced colonialism more
than a generation earlier than Pormpuraaw, and even though these townships are
only about 90 kilometres apart and their residents share many ties of kinship or
clan affiliation, they are remarkably different in appearance and atmosphere.

Almost all of the traditional owners of DOGIT land in Pormpuraaw are resident
there. There are also many people in Pormpuraaw who were born in the bush and
some who remember their first encounters with a White man. In general, people
there are reserved and rarely travel beyond the DOGIT. In contrast, Kowanyama
has a more cosmopolitan feel. Though almost all traditional owners of DOGIT
land are also resident in Kowanyama, its population is drawn from a wide area
that encompasses the northern Gulf country and southwestern Cape York
Peninsula. Probably no more than half of the population are traditional owners of
DOGIT land and the community has had a long association with the cattle
industry in the Gulf country and people travel quite readily to Normanton,
Chillagoe, Mareeba or Cairns for business, or to visit friends and relatives. Some
people, in both Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama, have maintained lifestyles that
have involved lengthy periods in the bush either through work on community
cattle operations, or because traditional food sources have remained an important
part of their diet, or through an active interest in maintaining traditional
relationships with their homeland country. Other people have had these
relationships and access to their homelands dislocated by pastoral lease
boundaries; or by the need to leave their home and take up residence in urban
communities such as Cairns or Mareeba. These moves were undertaken by
people either of their own volition, or because they were ostracised by mission or
State administrators for misdemeanours. Other land relationships have also been
modified for some kindred and families by other experiences involving these
administrations, and the influence of particular priests, mission superintendents or
DAIA managers; or, by the pastoral industry, and life on a cattle property rather
than on a mission. These differing forms of ‘time-space convergence’ (after
Giddens 1985) or of historical and geographical contingency, of relationships to
land and township life, have contributed to the expression of a number of novel
approaches to land allocation in each community since the DOGIT transfer in
1987. They have also influenced a wide range of other social practices to do with
marriage, ritual and cosmological beliefs, subsistence and economy, and familial, gender and interpersonal relationships (for instance Taylor 1979; 1984; and 1988 for Pormpuraaw).

The differences between Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw were already apparent in the Mission years

“Edward River Mission provided a sufficient contrast to Mitchell River for it to be representative of the “wild” dimension of the “outside” but for most purposes the earlier missionary classifications had collapsed into various degrees of “insideness” of the mission inmates” (Freier 1999, 253)

According to Freier (1999) ‘insideness’ was a form of differentiation, or degree of inclusion in community life, which was used by the missionaries to reward mission residents who were models of the behaviour and lifestyles that the church was trying to promote. Notions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ or of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ are both a spatial and a social dialectic. These simple binary opposites are the basic topological properties of implicit space on the southern Gulf Lowlands. They are the product of an active process, independent of the church and State, of identity formation and of ‘objectification’ by people in the southern Gulf Lowlands which is based on the proximity of traditional country to the Mission township. Missionaries and residents may have used the terms ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ in day-to-day conversation as if they were commonly understood terms but in fact they had entirely different meanings to either group. Local people used the terms in a geographical and social sense which still persist today in the early 2000s, in discussions about the relative benefits of community homeland and land use policy. The latter will be described later on in this thesis.

A sense of belonging to country on the basis of DOGIT and pastoral lease spaces that have been imposed on the landscape (abstract space) is an immediately apparent feature of the human geography of the southern Gulf Lowlands in ‘Community time’ (post -1990). In a topological sense, the human geography of the Gulf Lowlands now encompasses a number of broad cognitive spaces, or domains of shared knowledge and appreciation of the landscape that are historical creations. For instance, many men in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama worked on
cattle properties outside of the DOGIT during the 1960s and the 1970s and life as a 'ringer' is a major part of many of the biographies of older men in town today. In a mapping trip along the Alice River in 1997 that included forays into pastoral properties to identify some of the traditional sites that are of significance to pre-colonial life in the Lowlands, visits to stockyards often had as great an affective value as those to traditional story places. Many of these places actually combine both roles. They are ‘heterotopia’ (after Lefebvre 1991; Foucault 1980) that are features of both the Aboriginal (absolute) and the European (abstract) landscape. They are places where Olkola, Yir Yoront, Kuuk Thaayore, Kunjen and Kokoberra or Kokoberrin ringers camped together in each other's traditional country in those years. They are 'memento mori', places where people reminisce about their youth and about people who have died, and about life in the region 30 or 40 years ago. People who are identified in these reminescences are often referred to locales in the European landscape, for instance as part of 'Mission mob', 'Koolatah mob' or 'Dunbar mob', depending on where they were born. A common refrain at the end of a story-telling session is that ‘we all one mob’, or, ‘we all one tribe’. This expression of solidarity usually refers to the fact that they all live within the southern Gulf Lowlands and is not usually extended to people from outside of this region and also expresses a wider sense of ‘insidedness’ or containment within a regional enclave. Nevertheless, there are differences in ‘landscape of knowledge’. ‘Kowanyama mob’ and ‘Pormpuraaw mob’ have highly developed senses of personal identity and an 'esprit de corps' based on the township where they live which at times can appear to transcend any traditional kinship or tribal and language affiliations that exist between people in either place.

Also underlying the apparent fluidity in social relationships and sharing of geographic and cognitive space within the southern Gulf Lowlands is a marked differentiation (inside/outside) between Aboriginal people in terms of their tribal or local homeland affiliations in the landscape which reflects the classical duality in land relationships between the ‘range’ of broad kinship relationships and land use rights, and the ‘estate’ of clan membership and land ownership rights (after Stanner 1965); even though the traditional nomenclature associated with some of these domains is now infrequently used.
‘Kunjen mob’ or ‘Thaayore mob’; or ‘Scrubby Bore mob’ or ‘Joe’s Lagoon mob’; ‘Alma’s mob’ or ‘Eddie’s mob’ are typical of the more local territorial identities assumed by people. Many of these nomenclatures and relationships are of longstanding and already existed in 1990, however in subsequent years they have become more actively deployed as both social and geographical references in assertions of moral authority over homelands or related issues of community land management. They are also apparent in the assertions of rights of occupation or use of such areas by local people in the years since the introduction of Land Claim (Queensland 1991) and Native Title (Commonwealth 1993, 1998) legislation. There are now constituencies or homeland groups in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama whose geographical identities, as well as being based in the pre-colonial Aboriginal landscape are also historically realised. Some groups have highly developed territorial interests and wish to return to live in their traditional homelands within the DOGIT area; others, who have no affiliation to community lands, wish to negotiate access to country within the DOGIT. Some work on principles of land ownership and use that are grounded in pre-colonial practice; others on principles such as those espoused in the Katter legislation; and, others have developed principles that are based on social relations that have been developed historically in township life.

The following chapter goes on to explore the influence of those historical and geographical contingencies to social identity that have been described in this chapter, on the urban geography and social life of the present day townscape of Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw in the 1990s and 2000s.
Chapter 3

Territorial Affiliation in Southern Gulf Lowland Townscapes

‘the first law of geography: everything is related to everything else, but near things are more closely related than distant things’ (Tobler 1970 cited in Adams 1997, 164).

The rationale underlying this chapter is that territorial affiliations are reproduced in social organisation and domestic life in the townships of the southern Gulf Lowlands and that their spatial distributions there may provide an analogue of the organisation of land use and of homeland ownership in the landscape. The township is the locus of all social relations and the place where the development and conduct of practice in many areas of life occurs. If, as Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1985, 1996) suggest ‘spatiality’, where people live and who they share their daily lives with, is an active constitution of social practice then the topography of the township may be expected to reveal features that are connotative of the ‘implicit’ spaces and territorial notions that have been described for the southern Gulf Lowlands in the previous chapter.

Many Aboriginal domains whether in former mission settlements or in towns, share one or two common topological properties, or an amalgam of both. The first is that some Aboriginal settlements show territorial patterns in their social spacing that are a corollary of traditional tribe or clan organisation of the landscape, with kin-related people or homeland groups living in households in close proximity to each other (for instance Anderson 1989; Bell 1993; Memmott 1991, 2002; Moran 1999; Taylor 1979). Centralisation and the phenomenon of core and proximate Aboriginal populations in relation to the proximity of traditional country to European settlement is another property that may influence social relations and domestic residency patterns as well as land allocation practice. This phenomenon has been summarised in early colonial history by Stanner (1965) and has also been recorded as recently as the 1970s and 1980s in the Bloomfield area of eastern Cape York Peninsula (Anderson 1988, 1989). It has also been proposed in the previous chapter as a framework for demonstrating
the relative primacy of tribal groups in present day community life on the southern Gulf Lowlands.

This chapter investigates three properties of social space in the Pormpuraaw township. They are

the relative visibility of traditional land affiliations in the social composition of the households and neighbourhoods of the townscape;

the presence of homeland groups within the township; and,

the effect of the proximity of traditional country to the township on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the identified homeland groups.

These alternate representations of social space are based on ethnographic models of kinship and clan affiliation (Sharp 1937; Taylor 1984) and a model of homeland group demography that is derived from a survey of the ethno-archaeological and anthropological literature. These representations are compared with social townscapes that have been described for Kowanyama (Taylor 1979, 1984; Strang 1994) and their significance as spatial analogues that are representative of social organisation and territorial affiliations in the landscape is then reviewed.

3.1 Introduction

There is more than a generation between the foundation of the Mitchell River (1903) and the Edward River (1939) missions at Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw respectively. Even though they are only 90 kilometres apart and have many ties of language and kinship there are considerable differences between the two communities. Pormpuraaw has a topographically outstanding location on a series of beach ridges above the Gulf coastline and is continuously moderated by sea breezes. Kowanyama is located about 30 kilometres inland of the coast.
and has a savannah type environment. It is a hot and dusty place in the later dry season and often has the highest recorded temperature in the State on daily weather reports on radio and television. Kowanyama is almost twice as large in population and in extent as Pormpuraaw. On first impression, the people there are gregarious and friendly whereas at Pormpuraaw they tend to be more reserved. At the end of the day in Kowanyama people are out in the streets taking early evening promenades, or are gathered around the church store consuming ice creams and soft drinks, or are fishing in the Magnificent Creek.

People will stop and talk to strangers in the street and invariably preface their introductions with details of their family, their genealogy, or the country to which they belong. From time to time, attempts are made to position some of the longer resident White people more formally in community life by exploring possible classificatory ties such as 'brother', 'sister' or ‘bunji’ (cousin) to families within the community. Such personal details and acceptances are harder won at Pormpuraaw where there is little street life in comparison to Kowanyama and where most social activity takes place around the home. Younger people there are sometimes discouraged from going to football or dance carnivals elsewhere on the Cape unless accompanied by older people, whereas Kowanyama youth host major rodeo and football carnivals for the Peninsular and Gulf regions each year.

What appears to be a brooding nature or reticence amongst some people at Pormpuraaw is in fact shyness. For many local people Pormpuraaw is their entire universe and some of them may never leave it in their lifetime. Their relative isolation has meant less contact over the years with the rest of Australia. Pormpuraaw people in turn tend to be regarded with some reserve by people from elsewhere on Cape York Peninsula. They have a reputation for sorcery and visits from other communities outside of the Gulf Lowlands, unless visitors have relations in the community, are infrequent. Movement through the Pormpuraaw landscape is prescribed by tabus and the designation of areas of 'poison' or 'sickness' country whose locations are often either secret, or are shielded from outsiders, unless visitors state an intention to visit these areas. Road access to the community is only possible for seven or eight months in the
dry season, either along an unsealed road from Musgrave 248 kilometres to the east on the Cape Peninsular road, or, for five or six months in any year, along another unsealed track from Kowanyama to the south. Improvements to the Musgrave road since 1994 have reduced a nine hour journey to three hours and the journey to Kowanyama takes three or four hours depending on the condition of the track. As it involves two major river crossings it can only be undertaken in a four-wheel drive vehicle.

Pormpuraaw township had a population of 568 and in 1996 and 683 in 2001 respectively (ABS 1996, 2001) of whom 494 and people were long term residents. As described in the previous chapter there is a linguistic divide in the Pormpuraaw landscape with Wik dialect speakers traditionally occupying the area to the north of the Edward River, and Kuuk Thaayore speakers to the south. There is also a number of Yir Yoront speakers who share some kinship ties with members of the Kowanyama community to the south of the Mitchell River. Wik speakers share similar ties with members of the Aurukun community to the north of the Holroyd River. These linguistic divisions are apparent in the Pormpuraaw township in the form of distinct neighbourhoods, and in distinct work and social groups, for Wik and Thaayore speakers respectively. Thaayore people may not wander around streets on the ‘Mungkan side’ of the township unless they are accompanied or are going about legitimate business. Community council work gangs tend to be made up of exclusive language groups. The cleaning staff in the Council office are Thaayore women and there is one woman from Mungkan side who works as a clerk in the post office. At a morning tea in the office to celebrate the birthday of the latter person, only White staff members and visitors accompanied her. The Thaayore ladies did not participate and kept themselves at a distance. The maintenance of ‘social distance’ is an inherent feature of Aboriginal life. It mediates all relationships and transactions that take place in the community. Even though certain features of it, particularly those that deal with the ‘avoidance’ relationships between related kin may seem puzzling at first, it is grounded in the principles of maintaining social order and the avoidance of sexual relations between closely related people in small and isolated populations, and is quite respectful in practice.
The main focus of political life in both communities since 1990 has been the establishment of homelands (actually called outstations by people in Pormpuraaw) by groups of people in areas of the landscape where their ownership rights are recognised by the rest of community. The main arena for the negotiation of homeland space is in the households and neighbourhoods of the township and some of the criteria that are used for deciding on homeland group membership are described below.

3.2 Social organisation and land allocation practice on the Gulf Lowlands

There have been a number of ethnographic accounts of social organisation on the Gulf Lowlands (McConnel 1939; Sharp 1937; Sutton 1978; Taylor 1984; Thomson 1939; Von Sturmer 1980). In his analysis of traditional social organisation and totemic systems of land affiliation amongst the Yir Yoront, Sharp (1937) summarised Aboriginal ontology in terms of three major themes.

- the physical environment of landscapes, weather and flora and fauna as sensed in daily life;
- the social world of relationships between people; and,
- a mental world of myth and belief.

The physical world is represented through language in the form of differing taxonomies and nomenclatures for general classes of phenomena such as rivers or landforms, for differing plants and animals, or for differing kinds of weather. Specific kinship terms are also used to describe human relationships in the social world. These terms and relationships provide each person with a unique identity that describes their position in society, and how that relates to the kin relationships of every other individual, who has ever lived, or is yet to be born in that society. The physical and social worlds are linked in turn by myth and
belief through clan and totem affiliation. Each person is a member of a clan or landholding corporation. Each clan holds a suite of totems that are iconographic representations of the physical world and that are badges of corporate identity.

The estate of a clan is a tract, or series of tracts of landscape, and each clan has a cosmology or set of creation stories that describe the formation of that landscape by ancestral beings to whom clan members are patrilineally related by kinship.

3.2.1 Kinship
A key determinant of social structure and perhaps the most resilient feature of Aboriginal lifestyles in Australia today is kinship. Numerous studies throughout North Australia have shown that kinship systems are widespread (for instance Peterson 1991; Sutton 1998). The assertion that ‘he just like a white fella, he got no custom way’ is a comment on Aboriginal identity that is occasionally heard in Pormpuraaw or Kowanyama. The consanguinary or affine relationships that each person has with other kin, and the associated protocols of sharing, of marriage and inheritance, of clan membership and of ritual duties; and the rules of personal behaviour a person is obliged to follow, are some of the custom ways referred to in this statement, all of which are a product of kinship.

Kinship groups are biological. Traditionally, they usually comprise a patrilineal descent group, that is, an unbroken series of fathers and sons. Lauriston Sharp in ‘Totemic Structures in North Australia’ (1937); and John Taylor in ‘Of Acts and Axes’ (1984) recorded slightly varying kinship structures for Yir Yoront and Kuuk Thaayore society respectively. They can be both summarised as an assymetrical patriline cross-cousin system where, theoretically, males marry their mother’s brother’s daughter (MBD), and females marry father’s sister’s son (FZS). There is an asymmetry in marriage and inheritance rules where a man cannot marry a woman within his own patriline. A man cannot marry the sister of his sister’s husband, nor give his sister as a wife to his wife’s brother. As well as the normal consanguinary terms used to describe relationships within a family, such as brother or sister, there are also classificatory terms. For instance, where all father’s brothers (FB) are referred to as father, and all of
their wives are referred to as mother, or father’s father’s brother (FFB) is referred to as father’s father (FF). The nomenclature has a three generation cycle and thus young people in some circumstances may address older people by junior terms within the system. Younger brothers and sisters, and FF and FFS are called by the same term that is in terms of kinship they are classified together (Sharp 1937). Sharp gives examples of this duplication of kinship terms between alternate generations. These terms provided ‘shorthand’ for defining permissible routes between kindred in making marriage alliances.

The system is egocentric and any person, or ego, who cannot recall particular relationships within this system, can orient themselves appropriately by finding out how their parents address those people about whom they are uncertain (Taylor 1984). The ‘grammar’ of their kinship system then allows them to compute their own relationship and its appropriate name. In all, Taylor described 21 fundamental classes of kin in Kuuk Thaayore society each of which has a unique name that describe the relationships between a person and any of their ancestors or descendants within this hierarchy. As with the Yir Yoront system where 19 classes were defined, these terms apply in a lateral sense in any generation to people in matrilineal and patrilineal descent lines. The difference in number of classes between the two systems is due to differences in nomenclature related to age and gender (Taylor 1984).

Kinship systems are polysemic in terms of the meanings of classificatory terms. For instance, in Kuuk Thaayore society there are 20 different vocative classes that determine how differing kin are addressed by an ego. Kinship and its terminology also determine personal rights, social relationships and civic responsibilities other than marriage. These include responsibilities in ritual such as initiation or death rites, in the recital of stories or performance of dances, and in rights of access to the landscape. Sharp and Taylor also describe the significance of kinship in terms of a variety of phenomenological behaviours. Sharp (1937) describes its effect on humour and how jokes are received; for instance, who is obliged to laugh the loudest and the nature of ‘joking’ relationships. Such behaviour has a role in maintaining social distance between
kindred who may be too close genetically and where the avoidance behaviour that is required of certain kin relationships, for instance between a male ego and FBD, is difficult to maintain because of prevailing domestic circumstances. Taylor (1984) describes how kinship determines how kindred respond to a sneezing attack. They show their sympathy for the sufferer by touching the part of their body that describes their particular kin relationship to that person.

People who are not biologically related to each other may still be received into a kin relationship and thus receive a set of classificatory or fictive terms that describe their adopted relationship with the consanguinary members of the kindred. People may be elected into kinship in order to fulfill ritual roles, such as mourning or mortuary rituals, where there is a shortage of people and no appropriate kin are available, for instance, whilst a husband is temporarily away (Taylor 1984). Sometimes membership is offered as a goodwill gesture, or to fulfill a sense of organisation. Kinship is a fundamental feature of Aboriginality and everybody must be a member of a kindred and so it may be offered like a ‘visa’ to accommodate visitors into local society in order to overcome ‘horor vacui’. Everybody has to belong somewhere or to somebody. These classificatory as opposed to biological rights of kinship are usually only applicable to the person to whom they have been granted, and are not usually handed on to their next generation.

3.2.2 The Clan
Unlike kinship classes that give a person or ‘ego’ a unique identity in society, a clan is a sociocentric group or corporation in which all members are equal. It is a group of people who are identified with a particular area of land.

‘An absolute segmentary grouping is created when certain members of successive generations of a patrilineal descent line are brought into a common and permanent relationship or association with some distinctive entity which exists independently of the descent line. Such a grouping is the totemic clan’ (Sharp 1937, 132).
Clan members usually speak the same dialect and share the same ‘mythological charter’ of stories, song and dance about the heroes or phenomena involved in the creation of their ‘estate’ or clan country.

Each clan has a unique suite of totems and links to their mythical ancestors that are a subset of a larger clan cosmology, and which are also reproduced at specific locations in the landscape. Tracts of land are distinct phenomena each of which has their own ‘private geographical personality’ (Sharp 1937). Almost all major physical landmarks such as waterholes or patches of woodland have a name and a role either in a mythological story that links clan members to specific creation events or acts; or they are landmarks of events in recent history. These physical features may function as a totem which provides an emblem of personal and group identity within a clan totemic structure (Sharp 1937; Sutton 1978; Taylor 1984). Assemblages of totems and myths are usually related to contiguous parts of landscape that form a clan estate. One clan may be closely associated with another through kinship, and two such clans may share the same totems, but there is always a primary association of a totem with one clan or another.

‘Each complex thus stands out as a distinct constellation of associated things, persons and ideas’ (Sharp 1937, 67).

Traditionally, the most important functions of the clan system were the regulation of land tenure and of land use within the estate. The prescriptive functions that defined clan membership or land tenure, and rights of land and natural resource use, were comprehensive. Just as each member of the population had to occupy a niche within the kinship system so each tract of land had to be regulated as to the prescribed uses, whether economic or ritual, for that location. In principle, there was no such thing as ‘common land’ on the Southern Gulf Lowlands. Every place is related to a clan and its membership and there are no voids in the system (Sharp 1937).
Clan membership is determined by conception filiation (Sharp 1937). There are places within any clan country where there is an inexhaustible store of spirit babies, and prospective parents usually find the spirit of their baby in father’s clan country or estate. The sighting of a father’s totem, even if he is not in his estate, may suffice for conception. Alternatively, a spirit baby can be attached to a man in one country who takes it back to camp in another country where it enters the body of his or her prospective mother. Spirit babies may even be transported to their mothers by birds (Sharp 1937). These are convenient devices even today, as parentage in the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama communities is largely of single mothers, and this system can give them some discretion in the patrifiliation and naming of children.

Traditionally, a child’s name usually referred to a ‘country of orientation’ (Sharp 1937) or particular tract of land within an estate for which it was responsible. The name could refer to a mythical event or a being such as ‘Brolga’s Dance’ but this in turn was invariably related to a specific locale in the landscape. A classificatory father, usually FB, gave this name but a child might also receive title to country belonging to FS, FF, or FFS, who are also its classificatory fathers. For patrilines that became extinct the whole of its estate, and title and totemic associations would pass to another clan. The receiving clan was not necessarily the most proximate geographically but the one that was closest in kinship and in totemic mythology (Sharp 1937). Theoretically, a clan estate could never be broken up. The clan members may die but the places that comprise a clan estate, and their mythical associations, remain the same. From an ontological point of view, the whole unit including the land and its mythology and totems is transferred in total. In traditional ideology, clans like other elements of the 'Story' are indestructible, and none of them can be removed separately from the cosmological context which binds them together. This says Sharp ‘prevents change and maintains stability as efficiently as any written constitution’ (1937). According to Sharp's model, the number of estates always remained fixed irrespective of the population size of the clans. This is in contrast to other theoretical (Peterson and Long 1986; Stanner 1965) and empirical (Sutton and Rigsby 1987; Sutton 1996) models of the relationship
between estate size and population size, which state that as population declines so the territory of a clan either contracts in area or is subsumed by another clan. Nevertheless, in a practical sense, some clans do die out. Demographic modelling has suggested that it is possible that 25% - 30% of the clans in any population may disappear within any cycle of two or three generations (Taylor 1999). Some of the ways in which deceased clan estates are dealt with in present day land allocation on the southern Gulf Lowlands are described in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Clan affiliation gives a moral right of ownership to the estate and control of the spiritual and natural resources within it. Moral authority is the acknowledgement by others of personal rights to land by descent and inheritance or from totemic affiliation. Taylor (1984) described primary rights, which are inherited through the patriline that bestowed rights of stewardship in the performance of particular stories and songs (woocharm) and the maintenance of related ritual places (raak ngarth), and a central role in decision-making about the clan estate. Sharp made a distinction between individual control and ownership of named places, and rights of access to, and the use of the spiritual and natural resources of larger areas of the landscape. Potentially, depending on the depth and breadth of a person's kinship relations then all land was open for 'reasonable use' (Sharp 1937). Spatially, Sharp described the two domains of land ownership and of land use, in terms of a homeland and a range. The homeland corresponds to the clan estate, and the range to the country that is available from the wider set of social relationships that a person may have. He also described them as the 'formal' system of land ownership (primary rights) and the 'informal' system of access to land and its resources (secondary rights). The minimum set of relationships provides each ego, whether male or female, with one primary relationship or right to their father’s country. If three generations are counted, and ego is married, then seven potential secondary rights may also exist through wife or husband, mother and grandparents to the rights of use in the landscape, and may comprise access to one or more clan estates. All formal or primary rights are transferred through marriage and kinship, as are most informal or secondary rights, though some of the latter can
also be granted on a classificatory or discretionary basis. The rest of this chapter will refer to the geographical domain of formal and informal rights that a group of people with common territorial interests share as a homeland.

3.2.3 Homeland groups

Spirit conception and patrilineality were the orthodox ways of defining clan membership. Sharp described the operation of these rules in terms of the giving and receiving of women, and hence reproductive potential, between patrilines. A male ego cannot marry the women in his patriline but may receive one from another. In turn his patriline may give women away to other groups. This set up a system of reciprocal obligations whereby a male ego is superordinate in his relationship to those clans or patrilines which have received women from his clan, but subordinate to those from which he has received a wife (Sharp 1958). These obligations were usually reproduced in patterns of food exchange and in reciprocity of rights of entry and of land use throughout the year as differing foods became available in the landscape. They gave each homeland group, or domestic ‘hearth group’ (after Taylor 1984), an exploitative range or ‘domain’ (after Stanner 1965) that could potentially extend across a number of clan estates. For instance, Sharp (1937) records the presence of Kuuk Thaayore people, from north of the Coleman River, in camps in Yir Yoront country at the mouth of the Mitchell River. A homeland group essentially comprised a three-generation family of grandparents, parents and children. They were the basic territorial unit in land use in terms of the acquisition and sharing of food; and also the core kindred, or reproductive units, between which marriage partners were exchanged. It was possible for some people to have never lived in their own estate but to choose instead to live in the country under the control of other members of their group (Sharp 1937).

Large families, which are analogous of traditional homeland groups, are evident in present day Aboriginal townships. Some of them display the same kind of territorial specialisation, with the accumulation of clan affiliations to country to
which they have traditional rights of ownership and use within them. In some communities they form distinct spatial domains and live in close proximity to each other, often in neighbouring houses (for instance Bell 1993; Memmott 1991, 2002; Moran 1999). They also tend to a modality in the number of people that they contain. Ethnographic studies of hunter-gatherer communities in Australia and elsewhere in the world have identified a group size of 25 as a modal number for homeland groups in the bush (Binford 1981; Coombs and Smith 1994; Kelly 1995; Lee and Devore 1968; Sutton and Rigsby 1982; Smith 2000; Sutton 1992). Groups with a membership of between 25 and 40 people should have sufficient clan affiliations to territory across a seasonal range of environments to subsist and survive as an independent landholding group (Peterson and Long 1976; Stanner 1965; Tindale 1974). This number of people still appears to be significant in determining the core size of a co-resident family within a community. It is also the approximate number of occupants that one might expect to find on a homeland or outstation site (Altman 1987; Cooke 1995; Coombs and Smith 1994; Myers 1986; Smith 2000; Sutton and Rigsby 1982). For instance, the average size of a ‘mob’ at Wujal Wujal in Eastern Cape York Peninsula was found to be 26 people distributed between an average number of 4 households (Anderson 1988). Each ‘mob’ formed an economically integral unit in township life that pooled their incomes and shared household resources, and also had an identity as a distinct camp group in the bush prior to the foundation of the mission in the 1960s. Worldwide, ethnographic studies (Binford 1991; Kelly 1995; Lee and Devore 1968; Sahlins 1972; Winterhalder and Smith 1979) have also identified the modal demographic characteristics of a homeland group. In a traditional sense, these can be summarised as a balance between ‘producers’, male hunters and female food gatherers; ‘reproducers’ who are fertile women; and, ‘dependants’ in the form of children and non-productive older people to ensure reproductive success, as well as economic self-sufficiency (after Binford 1991).
3.3 Social space in the Pormpuraaw township

This chapter goes on to apply the criteria for clan, kin and homeland group membership that have been described above to determine the distribution of social spaces that are representative of traditional land affiliations and of current homeland interests in a cartographic model of social organisation in the Pormpuraaw townscape. Local land allocation systems recorded by Sharp (1937) and Taylor (1984) for the Yir Yoront and Kuuk Thaayore language groups are used to model social organisation in the entire household population. These ethnographies provide the only complete models of social organisation that are available for the study area. The kinship relationships between members of that population are used as a social idiom, and household of residence as a spatial referent for representing the distribution of clan membership, and associated formal land ownership and informal land use rights to traditional clan estates. These relationships are imputed from the genealogies and kinship relations of the populations recorded by Taylor, in censuses of Pormpuraaw people between 1968 and 1975, to enumerations of the 1988, 1996 and 2001 household populations (Reser 1991; Taylor and Anderson 1996; Monaghan and Taylor 2003). The genealogies were constructed from informant interviews, from historical mission, and from hospital and community administration records (Taylor 1984, 1988). Biological rather than ‘spirit baby’ conception is used as the rule in the model for transferring formal and informal rights to clan estates between individuals in successive generations. Patrifiliation, inheritance from the father, is now the generally accepted practice for identifying formal or primary rights to country in the Gulf Lowlands today, and 'mother's country' is generally acknowledged as the domain of informal or secondary rights.

Comparable relationships are also mapped in the landscape. The spatial referencing system for the landscape is the distribution of known clan sites in the DOGIT area. Most of the 426 traditional places and related clan estates that are recorded in the Pormpuraaw land information system were recorded by John Taylor between 1969 and 1973 and most of his informants at that time had been in their teens and living in the bush when the mission started. Other sites were
added in mapping trips with traditional owners, some of which I was able to participate in, during 1992 and 1994. This mapping is not exhaustive but it is illustrative of the relative spacing of clan estates in the landscape. The spatial referencing system for the township comprises the Pormpuraaw lot plan, and household of residence for each person was obtained from household censi of 1988 (Reser 1991), 1996 (Taylor and Anderson 1996) and 2001 (Monaghan and Taylor 2003). The model is implemented in a relational database (Microsoft Access 1997) and is linked to the community land information system (ESRI Arcview 1998). Records on the location of named places in the landscape, their position within traditional clan estates, and on personal clan affiliations of township residents, continue to be added to the model.

The basis of this cartographic model is in work undertaken in Pormpuraaw in 1996 and 2001. A survey of the demographic characteristics of township households was undertaken for the Community Council at about the same time as the national Australian census (Taylor and Anderson 1996). The objective of the survey was to provide information for the development of a Community Strategic Plan. This included the identification of the needs of aspiring homeland groups so that Council could make financial plans for the construction of basic infrastructure to assist these groups in their homeland plans. My role was to integrate genealogical and demographic databases in the community land information system and to provide a means of accessing and visualising their content in the form of maps of the townscape and of the landscape. The 2001 household survey was undertaken by me to identify vulnerable households as part of the preparation of a natural disaster risk mitigation plan for township and homeland residents on behalf of the Community Council and the Queensland State Emergency Service (Monaghan and Taylor 2003).
3.3.1 Language affiliation

The distribution of language by household was imputed from the primary clan affiliations of residents in each house (Table 3.1). There are at least 11 different dialects amongst the languages that are spoken in the community. For instance, Wik dialects include Mungkan, N’gachara, N’gotanth, Mu’in and U’im. For the sake of clarity these dialects have been aggregated into the four major Kuuk Thaayore, Wik Mungkan, Bakanh and Yir Yoront language provinces. There are also some Olkola speakers who are closely related to Bakanh people. As described in Chapter 2, these language groups have either core, proximate or peripheral status respectively in terms of the location of their country relative to the township. Kuuk Thaayore speakers form the core group as their traditional country is entirely within the DOGIT area and includes the site of the present day township. Wik and Yir Yoront speakers are proximate groups. Wik speakers have a large area of their traditional country in the DOGIT, north of the Edward River that also extends northwards into the Aurukun Shire. Yir Yoront people also have traditional country in the DOGIT that also extends
southwards into the neighbouring Kowanyama DOGIT. Bakanh speakers are historically later in community life and their country lies almost entirely outside of the DOGIT, on adjacent pastoral properties. The comparative distribution of languages in the landscape and in the township shows the clear neighbourhood distinctions between ‘Mungkan side’ on the northern and ‘Thaayore side’ on the southern side of the township with Bakanh and Yir Yoront speakers also occupying the same relative geographical positions on either side of town (Figure 3.1). The distribution of recorded places with these language affiliations in the landscape is shown in Figure 3.2 where they are registered with the underlying historical leases which make up the present DOGIT area.

In 1996, a total of 91 house lots on the town plan (Figure 3.1) are occupied by Aboriginal people and 76 lots are either occupied by non-Aboriginal residents, are unoccupied, or have not been built upon. There are 56 households with 269 people in them where there is also a least one primary Thaayore clan affiliate who is resident there as well. There are 18 households containing 114 people where there is at least one Wik affiliate resident; and, 17 households with 111 people where there is at least one Bakanh speaker in the household. There are 43 households that contain 118 people where only Thaayore speakers are resident; and, seven households with 42 people who are solely Wik speakers; and, seven households with 37 people who are Bakanh speakers. There are two households containing a total of 27 people that have representatives of all of these populations.

In a 1972 survey there were 46 households and 288 Aboriginal people in Pormpuraaw (Taylor 1979). In 1972, the heads of 28 households that contained a total of 166 people spoke Thaayore. 17 household heads that represented a population of 117 people spoke Wik Mungkan, and Bakanh was spoken in one household with five people in it. The most marked change between 1972 and 1996 is in the migration into the community of people from outside of the DOGIT and the increase in the number of people and households that contain
Figure 3.2: Language affiliation and historical lease areas in the Pormpuraaw DOGIT
Table 3.1: The distribution of language affiliations by household in Pormpuraaw in 1972 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE AFFILIATION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOUSES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PERSONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuuk Thaayore (and Yir Yoront)</td>
<td>56 (28)</td>
<td>269 (166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wik Mungkan</td>
<td>18 (17)</td>
<td>114 (117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakanh</td>
<td>17 (1)</td>
<td>111 (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1972 statistics is in parentheses)

Bakanh as well as Wik Mungkan speakers (see Table 3.1). Bakanh people came into the community from pastoral properties on the eastern margin of the DOGIT and many Mungkan people have migrated from Aurukun.

3.3.2 Clan affiliation

Up until 1996, there are 17 clans that have been identified in the Pormpuraaw township who have access to land in the DOGIT area. Table 3.2 summarises the distribution of formal and informal affiliations, in 1988 and 1996, of the above populations to these clans within Thaayore side and Mungkan side households in the township, and with a third set of ‘township’ clans whose traditional country includes the town and it’s immediate area.

Of the 1996 population, 298 people had formal affiliations to one of the clans recorded in Table 3.2, 66 people had informal (mother’s country) but no recorded formal affiliations to the same clans, and 76 people had no affiliation recorded for them at all. Bear in mind that any person has only one formal affiliation and may have several informal affiliations to the same or to other clans. Those people for whom no clan affiliation was recorded were so either because their father’s identity and clan were not known; or, the father may have come from outside the Gulf Lowlands region and thus have no local customary interest in land. Some are Aurukun or Kowanyama people who have married into Pormpuraaw and have not been included in the model as there is no clear information yet on the specific land affiliations that attach to their genealogies.
Table 3.2: Distribution of clan affiliations in the 1988 and 1996 Pormpuraaw household population
Some clans are now almost extinct and there is evidence of others merging together. For instance, there are some Dog/Goanna/Brolga; Rainbow/Cyclone/Watersnake; or, Brown Crane/Yuuchup/Dog/Goanna aggregations which are not identified in this summary. The process underlying these realignments is not clearly understood at this stage. Some clans are in demise locally because of a geographic imbalance, where members are living elsewhere; or, because of demographic imbalance, where people are too few and too aged to reproduce (Taylor and Anderson 1996).

Four groups of clans whose country in the landscape is spatially contiguous are apparent in adjacent households in the township. They also have complementary distributions in the landscape that broadly correspond to those Queensland government lease areas that were successively included into the Pormpuraaw DOGIT area between 1915 and 1958 and which were described in Chapter 2 (Figure 3.2). The distribution of the formal (primary) and informal (secondary) affiliations for these four groups of clans within the townscape and the landscape are shown in figures 3.3 – 3.6. One group of clans has a relatively low number of formal affiliations in its population (Table 3.1). The latter imbalance suggests that the entire population of these clans is not represented in Pormpuraaw. These include the Darter/Black Diver, Grass, Rainbow/Cyclone and Dog/Goanna clans, each of which have their country at the southernmost end of the DOGIT and beyond into Kowwanyama, and whose primary affiliates, except for one person, live on the Thaayore side of the township (Figure 3.3).

Members of the Grass clan are customarily Olkola or Kunjen speakers and the other clans are Yir Yoront. The majority of Yir Yoront speakers actually live in Kowanyama. Olkola speakers originally resided in country to the east of the DOGIT which is now subdivided by pastoral properties. The Darter/Black Diver clan only has one primary affiliate living in town. The Rainbow/Cyclone clan has five people with formal rights in the township all of whom live in one household. Brown Crane/Yuuchup is another clan of Yir Yoront origin who occupy similar geographical positions to this group both within the township and the landscape, but which has a larger complement of formal affiliates. The
Figure 3.3: Group 1: Distribution of clan affiliations in the landscape and townscape
Figure 3.4: Group 2: Distribution of clan affiliations in the landscape and townscape
Figure 3.5: Group 3: Distribution of clan affiliations in the landscape and townscape
Figure 3.6: Group 4: Distribution of clan affiliations in the landscape and townscape
majority of the country that is traditionally owned by Yir Yoront speaking clans broadly corresponds with the area of the Battersea and Mitchellton leases which were set aside as the initial Edward River reserve area in 1915 and 1922 (Figure 3.2). A mission set up in the early 1930s at Puyal in Chillagoe Pocket was abandoned and re-established at the present township site in Thaayore country in 1939. Many Yir Yoront people were removed to Kowanyama from this area before the relocation of the mission in the 1930s when, prior to 1942, it was still part of the Mitchell River Mission. Other Yir Yoront people camped in their own 'village' at the Edward River mission until the later 1950s when many of them relocated to Kowanyama following recurrent quarrels with Thaayore people (Alpher 1991; Taylor 1984). And at about the same time that Chapman returned to the Mitchell River mission after having set up the Edward River township (see Chapter 2)

A second group includes the Watersnake, Wallaby/ Lightning and Brolga clans (Figure 3.4). They are Thaayore speakers and share contiguous country in the landscape. They contain the greatest number of formal and informal land affiliations in the township. The Duck/ Spear and Groper/ Barramundi clans form a third group. They occupy the middle country of the DOGIT and the northern range of Thaayore country up to the Edward River (Figure 3.5). Traditionally, the Duck/ Spear clan are owners of the site of the township and have formal rights distributed over both Mungkan and Thaayore sides. It has 16 affiliates in households on Mungkan side and 23 on Thaayore side.

Affiliates from the Possum, Snake/ Shark, Diver/ Turtle and Freshwater Crocodile (2), and from the Freshwater Crocodile (1) clan, whose traditional country lies north of the Edward River and was first brought into the reserve in 1958, are almost all based on the Mungkan side of the township (figure 3.6). The latter clan are Bakanh speakers and the remainder are Wik dialect speakers.

The social distance between the Wik speaking clans who occupied the northern part of the present day DOGIT and the Thaayore and Yir Yoront speakers to the south, which was first observed by McConnel (1939) in 1928 in her expedition along the Edward River is still evident in the townscape (Figures 3.3 – 3.6).
With the exception of the Duck/Spear clan, only eight people from Thaayore side clan groups, who have a total membership of 143 people, live with families on Mungkan side; and four people from clans on Mungkan side, who have a total membership of 83 people, live with families on Thaayore side. The Wallaby/Lightning and Grass clans have five formal affiliations in one household on Mungkan side, and there are two young women with Policeman Bird formal affiliations from Mungkan side who live with marriage partners in separate households on Thaayore side. Overall, the most distinct spatial formations comprise the Wallaby/Lightning and Brolga clans on Thaayore side and the Possum, Snake/Shark and Crocodile clans on Mungkan side. These clans have also had the largest increase in the number of their formal affiliates since the 1988 census (Table 3.1).

### 3.4 Homeland groups in the Pormpuraaw townscape

Social spaces that are connotative of present day homeland interests in the landscape are defined using criteria that are based on those recurrent demographic characteristics of such groups that have been identified in ethnographies worldwide (for instance Binford 1991; Kelly 1995) and which were summarised earlier on in this chapter. The groups are initialised on the basis of households where two or more people with the same family surname or ‘mission’ name live. The significance of mission names as territorial indicators will be discussed later in this chapter with reference to both Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama. The criteria that are then used to characterise homeland groups within this population include the following properties,

- **family specialisation** in terms of the proportionate number of people in the homeland group that share the signature family name;

- **demographic specialisation** in terms of their reproductive capacity (women aged between 15 and 30), economic capacity (adults aged between 15 and 45), number of dependants (children under five years of age).
age or adults over 50 years of age) and the number of recent migrants into the community that they contain;

**stability of household residence** between 1996 and 2001; and

**territorial specialisation** in terms of the number of primary and secondary rights that each household in the group has to places in the landscape and the **spatial contiguity** of houses in each homeland group.

### 3.4.1 Family specialisation

Eleven putative homeland groups were defined on the basis of surname. The eleven groups comprise 308 of the 446 Aboriginal people in Pormpuraaw in 1996 and 179 of them are people who have one of the signature surnames. Each group occupies an exclusive cluster of households that includes people within them who do not have the same surname as the majority of the group. There are also other people with the same surname who live elsewhere in the community, in households outside of these clusters, but they are the only member of the household in which they live that bears their surname. Two groups of nine people who each occupy single households on Mungkan side were excluded from this analysis as they are migrants from Aurukun and there is no information available at present on any affiliations that they may have to country in the Pormpuraaw landscape; and another group of ten Yir Yoront affiliates who were resident in 1996 but who had dispersed by 2001 because of a death in the household have also been excluded.

### 3.4.2 Demographic specialisation

Demographically, and from a traditional perspective, each cluster may be viewed as a self-contained homeland group. Signature members may have formal land affiliations from their paternal grandfather; except for mother and grandmother, who would have formal affiliations to country in their paternal clan, which in turn would provide informal rights of land use for the rest of the family. The ideal homeland group formation would also have a gender and age distribution to
ensure its economic and reproductive success (for instance Binford 1991; Kelly 1995; Winterhalder and Smith 1979). Table 3.3 shows the demographic properties of each of the notional homeland groups. These include the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reproducer%</th>
<th>Producer%</th>
<th>Dependant%</th>
<th>Migrant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Category**

1 = Kuuk Thaayore  
2 = Yir Yoront  
3 = Wik Mungkan  
4 = Bakanh

**Reproducer**% is the number of females between the ages of 15 and 30 as a percentage of category size. **Dependant**% is the number of children less than 15 years old as a percentage of category size. **Producer**% is the number of adults between 15 and 45 years old as a percentage of category size. **Migrant** refers to the number of migrants in that category and groups refers to the number of household.

Table 3.3: Homeland group demographics in the Pormpuraaw townscape

proportionate number of women of reproductive age (Reproducer), adults of working age (Producer) and of dependant children (Young Dependant) and elderly people (Old Dependant), and the number of migrants from other Gulf Lowland communities in each group.

There are differences between some groups within this population in terms of their reproductive potential, which is the number of children and women of child-bearing age; and in the number of migrants that they contain. The group which consists mainly of affiliates to Yir Yoront clans does not have any children under the age of five and only three women of reproductive age, amongst its residents. This group also has the lowest proportion of affiliates with the signature name of
all of the groups in the township (Table 3.4); consequently, it has the weakest homeland identity of all of those that have been identified in this model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Houses</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
<th>% of signature name in town</th>
<th>% of group with signature name</th>
<th>Number of homelands in landscape (2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CORE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thaayore</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROXIMATE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wik Mungkan</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yir Yoront</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERIPHERAL</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakanh</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thaayore</td>
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<td>95</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wik Mungkan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Homeland group composition in the Pormpuraaw townscape

Overall, the modelled homeland population has received more migrants than has the rest of the township, more so those groups on Mungkan side. Bakanh and Wik dialect speakers have formed the bulk of the migrants into Pormpuraaw since the early 1970s. For instance, about 50 Wik dialect speakers from Aurukun came to live in Pormpuraaw in the mid-1970s (Taylor 1979). Seventy three of the Aboriginal people counted in the 1996 survey had not been in Pormpuraaw in 1988 and were born in another community. Twelve people came from Kowanyama and 54 from Aurukun. All of the Aurukun people are related in some way to people in Pormpuraaw and thus have potential affiliations to land on the DOGIT. They live entirely in households on Mungkan side. Households in the Wik homeland groups contain 73% of the migrants who arrived before 1988, and 40% of all arrivals since then. A comparison of the number of people who lived on Thaayore and Mungkan side in 1972 and 1996 demonstrates the effect of this migration on the townscape (see Table 3.1). Despite its high migrant intake
between the two household census dates, 1988 and 1996, Pormpuraaw is a relatively closed society where almost all new arrivals are related in some way to people in the town. Many of the Aurukun people have settled with Pormpuraaw partners (Taylor and Anderson 1996). Some Kowanyama women have established partnerships with local men, but on the whole most Kowanyama people come to Pormpuraaw to visit relatives and friends and are usually only temporary residents.

There is little difference between individual household income and the number of people in all community households (Spearman $r^2 = 0.77, n = 89, p = 0.000$ at 0.05 significance level) and household income and the number of people in households within the identified homeland groups (Spearman $r^2 = 0.90, n = 11, p = 0.000$ at 0.05 significance level). Pormpuraaw, like most Aboriginal communities, has a welfare economy where there is little variation in personal income levels within the community as the majority of the population receives ‘dole’ payment for participation in community development or maintenance work (CDEP) programmes.

3.4.3 Household mobility

A household survey in December 2001 counted 583 Aboriginal people in Pormpuraaw. This is an increase of 57 from the 1996 population. Of the 2001 population, 395 had been resident in 1996, 101 people had died or moved away, and 142 had been born or had arrived in town in the intervening five years (Monaghan and Taylor 2003). Of the 395 people who have been resident in 1996 and 2001, 192 or 49% of them had moved house in the intervening years. The 2001 survey counted 278 members of the 1996 urban homeland population and 102 or 37% of these people had moved house. This difference in mobility between the homeland and non-homeland populations in Pormpuraaw was enhanced when analysed at the household cluster rather than at the individual household level. Overall, most movement occurred within household clusters or homeland groups. Of the 102 movements within the homeland population only 31, or 11% of them, involved moves to houses outside of their household cluster. Household mobility is an integral feature of domestic life in many Aboriginal towns. In Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama it occurs over cycles of weeks or months when movement from house
to house is undertaken mainly by single people, young or old, or by young childless couples in the 18 – 25 year age group. Reasons for relocation include visits to relatives, household closures following a death, to ‘cool off’ if there has been any disagreement in their usual home, or to relieve overcrowding. Even if I have only been away for a week or two from either Kowanyama or Pormpuraaw I have to check where some of the old men, who are my friends, are living on my return. One of the features of community life that assists this mobility is that rents are not collected by household; instead, adults are each charged a weekly levy of $20 by the council as a service charge or ‘rent’ irrespective of where they live in the community.

3.4.4 Spatial contiguity
Territorially, Kruskal - Wallis H tests (SPSS 1998) of the distribution of primary affiliations to core Thaayore clans between all of the homeland groups show that there are significant differences in their distribution between Thaayore, Yir Yoront, Wik, and Bakanh homeland groups, ($x^2 = 6.909, df = 3, n = 11, significance = 0.032 at 0.05 confidence level). Also, at the household level there is a significant negative correlation between the geographical proximity of their traditional country to the township and the amount of affiliations that homeland groups have to core (Thaayore) clans as a proportion of their overall affiliations. This effect is more marked with primary affiliations, which are more closely related to notions of land ownership, than with secondary affiliations (Primary affiliations: Pearson $r^2 = -0.749, n = 11, significance (2-tailed) = 0.008 at the 0.01 confidence level. Secondary affiliations: Pearson $r^2 = -0.572, n = 12, significance (2-tailed) = 0.066 at the 0.01 confidence level).

3.4.4.1 Thaayore side homeland groups
The model on Thaayore side identifies four groups, three are distributed between Thaayore households and another is located within a set of Yir Yoront related households. One Thaayore group, which comprises three generations of a single family, has 34 affiliates in a cluster of nine neighbouring households. Twenty of this family’s formal affiliations are to the Brolga clan, for which there are an overall total of 27 in the present Pormpuraaw population, and three are for the Watersnake clan. Of a total of 101 informal rights, 58 are in the Watersnake clan.
for which there are a total of 110 rights distributed through the population, 12 are in
the Brolga and 18 in the Dog/ Goanna clan. These affiliations translate into access
to contiguous clan estates in the landscape, which extend inland to the DOGIT
boundary and within which three homeland sites have been set up since the 1990s.
This distribution is complemented by the close proximity of member households in
the townscape.

A second Thaayore group, which contains 36 people in nine households, has one
long established homeland in the landscape and another two are being planned for
occupation in the near future. The residents of the established homeland are a
subset of this group who occupy three adjacent houses. The proposed homeland
residents are resident in houses in the same part of Thaayore side. All of the
homeland sites that belong to this group are part of traditional estates that are
adjacent to each other in the landscape. The Yir Yoront group is in households in
the general vicinity of this second Thaayore group and they mingle socially and
share some of the homeland aspirations of the larger group. The remaining
Thaayore group lives in households that are more widely dispersed through
Thaayore side.

3.4.4.2 Mungkan side homeland groups
There are two Bakanh and one Wik homeland group. The Wik group lives in ten
households dispersed throughout Mungkan side. Though they share the same
surname the three homelands that are currently occupied by them are autonomous
enterprises that are entirely independent of each other. These homelands are
territorially contiguous in the landscape but at present there are only distant social
relations between the people who occupy these sites even though there is some
overlap in terms of traditional affiliations between them. This group also has a
low proportion of all of the people that have the signature surname amongst their
members and also a low proportion of the number of people with this surname
within the group.

One Bakanh household group comprises 22 people, with nine people below the
age of 15. There are another 17 members of this family on Mungkan side of
whom only one person is over the age of 30, and eight are children under the age
of 15. The main reproducers in this group are two sisters. Of the 39 people in these two groups only six have known formal rights to traditional country in the DOGIT area. Recent data, which has not been included in this analysis, show that some of these people have formal affiliations to clans whose country is at the northern end of the DOGIT between the Holroyd and Kendall Rivers. The remaining people are immigrants, all of whom have some informal rights inherited either from their partners or from their mother’s side. Though there are only a small number of affiliates, they form a specialised distribution in the landscape. They have six of the nine known Freshwater Crocodile (1) formal rights. The group has 16 of the 30 and 13 of those 26 informal or secondary rights that exist in the township for the two Freshwater Crocodile clans. These are separate but geographically contiguous clan estates that share a story along their extent, which is broadly the course of the Edward River, from the inland to the sea, which deals with the struggle between the freshwater and the saltwater crocodile at creation or ‘Story’ time.

Most of the traditional country of Bakanh people is on pastoral properties to the east of the Pormpuraaw DOGIT. One of the Bakanh groups purchased the Strathgordon pastoral property with the assistance of the Indigenous Land Corporation in 1999. People from the other group occasionally stay with their relatives on this pastoral property and are about to negotiate the construction of a homeland site with the owner of the adjacent Southwell pastoral property. Both Bakanh families worked on these properties as ‘ringers’ or domestic staff for many years up until the 1970s.

3.4.4.3 Township homeland groups

There are three homeland groups on Thaayore side and a fourth on Mungkan side who have most of their clan affiliations in country that is in relatively close proximity to the township. The Thaayore groups have country to the north and south of the township and occupy houses on both sides of town. One of them has had a homeland site in the landscape since about 1995.

The Mungkan side group is currently setting up a homeland site in their traditional country, about 10 kilometres away from the township. One of the two young
women who are the ‘reproducers’ of this group is related to the Bakanh homeland group and the partner of the other is a migrant from elsewhere in the Gulf Lowlands.

3.4.5 Social space and homeland group identity
Relating an ethnographic model of clan organisation and land affiliation on the Gulf Lowlands (Sharp 1937, 1958; Taylor 1984) and a model of homeland group demography to the Pormpuraaw town plan, and to 1988, 1996 and 2001 household censuses shows that traditional organisation of the landscape at the clan level is a conspicuous feature of the present day urban geography of Pormpuraaw. House spacing and clan spacing in the township is isomorphic and, geographically, they complement the distribution of related clan sites that have been mapped in the landscape. If one considers the clan system as a strategic framework then homeland groups are also evident as logistically organised households that contain a high order of territorial and social specialisation within this system. As well as strong links to country, these groups have a distinct surname identity and have stable residency patterns in well-defined household clusters around the township. This relative stability lends weight to any assertions of authority over country that these groups may make, whether in the township or the landscape. The Pormpuraaw townscape is clearly a domain of knowledge, a cognitive space of named places, and of rights of ownership and use, within which homeland groups form discrete spaces or lacunae, or islands of ‘moral space’ (after Bauman 1993).

‘Cognitive space (rules and knowledge) is like an archipelago, spaces with lots of semiotically empty spaces in between them ... islands are not contiguous, but neither they are exchangeable (sic); each harbours different knowledge, meanings and relevance’ (Bauman 1993, 198).

Nonetheless, there are contrasts in these properties between Mungkan side and Thaayore side that are of such a magnitude that, just as with traditional clan estate and language criteria, the Pormpuraaw township might be considered as comprising two entirely separate places; and homeland group identity is more visible, on the basis of the criteria in the homeland model that has been developed in this chapter, on Thaayore side than on Mungkan side. Residential mobility between households
is higher on Mungkan side, partly because of the high migration rates associated with this part of town, and surname is not as clear a criterion for distinguishing homeland groups as it is on Thaayore side.

The model has also revealed a socially ranked geographical space in the Pormpuraaw townscape, which is correlated with the proximity of traditional country to the township. Though there are separate spaces comprising Thaayore side and Mungkan side groups, there is also an overlapping space of traditional affiliations between them for those groups whose members have primary affiliations to country in close proximity of the township (see figure 3.5). The intercalation of households with Kuuk Thaayore and Yir Yoront primary affiliations within ‘Thaayore side’ groups mirrors those relations between the language groups which were first described by Sharp in the early 1930s (Sharp 1937). There are no primary Yir Yoront affiliations within homeland groups anywhere else in the township. Despite the greater overcrowding in households on Mungkan side than on Thaayore side, the Bakanh groups there manage to form distinct clusters that are separate from the rest of Mungkan side.

Topologically, the distribution of formal and informal clan affiliations in the township (figures 3.3 – 3.6) comprises a cognitive space of social relations that is resonant of the ‘spaced estates’, of formal affiliations and rights of control of territory; and ‘overlapping ranges’, of secondary affiliations or rights of land use (Sharp 1937; Stanner 1965; Taylor 1984). Whereas clan estates are almost exclusive of each other in the landscape, some overlap between them is evident in their distribution in households in the township, except in those households occupied by the homeland groups identified in this chapter. Geographically, the homeland groups have accumulated rights to spatially discrete homeland domains whether viewed as clan estates in the landscape or as household clusters in the townscape.

Homeland groups are also evident in the Kowanyama townscape, in a township that has a social topography that is completely different to that of Pormpuraaw
3.5 Social space in the Kowanyama townscape

Strang (1994) commented on the partition of Kowanyama into neighbourhoods which are identified by each of the languages spoken in the community. The distribution of street names in the township reflects the cultural geography of the DOGIT and the Mitchell River country that was described in Chapter 2 of this thesis; with the relative position of each language name on the township street plan corresponding to their relative position in the landscape. The current Kowanyama population is in fact dispersed through these streets in such a way that the boundaries between them are not as clear as they are for language groups in Pormpuraaw. A Kunjen side that includes Olkola speakers, a Yir Yoront side, that also includes Yir Thangedl speakers, and a Kokoberra side are sometimes referred to locally, but this geography is more anecdotal than real in terms of the actual population distribution. Aboriginal people had originally settled in the Kowanyama mission in a pattern that reflected their territorial distribution in the landscape. Each tribe occupied a separate ‘village’ in the township. Cyclone Dora destroyed a townscape of simple cabbage palm thatched huts in 1964 and the Queensland government introduced a new town plan in the late 1960s. Figure 3.7 shows the distribution of the main language groups in the Kowanyama township in 1973 (Taylor 1979). Figure 3.8 shows a town plan that was proposed by the Department of Native Affairs for the reconstruction of Kowanyama in 1964. The latter plan shows a separate area set aside for a Koko-Mungin (Kokomunjen) village. This tribal separation no doubt existed throughout the township prior to the cyclone but was never restored when the township was rebuilt in the later 1960s and in the 1970s.

A severe housing shortage at Kowanyama since the late 1980s, which has only been alleviated as of about 2002, may have disrupted the potential development of any preferred residency patterns by local people. Certainly, some older people in Kowanyama often say that they would like to see some of the new housing built at places which are four or five kilometres away from town, and which would house only traditionally kin-related people. They want to see a return to a Kowanyama of separate ‘tribal’ villages. Strang (1994) identified the influx of people from
Figure 3.7: Main language affiliations of households in Kowanyama in 1973 (Taylor 1979)
Figure 3.8: Queensland government plan for the reconstruction of Kowanyama (Department of Native Affairs 1964).
surrounding cattle stations in the 1960s as another factor that may have led to the dilution of the ‘tribal village’ topography of the Kowanyama township.

Though language affiliation is not as obvious in the townscape as it is in Pormpuraaw it is how people in Kowanyama classify themselves. Kokomunjen (Yir Yoront), Kokoberra, Kokoberrin, Kunjen and Olkola speakers form the dominant social groups or ‘tribes’ in town and even though their populations are more dispersed than in Pormpuraaw they tend to be the majority and often the sole occupants of the household in which they reside. Unlike Pormpuraaw, there is a high degree of exogamy between language groups in Kowanyama which is not apparent in historical or anecdotal records of community social relationships in the 1950s and 1960s when people still married within their ‘tribe’ (Kenny Jimmy, Judy Brumby pers. comm).

Again unlike Pormpuraaw, where any individual readily declares it, clan affiliation is not part of observed daily life in Kowanyama. Kowanyama people identify themselves in terms of kinship. A casual conversation in Kowanyama requires continual computation of the kinship relations that the conversant has with the people or places that they are recounting. There are no references to clan totems, as in Pormpuraaw, which provide convenient shorthand to summarising both land affiliations and social relationships. Instead, Kowanyama people tend to make declarations to ‘country’ and identify themselves with locales in the landscape, such as Topsy Creek, I’ygow or Kowanyumal Pocket; or, for instance, to Kunjen or Yir Yoront country which they share with the rest of their kin. In my experience, open declarations of clan affiliation by reference to their totem only occur when necessary. Such declarations occur in land claims to State assigned pastoral or national park land that are part of traditional country; when plans are being made to set up homeland sites; when a flora or fauna totem is inadvertently offered as food; or, when mortuary bans are imposed on entry to traditional country following a death in the community. Older people with whom I have had a close working or social relationship have been the only people to disclose personal clan affiliations to me in Kowanyama. People there are gregarious and sociable but they have a
deeply grained sense of ‘personal space’ and tend not to reveal their specific affiliations to outsiders, in particular to White people.

As in Pormpuraaw, family surnames give some clues to the identification of homeland groups in Kowanyama. In pre-mission times most people would have been identified by a ‘bush name’ that gave their clan affiliation and personal totem or 'country of origin' (after Sharp 1937). ‘Bush’ names are still common in Kowanyama, though like clan names they are rarely heard in public. Nowadays, most families are identified by a ‘mission’ name that was given to their grandparents or great-grandparents by missionaries or by district police in the early years of the 20th century. Some classes of these names are unique to pre-mission population groups and allow present day people to be broadly referenced to the landscape. Kowanyama has a suite of mission names that reflect the historical involvement of its population with the pastoral industry. These include the names of pastoral properties in the Mitchell River region such as Inkerman, Dunbar, Koolatah, or Highbury. These surnames are largely borne by people whose traditional country lies on those properties that are on the periphery or beyond the DOGIT, many of whom came into Kowanyama from the late 1950s onwards.

Another feature of Kowanyama nomenclature is the widespread use of patronyms as surnames. These were the baptismal or Christian names, Dick or David for instance, that missionaries gave to male family heads who came into Trubamanam and then Kowanyama in the earliest years of the Mitchell River Mission. Chapman in his mission diaries in the 1930s refers to people in the Kowanyama community solely by their adopted ‘Christian’ name. Most of these were either Kokoberra or Yir Thangedl speakers, and from about 1937 onwards Yir Yoront speakers, whose homelands are on the boundary of the original reserve area. Baptismal names were also given to some Kunjen and Kokoberrin speakers, who were in the mission at the time of its establishment and whose country lay beyond the boundary of the reserve. The name was also given as a surname to the rest of the group and from then onwards to their descendants. In the same way that language and clan affiliations work in Pormpuraaw, patronymic naming is an indicator of the core or ‘inside’ population, and also of many members of the proximate population, both in early Mission time and in the present day township, whose homeland country is within the area of the DOGIT.
Patronymic names allow the identification of groups of people in Kowanyama and the areas of the landscape that their forebears occupied at the start of the 20th century. In some instances, they also present themselves as household clusters in the township, or as a signature of homeland group identification such as 'the Gilbert mob'. Other Mission names such as the names of wildlife such as Possum, Yam or Brumby; or, of Gulf Lowland rivers including Holroyd, Kendall, Edward, Coleman and Mitchell often only apply to distantly related and geographically dispersed traditional kindred in Kowanyama. The latter class of geographical names are more common at Pormpuraaw where patronyms are borne by fewer members of the local population. This difference in nomenclature is probably because people in Pormpuraaw had acquired their names from pastoralists and frontier police in the years prior to the establishment of the church mission there in 1939.

Surnames are not a wholly conclusive way of identifying membership of current or aspiring homeland groups. For instance many people on Mungkan side in Pormpuraaw share a Lowland river name as a surname, but there are quite different groups amongst them in terms of their homeland interests and their social relationships. Adoption is also quite common in Kowanyama and children who are taken in by a family receive that family’s name. Some adopted people will refer to their biological parentage rather than their adopted parentage when expressing their land affiliations. Other people nominate the country of their adoptive parents. Also, mothers in single parent households in Kowanyama often name their children after their own surname, or that of the father of the child. In the latter case this can mean sibling brothers and sisters have different surnames if the mother has had more than one partner. A similar naming practice in single mother households is described in Coen in the central Peninsula (Smith 2000). This matrilocality may lead to assertions by some people to formal affiliations with their brother’s or sister’s father’s country. This means, that in contrast to the patrilineal dogma, that some people may claim many formal affiliations through their siblings’ fathers (Colin Lawrence, pers. comm). However, I have found no evidence of this kind of assertion having ever been made in a context that relates directly to actual claims of rights to land ownership, occupancy or use. It does have a currency though in defining social relations in township life in Kowanyama. Single parent pensions
have provided young women with greater autonomy and freedom of choice in partners and the composition of their households in recent years. Their choice of partners is more constrained in Pormpuraaw where, with three exceptions identified in the 1996 household survey, all liaisons within the population described in this chapter have occurred within their parent tribal or language affiliations.

The lack of a clear spatial order in the Kowanyama townscape, when compared to that in Pormpuraaw, that reflects the local geography of land affiliation, does not imply a lack of integrity or loss of value in land relationships. It means that it is expressed in other ways. People in Kowanyama openly declare their affiliations and homeland interests in daily life; their social space is an egocentric or body-centred one whereas that in Pormpuraaw is sociocentric and territorially bounded in residency patterns in the township. In the context of this study, the modelling procedures based on traditional land affiliation that were used to identify social space in Pormpuraaw would reveal little if applied to Kowanyama, even if available ethnographic and household survey data had been mapped. There are occasions though in Kowanyama when the geography of local language is reflected in the spatial patterning of social behaviour. For instance, in the beer canteen on pension day afternoons, which are every second Wednesday, the old people congregate into distinct regional clusters of one or two tables within which beer jugs circulate but rarely migrate across to other groups. Social space is mostly evident in street life in Kowanyama. Avoidance or reciprocity relationships are evident in queues for the checkout in the community store; in the way people cross the street or turn away on the pavement to avoid each other; or, that conversation comes to a halt or becomes more animated as people join the group; or, in the order in which people consume food and drink at house-opening or birthday feasts. All of these actions represent small somacentric or body-centred (after Casey 1993) facets of social space, determined by personal kinship relations, as well as tribal affiliation, that crystallise and dissolve continuously in daily life in the community. In meetings of the Counsel [sic] of Elders in the Kowanyama Land and Natural Resource Management Office where community land affairs are administered (this institution is discussed in more detail in later chapters of this thesis), careful attention has to be paid to seating arrangements and the serving of morning tea so that the order of places at the table not only reflects the cultural geography of the DOGIT, in
particular the language or ‘tribal’ affiliations of people, but also any social distance in kinship relations between the members who are present. Acting as the chair at such meetings, as I have done on a number of occasions whilst acting as Manager of the Office, can be a nerve-wracking experience. One is often chastised for a lack of good manners in the way that one addresses people, or for a lack of sensibility of the nature of social relationships between people who are present. All of these relations are easier to comprehend in Pormpuraaw where they are territorially bounded in the streetscape.

3.6 **Urban space and land affiliation on the southern Gulf Lowlands**

One of the main assumptions of this thesis is that the township is the ‘habitus’ (after Bourdieu 1977) or locus of all social relations and it is the place where social practice is generated. This chapter has attempted to explore whether there is a topological or spatial order to social organisation in the townscape of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama that reflects the core (inside) - periphery relationships based on the proximity of traditional country to the township, that were created in the earlier years of the 20th century.

Two markedly different urban geographies have been described for Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw in this chapter. The differences in the two geographies can be explained by ‘time-space distantiation’ effects (after Giddens 1985) and the 40-year difference in the length of the colonial administrations experienced by the two communities. This is particularly evident in social organisation in the agnatic (apical ancestor) and cognatic (clan totem) idioms that are used by families to represent their descent lines in Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw respectively. Sharp (1937) describes a strong totem-based system of land allocation, similar to that in present day Pormpuraaw, in the northern half of the present-day Kowanyama DOGIT in the early 1930s and this is not so prominent there today. Instead, descent lines are detectable in the surnames of homeland or descent groups that refer to the apical ancestors who provide justification for connection to country. Nonetheless, there are sociological similarities between the two townships in the ways in which homeland groups present themselves in community life, especially in terms of the
group size, surname identity and household contiguity and the stability of household residence criteria that were used to identify them in this chapter. In Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw, as in many other areas of Aboriginal Australia

‘The surnamed descent group stands to the household somewhat as the clan did to the band in classical systems’ (Sutton 1998).

It appears that each of the township geographies represents a distinct spatial praxis, an accommodation of local ways to the introduced social technologies of settlement life, housing, administration and a welfare economy; that has been produced in circumstances of geographical and administrative isolation from each other and from the rest of Australia. Each geography is the product of three or four generations of community experience of life on a remote Aboriginal reserve and they are examples of a response to centralisation (see Chapter 1.3.2) that have also been documented in communities elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia (for instance Anderson 1989; Bell 1993; Memmott 1991, 2002; Moran 1999).

The change from an urban topography of ‘tribal’ villages, like that of present day Pormpuraaw, to a more socially open townscape that occurred in Kowanyama in the 1960s and the 1970s can be viewed as a local response to the social engineering goals of the Queensland government and the assimilation policy which underlies the DOGIT tenure (see Chapter 2.4) but does it also imply that there was also a change in local systems of land affiliation? Cyclone Dora and the destruction of the mission township in 1964 precipitated the change and a new town plan was introduced

‘Instead of the traditional pattern of three distinct villages, with houses situated at the discretion of their owners, the new town plan prescribed surveyed allotments on defined roads. Since the houses were allocated on a basis of housing need as they became available, the new township was tribally heterogenous bearing no resemblance to the tribally based distinctions of the mission villages’ (Freier 1999, 383).

The post – cyclone Dora reconstruction of Kowanyama took many years and often in circumstances of severe overcrowding in households (Frier 1999). Overcrowding was exacerbated further in the 1990s as houses which had been purchased as ‘Katter leases’ by their residents between 1986 and 1988 (see Chapter
fell into disrepair and could not be repaired by the Council who no longer owned them. Taylor (1979) makes similar observations to Freier (1999), both authors were in Kowanyama in the early and mid-1970s, in that the entire township would have had to have been rebuilt at one instance for the pre-Dora townscape to have been reproduced. Kowanyama also experienced a considerable immigration of families from pastoral properties and Aboriginal towns in the region in those years. Some were removals to get Aboriginal children to school, and others were precipitated by the collapse of Aboriginal involvement in the cattle industry following the introduction of ‘award wages’ for Aboriginal workers in the late 1960s. Attempts to remove Aboriginal families from pastoral properties and to relocate them in Kowanyama had been happening from the late 1940s onwards (Colin Lawrence, pers. comm).

The post-Dora reconstruction led to a social townscape which reflects the properties of the broader regional networks to which Kowanyama people belong rather than the archaic ‘three village/ three tribe’ configuration which, as much as anything else, may have reflected historical precedence in the arrival of tribal groups into the community rather than any indigenous expressions of territoriality and social difference. There are intimations in references to early mission records in Freier’s thesis (1999) that the tribal villages may have been as much for the administrative convenience of the mission as well as the cultural sensibilities of their inhabitants. The last major influx of a single ‘tribe’ into Kowanyama was with the arrival of Yir Yoront (Kokomunjen) people in the late 1930s and early 1940s; they were directed by the missionaries to a separate area in the mission and supplied with materials to build houses ( Oxley Library, Brisbane).

Again, it may be argued that the tribal heterogeneity of the present day Kowanyama townscape reflects a ‘status ante quem’ and a state of social relations that existed in its wider region prior to the arrival of the missionaries (see Chapter 2.2 and 2.3). If so, then the identification of the influence of the proximity of traditional homeland country to homeland group identity in the township, of a comparable order to that identified for Pormpuraaw in this chapter, is not possible irrespective of whatever social or cultural idiom may be used to map these relationships. Kowanyama people have always had a widespread network of social relations from the earliest
days of the mission, which has included people from far beyond the reserve boundaries. Roth (1907) and McConnel (1939) report on the permeability in tribal boundaries that existed in the lower Mitchell River valley in the earliest years of the twentieth century. Also, with reference to the Kowanyama region,

‘While most of the six hundred people of these three language groups speak only one of the languages mentioned, a majority of them also understand or “hear” a second language, and many, a third. The “network... of understandings” thus exists which might serve, regardless of language differences, as a basis for a society or for a community of interests. Yet it is impossible to locate a fixed population associated with a single bounded territory which might constitute a social or cultural community. Similar conditions obtain all up and down the coast as one proceeds north or south; languages change and other variations in cultural behaviour become standardised in different regions, but the cutting lines for societies or communities are nowhere clear, and everywhere there is flux or overlaps of people with their mutually understood but different behaviours. If we cannot delineate societies or communities, or discover any structural framework, political or otherwise, which might relate to them we had best ignore the idea of “nations” or “tribes” for this area. Indeed we might consider ignoring altogether the long-established “cookie-cutter” concept of culture, valid perhaps for the behaviour of island communities or pueblos, but clearly inapplicable here’ (Sharp 1958, 3).

The Aboriginal people who were displaced from pastoral properties and who came to live in Kowanyama in the 1960s and 1970s were not strangers. For the most part, they were related to many of the residents, or they had strong personal relationships which had been built up over many years of working together in the cattle industry throughout Far North Queensland. Many of these people moved into long-established households and took their place as kindred or as family members within them. The present day townscape of Kowanyama reflects a greater permeability in social relations within the township and with its wider region than does that of Pormpuraaw and one that is of long-standing and, hence, one that is not necessarily an artefact of government policy in the 1960s and 1970s.

This chapter has described only one dimension of social space in the southern Gulf Lowlands in terms of the spatial properties of social organisation and land affiliation in the townships of the region. The other dimension of this ‘habitus’ (after Bourdieu 1977) is out in the landscape where community notions of ownership and rights of use of land are also directly expressed in actual patterns of
homeland occupation and land use. The following two chapters of this thesis will look at the relative congruence or disjuncture between social space in the townscapes and landscapes of the region, and in particular at the influence of centralisation and proximity to traditional country and also the distribution of seasonally accessible space in the landscape on land allocation practice in the 1990s and early 2000s. These chapters will also ask whether the ‘spatialities’ (after Soja 1996) and modes of social organisation that have been revealed in the townscapes of Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in this chapter represent a spatial praxis that reflects local authority in land allocation practice in the landscape in the 1990s and early 2000s.
Social Space: Seasonal Accessibility and Homeland Distribution in the Pormpuraaw Landscape

Notions of social space in the landscape and associated land ownership and land or natural resource use values are physically constrained by the monsoonal climate and extreme seasonality of the southern Gulf Lowlands, and hence the relative accessibility of ‘country’ from the township. This chapter integrates ethnographic mapping of places in the landscape that formed part of the model of social space in the Pormpuraaw township in Chapter 3 with a model of wetland distribution in the wet and dry season landscapes of the southern Gulf Lowlands to describe the distribution of seasonally available space. First, the chapter describes the human ecology of the Gulf Lowlands with reference to ethno-archaeological models of land use and the logistical organisation of seasonal landscapes in order to demonstrate the significance of seasonally accessible space to social organisation and land allocation practice. The topological properties of these theoretical models are applied to the model of seasonally accessible space developed in this chapter in order to define tracts of potential homeland space within the wet and dry season landscapes of Pormpuraaw. Then, the effects of the proximity of available homeland space to the township on the establishment of homelands, in the 1990s and early 2000s, are reviewed. Finally, the models of social space, as represented in the townscape in the previous chapter and in the landscape in this chapter, are compared to determine what the congruence or disjuncture between both distributions reveals about the geography of land allocation practice in Pormpuraaw.

Wetlands are multivalent. They have many biogeographic, economic and social properties and their significance as spatial referents by which local people can articulate these values is also reviewed later in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis. Consequently, this chapter entails an exhaustive mapping of the social and environmental properties of the Pormpuraaw landscape.
Figure 4.1: Cumulative Weekly Rainfall at Kowanyama between 1991 and 1999
(Bureau of Meteorology)
4.1 **Seasonality and the physical setting of Pormpuraaw**

Stanner (1965) defined an 'ecological lifespace' to territoriality in addition to the 'sociological lifespace’ of the kind described for Gulf Lowland townships in the previous chapter. Traditionally, its organisation and extent was contingent upon

'longterm [environmental] equilibria under which nomadic bands could survive by nomadic ecology whilst maintaining sufficient interaction between a band's members’ (Stanner 1965, 5).

On the Gulf Lowlands such equilibria have required adaptation to extreme seasonality in rainfall. Almost all rainfall is between December and March during the period of the Northwest monsoon or 'wet' season. The remainder of the year is largely dry. Figure 4.1 shows the cumulative rainfall distribution for the years 1991 – 1999 at Kowanyama. There are differences between each of the years in the timing of the start and in the duration of the wet season. One consistent feature though is the marked seasonality in rainfall. After the 'wet' ends there is little or no rainfall for the following 7 or 8 months when evaporation rates then exceed any precipitation that may occur by a considerable margin. For at least three or four months in any year the Coastal Plain of the Gulf Lowlands is inundated to form a continuous wetland of many thousands of square kilometres in extent. Following the end of the 'wet' this water body starts to recede and to fragment into numerous swamps which can last for up to another three or four months but which also continue to recede in area and in depth over this time. For the remainder of the year surface fresh water reserves are confined to in-stream lagoons along the major river courses and to open waterholes, mainly in the larger depressions that are found on the interfluves in the region. These form discrete water bodies that are 'islands' in a landscape that becomes increasingly desiccated as the dry season advances. This annual cycle of wetland growth and recession is the key environmental property of the coastal lowlands of Monsoonal Australia (Haynes et al 1991).
Figure 4.2: Landforms within the Pormpuraaw DOGIT area (Monaghan and Taylor 1995)
At a regional scale, there are three distinct landscapes in the Pormpuraaw area (Figure 4.2). These are typical of many areas of coastal North Australia and include Coastal Lowlands, River Plain, and Woodland Ridge landscapes (Monaghan and Taylor 1995). These landforms are recognised by most local people and are referred to by a variety of nomenclatures that emphasise the difference between ‘ridge’ or wet season and ’plain’ or dry season country (Monaghan 2003a). They differ in the degree to which they are affected by seasonal flooding and they provide the contextual framework for the integration of environmental and ethnographic information in this chapter. An important point to bear in mind is that traditional and present day resource use is almost entirely confined to the land in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama. Despite Pormpuraaw’s location on the coast, local people only fish in the tidal arms of rivers. There is no tradition of use of the sea and also there are no stories or notions of affiliation that attach to the seascape. For instance,

‘Until the arrival of the white man, wooden dug-out canoes were not in use on the Gulf of Carpentaria, south of the Pennefather River. Bark canoes, manufactured from stringy-bark (Eucalyptus tetradonta) and known to the Wik Munkan as tonn, are in use on the Archer River and its tributaries, and among the all the people of the neighbouring groups as far south as the Kendall River. The tonn is essentially a river and estuarine craft, rather than a seagoing canoe. It is, however, freely employed by all the people about Albatross Bay [the present day Weipa area] for the hunting of dugong and turtle, which are harpooned as on the East coast. These canoes can only be made after the commencement of the rains, for until this time the bark will not strip. But the bark forms an important means of transport during the wet and in the early part of the dry season (ontjin min), when, on account of the flooded state of the rivers and of the low lying country, as well as the long grass, travel by land is difficult’ (Thomson 1939, 212).

Sharp describes movement around the marine environment in Kowanyama in the early 1930s as follows

‘Bark canoes are used by the Wik-speaking tribes at the mouth of the Kendall River, forty-five miles north of the Edward River [present day Pormpuraaw]. The tribes of the Edward River and to the south know this fact, and even have a word for canoe (pinat, ordinarily a pointed wooden container, but now meaning also any boat); and yet their only means of water transport is a light wood log four or five feet long (yo
wawn) to which they cling as an aid in swimming rivers and tidal inlets. They know
that the natives with bark canoes can fish from midstream and that they can cross the
coastal waters infested with crocodiles, sharks, sting-rays, and Portuguese-men-of-
war with a far greater degree of safety. The tree (wa’ar) which supplies bark for
canoes is as abundant in the southern area as in the northern. The only apparent
reason for the non-adoption of this valuable culture trait by the southern tribes is the
difficulty involved in fitting the trait into the established scheme of things. It would
have to be incorporated into one totemic complex or another and a myth explaining
its presence and associating it with a lineage as a totem would have to be developed,
if it were to become a permanent part of the culture of the southern tribes’ (Sharp
1937, 67).

4.1.1 Coastal lowlands
Taylor (1984) records seven landforms that are named and recognised by Thaayore
people for the Coastal Lowlands landscape. These include raak piip (intertidal
zone); raak muthin (beach ridges); raak rem (melonhole plain); and raak pathirr
(saltpan). Chase and Sutton (1981) also described categories for this kind of
landscape in Wik Ngathan country at Cape Keerweer. These are aak nhinthen ngaan
(sandridge country) and aak peth (saline mud flats), aak punth (tidal creek or
intertidal channel) and aak pontha (beach).

4.1.2 River plain
Unlike the Coastal area, the River Plain landscape is only described as one single
unit for instance raak panpirr (coastal plains) by Thaayore people (Taylor 1984); as
aak thongk (grass plains) by the Wik Ngothan (Chase and Sutton 1981); and as ark
pikkaput (savanna woodland) by the Wik Mungkan (Thomson 1939). Melaleuca
woodland covers most of the lower lying areas of the floodplain.

4.1.3 Woodland ridge
The Woodland Ridge landscape comprises four landforms - Coastal Woodland,
Coastal Ridge, the Holroyd Overflow and the Inland Ridges. The Coastal Ridge and
Coastal Woodland areas comprise Tall Open Forest and Vine Thicket, and Open
Eucalypt and Melaleuca Woodland respectively. Even though the ridge rarely rises
more than 6 metres above sea level it is the most pronounced topographic feature in
the Pormpuraaw area. It comprises a series of raised beach ridges or 'cheniers' of
quartz sand and compounded shell which support a diverse range of flora and fauna,
and which supply the only permanently available fresh water. These ridges were formed between 2500 and 6000 years ago when sea level was about 1.50 metres higher than today (Bailey 1977; Rhodes 1980). They have been recognised as some of the most ecologically significant features of the Gulf Lowlands (Stanton 1976). The Inland Ridge comprises a series of interfluvial ridges that start between 20 and 40 kilometres inland of the coast. They support Tall Bloodwood and Eucalypt Woodland and numerous perennial swamps and lagoons. The Holroyd Overflow comprises Tall Open Eucalypt woodland and numerous small wetlands in the form of perennial swamps and lagoons. It is a weathered laterite surface that rises to over 20 metres above sealevel. The landform has been described as a 'distinctively complex pattern of ecosystems and habitats' and 'Biologically interesting sedgeland. Has scientific value' (Connell Wagner 1989). It has been identified as a potential National Park (Stanton 1976) and as a priority conservation area (CYPLUS 1996). An inventory of 'Wilderness Quality' conducted by the Australian Heritage Commission has identified all Woodland Ridge forms, both inland and on the coast, as areas of high wilderness quality (Lesslie et al. 1992). They are also the areas of the greatest cultural and economic significance to the community as they provide refuges above the level of wet season floodwaters, and compared to the rest of the landscape there is also a relative constancy within them each year in dry season water supplies. The coastal ridges are labelled raak kuurkan by the Thaayore (Taylor 1984) and aak nhinthen theepenh by the Wik Ngothan people (Chase and Sutton 1981) and the inland ridges raak pemkaw, and aak nhinthen put or aak kumchel respectively.

Streams are virtually absent from the Woodland Ridges but instead these areas have substantial freshwater reserves in the form of interstitial moisture in the coastal dune ridges, and as surface lagoons in inland areas. The coastal dunes have an impervious clay base and thus act like 'sponges' in their retention of water from wet season precipitation. Fresh water can be found quite close to the surface in the swales between dunes and is permanently available. These areas are critical later in the dry season when surface water reserves, in particular over the River Plain country have
largely evaporated. Lagoons are like reefs at this time of year. They are high profile features in the landscape that provide foci for cattle grazing and refuges for flora and fauna. They are also landmarks which have names, ‘lieux dits’ (after Lefebvre 1991), which most people recognise and by which they orient themselves in the landscape, and assert rights of land ownership or use within the Gulf Lowlands. Many of them are the locations of the creation stories which relate people to differing parts of the landscape through their clan affiliations. They also provide many of the locations for ritual such as ‘spirit baby’ conception and for the management of wetland flora and fauna resources in increase or initiation rites.

4.2 Seasonality and ecological lifespaces on the Gulf Lowlands

The effect of seasonality on access to differing parts of the landscape is described with reference to the above landscape units and with reference to ethnographic accounts of traditional lifestyles in the Gulf Lowlands and ethno-archaeological models of the spatial organisation of landscapes. This review also provides a justification for the spatial analysis procedures that are applied in this chapter to the development of a cartographic model of seasonally available space in the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape.

4.2.1 Seasonality on the Gulf Lowlands

There have been a number of accounts of traditional land use on the Gulf Lowlands by ethnographers from the period prior to mission establishment up until recent times (Chase and Sutton 1981; Sharp 1937, 1952; Taylor 1984; Thomson 1939; Von Sturmer 1980). Ethnographic fieldwork in the Pormpuraaw area in the 1920s and early 1930s described a 'hunter-gatherer' lifestyle (McConnell 1939; Sharp 1937; Thomson 1935 in Taylor 1984). On one expedition, Sharp spent 29 months between 1933 and 1935 in the area between the Mitchell and Coleman Rivers and documented and mapped traditional places. Thomson spent several months camped on the Coleman River in company with a large party of Yir Yoront people in 1928. In ‘The Seasonal Factor in Human Culture’ Thomson (1939) observed the effect of the monsoon on Aboriginal custom and lifestyles for the Gulf Lowlands area.
between the Archer and the Coleman Rivers. He described the seasonal distribution of differing types of wetland, their significance as habitat for flora and fauna, and hence as reservoirs where local people obtained food and other raw materials.

Thomson also described in general terms the social organisation that underlay the strategies by which separate groups of people were allocated to the exploitation of differing wetlands and how these groups of people came together or dispersed as the distribution of fresh water changed through the year. Taylor's (1984) account is based on fieldwork between 1968 and 1973 and many of his informants in the community at that time had lived in the bush as young adults in the 1930s and still remembered their pre-mission lifestyle. These recollections, and extensive field mapping of the location and types of customary land use practiced by individuals and kin groups, provided Taylor with the basis for a logistical model of pre-contact land use in the Kuuk Thaayore country between the Edward and the Coleman Rivers.

Taylor described a small but highly mobile population which fragmented into small residential groups in the wet season and who later coalesced into larger more mobile groups as food resources waxed and waned during the dry season. They were largely sedentary during the wet season when they lived in small camps on the Coastal Ridge. Following the end of the 'wet', usually in March or April, the River Plain was extensively used by family groups who came together to collect the birds, eggs and vegetation that are available in and around late wet season swamps, and smaller groups of men formed hunting parties. This was a time of high mobility. As the landscape became desiccated grasses were burnt to enhance hunting opportunities, and with the disappearance of surface water from coast and River Plain swamps by May or June, a more regulated pattern of movement between the permanent lagoons on the Holroyd Overflow and the Inland Ridges was initiated. As these lagoons became progressively shallower and then empty, larger social groups formed and they concentrated around the deeper lagoons that are found inland of the coast. Dry season subsistence was largely based on the collection of nonda plums, which come into fruit around September, and the selective poisoning of waterholes to collect fish. These formed food staples until the onset of the 'wet' which is usually in November or December (Taylor 1984; Thomson 1939). Other researchers have also recognised
the significance of the physical properties of seasonal water bodies in social organisation, in particular, their position and relative spacing in the landscape; and changes in their relative depth and surface area over a dry season. These properties provide spatial and temporal referents for the range and direction of seasonal routes, and of the ordering and sequence of places that were visited along these routes in dry season movement around the landscape (Birdsell 1958; Chase and Sutton 1981; Gould 1991; Stanner 1965; Tindale 1974).

Taylor suggested that the order of food collection, and of dry season social and ritual activities, largely depended on the relative depth of water in lagoons, with the shallowest exploited earliest in the dry season and the deepest left until last. Like Thomson (1939), Taylor recorded a mobility pattern that was socially organised, that was circulatory and predictable in nature, and that was based on carefully prescribed routes between lagoons and rights of entry to use water, or to hunt and collect attendant wildlife and vegetation.

4.2.2 Logistical organisation of seasonally available space on the Gulf Lowlands

Ethnoarchaeology has developed spatial models that link notions of territoriality such as those of the clan estate or the range, to the physical contingencies of the environment that hunter-gatherer groups live in, in order to define the location and extent of the seasonal 'lifespaces' or the geographic ranges that people exploited in a landscape in order to subsist. The basic premises of these models are that people locate themselves to where food and shelter may be obtained with the least effort, and that various mobility strategies are in play at any time in order to ensure the optimal spacing of groups of people in a landscape. Ethnoarchaeological models can combine notions of social organisation derived from ethnography (Binford 1980, 1982, 1991; Ebert and Kohler 1988; Kelly 1984, 1995; Peterson 1975), foraging theory from wildlife ecology studies (Gamble and Boismier 1991; Kelly 1995; Winterhalder and Smith 1979), and least effort or optimising theory from economic and human geography (Chisolm 1966; Hagget 1965; Vita-Finzi and Higgs 1972) to estimate how populations are distributed in highly seasonal landscapes. They can include optimisation procedures based on the relative size and spatial distribution of
patches of edible vegetation or of faunal habitats, and the demography and the corresponding dietary needs of a population. Risk-based approaches attempt to predict the consequences for hunter-gatherer lifestyles of environmental perturbations such as drought (Joachim 1976; Ward 1978). Landscape studies of this nature have their roots in the 'human ecology' studies of the 1930s. These have included studies of seasonal indigenous land use in western Cape York Peninsula (Thomson 1939) and in Shoshone country in the Western Plains of the USA (Steward 1933, 1938).

Binford (1980, 1982, 1991) has developed a suite of logistical models from ethnographic and archaeological work amongst the Nunamiut people of Alaska. They have relevance to western Cape York Peninsula as they describe land use in an environment that also has marked seasonal contrasts in biomass and water availability. Binford’s broad aim was to identify the spatial properties of seasonal food procurement strategies across differing environments so that generalised spatial models could be developed that would help in the collection and interpretation of archaeological material. He developed the idea of an 'annual territory' (after Vita-Finzi and Higgs 1970), that encompassed all of the residential sites that a hunter-gather group would occupy in any one year or seasonal cycle. Around each residential site would be a 'foraging radius' where residents, mainly women, collect food, and nearer to the camp, a 'play radius', for children to roam around in. Beyond these radii a 'logistical radius' would encompass an area where specialised work-groups, in particular male hunters, would pursue game, and bring it back to the main residential camp. This might involve an overnight stay. Beyond this range may be a 'visiting zone' shared by relatives or by visitors from neighbouring groups, where trade or information exchange may occur (figure 4.3). The size of foraging and logistical radii would vary according to population size and food availability. The movement of campsite by any group that practices this kind of land use has consequences for the foraging and logistical radii of other groups of people that share the same landscape. In the Gulf Lowlands this movement was controlled by those formal and informal rights of access to land that have been described in Chapter 3,
and no doubt by information about environmental conditions exchanged between
neighbouring groups in the landscape within any dry season.

From an ecological perspective, Binford (1980) defined two forms of ‘tactical
mobility’ or alternative strategies in seasonal movement around a landscape. A
‘residential strategy’ involves the collection of food, usually by specialised work
groups working over a relatively small distance from camp, in an environment where
there is a high degree of constancy in food reserves. Food is collected and then taken
back to a residential camp. When the food resources around the camp are
sufficiently depleted then the whole group moves to another site. Binford refers to
people who follow this kind of strategy as ‘collectors’. Alternatively, ‘foragers’ have
to practise a ‘logistical mobility’, or ‘mapping on’ behaviour, which requires them to
move their residence more frequently than collectors and to search for food over
large ‘foraging radii’. Foragers behave logistically in their selection of foraging
‘patches’ and in the amount of time that is spent in hunting or gathering food in these
areas so that serious resource depletion is avoided.

In highly seasonal environments both of the above strategies might be practised at
different times of the year. Features of both are evident in the Gulf Lowlands in the
contrasting wet and dry season lifestyles described in the accounts of Sharp (1937),
Thomson (1939), Taylor (1984) and Chase and Sutton (1981). They have been
identified as a form of ‘strategy switching’ between collecting and foraging modes of
food procurement, and between relative sedentism and high mobility in residence
(Gould 1991). In terms of the physical environment, accessible wet season space
comprised areas of dry ground extensive enough for a group of between 15 and 40
people to subsist on for about four months. The wet season has been described by
local people in the country north of the Edward River as 'hungry time' (Von Sturmer
1980). Accessible dry season space was ‘tethered’ to the distribution of waterholes
waterhole may have a constellation of satellite camps, and there would have been
Figure 4.3: Logistical organisation in a hunter-gatherer landscape (Binford 1980)
cooperation between groups in these camps in foraging, or in hunting over large logistical radii throughout the inland country. Like other ‘water-tethered’ foragers (Gould 1991; Kelly 1995) people on the Gulf Lowlands stayed at a waterhole until it was depleted. This certainty in the arrival of the monsoon to replenish waterholes is complemented by little ethnographic or archaeological evidence of long term food storage as insurance against drought conditions due to a late ‘wet’. Late dry season waterholes were subject to ‘fish poisoning’ with extracts from tree roots that either temporarily, or permanently until the arrival of the monsoon, dissolved oxygen from a waterhole and thus killed all the fish within it. These strategies were accompanied by large camps of people who had been previously dispersed through the landscape. Nonda plum was collected and pulverised to provide a form of gruel, and fish were processed into a paste, usually for consumption at large social or ritual gatherings, or for use as rations on hunting trips (Thomson 1939). If these resources became scarce and insufficient to support everybody in a late dry season camp then the Coastal Ridge provided a ‘buffer’ or refuge in times of drought where people could return early to their wet season camps and obtain water by excavating wells through the ridge deposits.

There is little uncertainty or risk in foraging strategies in the southern Gulf Lowlands. Gould (1991) has said that the seasonal mobility strategies described by Thomson (1939) for the Wik Mungkan are characteristics of perhaps one of the most sedentary populations in Aboriginal Australia. Taylor (1984) reports that some dry season movement was undertaken for social or gastronomic reasons, either because of boredom or the desire to vary diet. Sharp (1937) also describes a mobile population in the dry season in Yir Yoront country between the Coleman River and the Mitchell River in the early 1930s where movement was also driven by social as much as by subsistence needs. As well as involving a switch from highly mobile foraging in the dry season to relatively sedentary food collection strategies in the wet season, seasonal movement also involved changes in terms of social relations and the way people mapped themselves onto the landscape. This is apparent at a regional scale in the distribution of mapped clan estates (in particular in Taylor 1984 and Von
Numerous small and exclusive clan estates have been mapped in the Coastal Ridge or ‘wet season’ country; whereas beyond about 20 kilometres inland, there are fewer estates that are more extensive in area and with boundaries, which are socially more permeable than those of the coastal estates (Chase and Sutton 1981; Sharp 1937; Sutton 1978; Taylor 1984; Von Sturmer 1980). Thomson (1939) describes late dry season gatherings at inland waterholes that may have involved hundreds of people: Sharp (1937) refers to these events as the ‘totemic ceremonial fiestas of the winter’. This was the time of marriage arrangements and of the performance of major stories and ceremonies. On the other hand, wet season occupation of the Coastal Ridge was of exclusive family camps.

The length of wet season residency on the Coastal Ridge, often by a single family at a single location, and the implied exclusive use of space in this strategy relate to the notions of formal control of the clan estate and of ‘father’s country’, and of moral space and the homeland that were discussed in the previous chapter. Traditionally, wet season camps were tranquil places where there was little contact with people in other camps (Sharp 1937; Taylor 1984; Von Sturmer 1980). By contrast, the pattern of short-term or intermittent residency, high mobility and the implied sharing of space in inland areas in the later dry season is connotative of a ‘public space’ or ‘range’ and of informal rights of land use that have been described for the cognitive space of wider social relations that people share in parts of the townscapes of the region in Chapter 3. There is still a marked element of seasonality to life in the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama townships. The late dry season is a time of high social mobility in town of visits between households and of trips into the landscape either for camping ‘holidays’ or for hunting or fishing. Once the wet season rain starts, Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw literally ‘cool off’. The cacophony of sound from parties or gatherings in different households, and the appalling high temperatures and humidity of the late dry season ‘build up’ subside, and people spend more time indoors in their homes with their families.
4.3 The remote sensing of seasonally available space

The representation of seasonal water bodies as referents of the extent of seasonally available space in the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape requires a range of spatial and temporal scales from the landscape to individual water bodies, and from single dates to seasonal trends, over an area of about 7,000 square kilometres. This demands a level of surveillance that can only be provided by satellite remote sensing. Also, current topographic mapping of the Gulf Lowlands contains limited temporal information on the seasonality of water bodies, and its representation of watercourses and water bodies is much generalised, with many of them not recorded because of the constraints of mapping scale.

4.3.1. Spectral properties of surface water in seasonally arid environments

Because of their shallow depth and their small surface area, water holes are relatively ephemeral objects, which are often barely distinguishable, in either aerial photography or digital remotely sensed data, from other features of the late dry season landscape. Their appearance in LANDSAT Thematic Mapper (TM) data which has a minimum spatial resolution of 30 metres (0.09 ha) can differ quite markedly between each of the landscapes that have been described above for the Pormpuraaw area. Except for the grasslands of the Coastal Lowlands, most of the Gulf Lowlands area is covered by woodland of varying composition and structure. In a spectral sense, seasonally arid woodlands are heterogeneous environments and their appearance in LANDSAT data is largely determined by three factors. The latter factors are differences in vertical and horizontal structure within these woodlands, their scleromorphy, and substrate reflectance from the ground surface.

Sclerophyll woodlands are diverse in terms of the height, crown density and crown cover of middle and upper storey layers. In Australia, one of the main causes of this diversity is the effects of attendant land use regimes, in particular grazing and fire practices, which can dominate the spectral response from these woodlands (Graetz 1990; Jupp et al 1986). The characteristic chlorophyll pigment absorption and leaf cell tissue reflectance features of photosynthesing vegetation in more temperate
environments, upon which many terrestrial remote sensing applications depend, are subdued in Australian rangelands because of the low chlorophyll content and the pendic structure of scleromorphous leaves (Graetz 1990). This means that the high infrared response that is characteristic of photosynthesising vegetation in other parts of the world is either absent or so subdued that it cannot be distinguished from responses that might be received from bare unvegetated surfaces. Hence tree canopies are not very visible at the spectral and spatial resolution of LANDSAT data and are more often detected by the shadows that they cast (Graetz 1982; Matheson and Ringrose 1994). Seasonally arid woodlands are generally open both within and between canopies. Apart from the shadows that they cast most reflectance is from the ground surface and hence is determined by the relative mixture of ephemeral grasses, leaf litter and bare soil (Graetz 1982). Thus for most applications of environmental remote sensing in semi-arid woodlands, and particularly so in the later dry season, the dominant response is from the ground surface and its most discriminable properties are its colour and whether it is in shadow, or wet or dry, or burnt.

The narrow range of spectral responses that is characteristic of Australian semiarid environments means that surface water, tree shadows, dark soils and fire scars all have virtually the same reflectance characteristics at all of the solar reflected radiation wavelengths measured by LANDSAT sensors (Graetz 1982; Graetz and Pech 1984; Matheson and Ringrose 1994). Surface water is usually identified by its characteristic absorption properties at near infrared wavelengths (Manavalan et al. 1993; McFeeters 1996; Rindquist 1987; Verdin 1996; White 1978; Work and Gilmer 1976). However, the ability to detect water is temporally dependant and becomes increasingly difficult from the end of the wet season onwards. Following the end of the wet season water is at its most discriminable as other ground cover features, in particular vegetation and bare ground, have distinctly higher reflectance properties at near infrared wavelengths. As the landscape dries out areas of water absorption are replaced by increased reflectance from dry ground surfaces. Areas which were formerly dark appear brighter depending on the amount of surface water remaining, the relative wetness of the soil and the amount of shadow cast by trees and hence the
structure of the coincident woodland. From April onwards, vegetation on the Gulf Lowlands is burnt by land users to enhance the productivity of grasses for game or for cattle. Late dry season burning regimes are invariably coincident with the area of remaining fresh water and thus errors of commission can occur in the classification of remotely sensed images, in other words, areas can be classified as wet when in fact they are dry and burnt.

There are two other limitations to the use of remotely sensed data in the mapping of dry season lagoons. They are their shallow depth, and their small surface area or uneven shape as the dry season advances.

**4.3.2 Spectral properties of shallow water in LANDSAT TM data**

Whilst near infrared wavelengths are almost totally absorbed by water, visible light penetrates water bodies. The relative depth of water in a lagoon can be determined as a function of increasing visible and near infrared light reflectance from the end of the wet season onwards as lagoons become shallower due to evaporation. The depth of penetration of visible light and its absorption or ultimate extinction is wavelength dependant. Depth of penetration in water, and corresponding decreases in reflectance levels with depth, are largely monotonic thus relative depth measurements are possible in clear water bodies. Despite this property, natural water bodies have many characteristics that confound the measurement of relative depth. These include turbidity, substrate colour, and with smaller or narrow or unevenly shaped lagoons, the effects of fringing vegetation or bare soil or areas of burning. All of these properties can have the appearance of either shallow or deep water at different visible light wavelengths. Shallow lagoons are expected to have greybody characteristics at visible and near infrared wavelengths, deep lagoons to have blackbody characteristics, and empty lagoons to have a whitebody appearance at the same wavelengths. This phenomenon changes over time and when individual lagoons on light-coloured substrates are monitored over a season their spectral properties are expected to follow an ordered sequence of increased reflectance from
blackbody to greybody to whitebody as they become progressively shallower and then dry out. The higher reflectance of brighter substrates and of bare soils and vegetation on the edges of waterbodies are likely to provide non-monotonic increases or decreases in the seasonal reflectance curve.

Figure 4.4 shows an idealised curve for dry season surface water distribution on the southern Gulf Lowlands. Rainfall records (for instance Figure 4.1) demonstrate that the landscape usually fills with water from monsoon storms during late January and February. Then there is a rapid decrease in flood waters until the beginning of April following the end of rainfall. From April onwards water then concentrates in the main river courses and in open, precipitation-fed, lagoons. From May onwards there is little wet season flood water left and associated swamps are usually empty by the end of June. Later dry season water is concentrated in deeper open lagoons and in
deep trenches in the main river courses. This later season water is represented as the asymptote in Figure 4.4 because even though considerable reductions in water volume, and hence depth, may occur there is little change in the surface extent.

The hyphenated inflections in the later dry season curve in Figure 4.4 show errors of omission (under-estimate) or of commission (over-estimate) that can occur as a result of the influence of surrounding vegetation, substrate effects and burning on estimates of the extent of surface water from remotely sensed data. These letter perturbations can cause errors in the estimation of the location and area of seasonally accessible space for populations who rely exclusively on surface water sources.

4.3.3 Geometric properties of shallow water bodies in LANDSAT TM data
Even with a spectrally homogenous object such as deep-water lagoon up to 60% of the reflectance values from its surface may be affected by responses from adjacent vegetation (Crapper 1981; Strahler et al. 1986). This 'mixture' or 'edge effect' problem is expected to vary depending on the type of woodland in which a lagoon is located and also on its shape, and on the time of the year at which it is remotely sensed. Lagoons that have greater perimeter/ area ratios, i.e. which are irregularly shaped will have greater inherent error in estimates of their extent (Manavalan et al. 1993). This can lead to errors of omission such as areas being classified as dry when in fact they are wet. The effective spatial resolution of remotely sensed data is not entirely related to pixel size. The 'point spread function' (PSF) of LANDSAT scanners means that reflectance values of low radiance targets, such as a relatively deep lagoon, may in effect be smeared over adjacent pixels (Mather 1999) thus increasing their apparent size, particularly early in the dry season. PSF effects vary between dates, depending on atmospheric conditions, and also the season. Lower sun angles in the dry season can produce more shadow from adjacent trees and thus overestimate the likely presence of surface water. Work and Gilmer (1976) reported minimum lagoon size estimates of 1 hectare and 0.5 hectares with LANDSAT MSS data that has a pixel size of 80 metres (0.64 ha). The smaller estimates were obtained by including mixture effects and they claimed better estimates of water body size by including water body shape in the classification. Picton and Puech (1992 cited in
Verdin 1996) recorded minimum lagoon sizes of 0.25 hectares with SPOT HRV data that has a pixel size of 20 metres (0.04 ha).

4.4 The mapping of seasonally accessible space in the Pormpuraaw landscape

The spectral and geometrical properties of remotely sensed data have to be accounted for in any reliable mapping of surface water distribution and of accessible space in seasonally arid landscapes. Hence, a statistical modelling approach has to be adopted to mapping which relies on the properties of the curve illustrated in Figure 4.4.

Eight LANDSAT Thematic Mapper (TM) images that cover approximate monthly intervals between February and September, with a February date from 1991, and a July date from 1992, and six dates from the 1994 dry season were used to produce maps of the probable presence or absence of surface water in the Pormpuraaw landscape over the course of a dry season. Maps were created with ARCINFO GRID software on a SUNSparc20 workstation and statistical analysis of their properties made with SPSS software on an IBM PC.

Each of the images was treated as an 'event' in a 'timeline' or temporal composite that described changes in surface water distribution. The underlying premise of the timeline was one of temporal constancy. In other words, that a pixel area that is classified as wet in September, and on all or most of the preceding months, was more likely to contain surface water, than a wet pixel which is preceded by a sequence of dry values on earlier dates. A related assumption was that no rain fell over the period of the timeline (see Figure 4.1).

Infrared LANDSAT TM Band 4 and Band 5 data were each classified separately into wet or dry categories using a spectral threshold value selected from sampling of the inshore area of the Gulf of Carpentaria in each image on each date. Successive pairs of classified bands were then combined to produce a single coverage with wet or dry categories for each pixel depending on the intersection of wet and dry values
between the two classifications on that date. Successive classifications for each date were then combined into one timeline where each pixel has eight separate wet or dry values, one for each month. Only two transitions in the state of a pixel were logically permissible between any consecutive dates, wet – wet and wet - dry. No pixel could become wet after having been dry. Illogical dry-wet combinations were evaluated in terms of the appropriateness of the spectral threshold values for that date or of the position of a pixel in the landscape, and the attendant fire regime (Anyanago 1997) or dominant vegetation community recorded for that location in landform mapping in the Pormpuraaw community land information system (Monaghan and Taylor 1995). They were either accepted, or revised with new spectral values accordingly in order to reduce the number of illogical, dry – wet, transitions.

The aim of this reclassification was for the frequency distribution of pixels classified as wet to approximate an expected negative exponential distribution for the extent of surface water, within any single waterbody or within any landscape over a dry season. This expected function has a rapid decrease in surface water area in the first three or four or 4 months, until an asymptotic value, which represents the extent of surface water for the remainder of the dry season, was reached (see Figure 4.4). The distribution which best resembled this expected form had LANDSAT TM band 5 wet values from May onwards excluded because of their confusion with fire scars. The latter are recognised from their shapes in the imagery, which depend on season and prevailing wind, local topography and vegetation types, and thus vary characteristically between differing landforms (Anyango 1997).

A 'runs' test was then applied to the timeline. A run is 'a sequence of like observations preceded and followed by a different type of observation or by no observation at all' (Daniel 1977). For instance, one run in the timeline would be a sequence of all dry or of all wet values. Two runs in a timeline such as wet values for the first three dates and then dry values for the remaining dates would indicate one wet/dry transition. The existence of 29 runs within 74 transitions, or unique combinations of wet and dry values, in the dataset demonstrated an underlying
stability with 86.38% of the almost eight million pixels in the timeline containing two or fewer runs \( n = 74, p = 0.05 \) at 95% significance level [1-tailed], Swed and Eisenhart 1943).

Each binary wet/dry classification for each month was then treated as an independent variable in a logistic regression model that used the other monthly 'events' and their wet/dry values within the 11 landforms that are recorded in the community area (Monaghan and Taylor 1995) as dependant variables to calculate the probability of the presence of surface water within each pixel on that date. The stratification into separate landforms was done to account for differing vegetation communities and spectral responses to burning and seasonal fire regimes within each landform. Acceptable models were developed for the 1994 dates (March, April, May, June, August and September) but not for February 1991 or for July 1992. Records from Kowanyama show that there was a difference in the amount of rain that fell in the 1991, 1992 and 1994 wet seasons. There was 1475 mm of rain in the 1991 wet season. The 1992 wet season was exceptionally dry with 618mm of rainfall and the 1994 season had 1155 mm of rainfall (Figure 4.1).

Fieldwork to obtain empirical evidence of the accuracy of the logistical regression models, in the form of direct 'ground truth', was precluded by the size and remoteness of the study area, and the range of dates and of conditions being evaluated. Instead, a subset of the March 1994 classification, approximately 3000 square kilometres in area, was extracted from the timeline and those contiguous pixels with a wet value within this extent were converted into vector polygons each of which was then deemed to represent a discrete water body. They were then visually compared with 1:50 000 colour aerial photography of July 1992 of the same area. Those of the 4473 water bodies in the March 1994 extent, which appeared to be either wet or dry in the July 1992 photography, were labelled accordingly, and logistical regression estimates of the probability of the presence of water for their corresponding locations obtained. A null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the mean odds of the presence of water between water bodies identified
as apparently wet or dry in the July 1992 photography was evaluated for each of the 1994 dates with a t-test of the independence of the two populations. The probability distributions calculated by each model were skewed so prior to the test being undertaken they were normalised to odds with the following formula, \( p(\text{WET}) / (1 - p(\text{WET})) \).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Sig.(2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>3.897</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>-0.930 (-0.694)</td>
<td>4473 (722.078)</td>
<td>0.352 (0.488)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td>0.763 (0.678)</td>
<td>4473 (785.581)</td>
<td>0.446 (0.498)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>57.596</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-4.209 (-3.107)</td>
<td>4473 (718.956)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>51.176</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-7.048 (-5.550)</td>
<td>4473 (738.542)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>26.119</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-2.718 (-1.781)</td>
<td>4473 (690.148)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>13.109</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>2.450 (4.212)</td>
<td>4473 (1991.22)</td>
<td>0.014 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( F = \) Levene's test for Equality of Variances  
Equal variances assumed (equal variances not assumed)  
DF = degrees of freedom  
Significance tests at 95% confidence level

Table 4.1: t-test of the odds of the presence of water in dry season water bodies

The null hypothesis was accepted for March and April, and rejected for May, June, August and September (Table 4.1). The test showed that there was little difference between the two populations in the first two months when both sets of water bodies almost certainly contained water at the end of the wet season as had been identified in the binary wet/ dry classification for March. March is a time of the year when the spectral contrast between surface water and surrounding vegetation is at its greatest and when there is a virtual absence of fire scars in the landscape. The wet and dry differences that were observed between the two populations in the July 1992 photography were apparent in regression models from May onwards.

In all 631 wet and 3842 dry water bodies were identified from the July 1992 aerial photography. Random sub-sampling to make both populations the same size did not greatly alter the results of the above test. All of the water bodies in the March 1994 classification are identifiable in the 1992 photography and many of them in fact are part of larger wetlands. These wetland systems had been fragmented into smaller water bodies in image analysis by wet/ dry spectral threshold values that excluded
the higher reflectance of stands of vegetation within or on the periphery of these wetlands.

Three types of water body were identified. An area of flooding or inundation from surface water run-off from the inland and overflow from the main drainage channels formed a single water body of more than 4000 square kilometres in area in February; in-stream lagoons which coincide with river courses, and which usually occur in deep, rock-cut trenches; and, open precipitation-fed lagoons which are not connected to drainage channels. A halo or drying aura around the margin of the inundated areas on the February image suggested that water levels had been higher in those areas in the days preceding the satellite overpass. There is a rapid decline in the surface area of fresh water following the end of the wet season and a concentration of water within in-stream and open lagoons as the dry season progresses. The inundated area declines in area quickly after March as floodwaters recede, and fragments into a number of smaller swamps almost all of which have disappeared by July. The more permanent riverine lagoons do not change much in surface area after May but instead probably continue to decrease in depth. The latter kind of water body was the most difficult to identify and many of them only appeared in the later dry season images as much of their extent had been masked by tree foliage on the early dry season dates.

Each of the above water body types is also characterised by broad differences in their shape. Shape is a property by which local people assess the biological and water quality properties of a waterhole. Swamps that occur in areas that were formerly inundated by surface water run-off tend to be circular; in-stream lagoons, rectangular and ribbon-like; and open lagoons more ovoid or sinuous in shape. In terms of the landscape they tend to be properties of the Coastal and River Plains, the main watercourses, and of the Inland Ridges, respectively. These trends and the landscape contexts in which they occur correspond with the cultural geography described by Thomson (1939) and Taylor (1984) which was summarised earlier on in this chapter. They also reflect the understanding that people in Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama have of how their environment changes over the course of a dry season, and of how
that underpins seasonal patterns of occupancy and land use. Insights into this understanding were obtained in both communities in numerous reviews of this model which are described later on in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

4.4.1 **Significance of seasonally accessible space in local knowledge systems**

Relating ethnographic information to the above mapping requires the matching of two separate chronological systems, one established by the dates of the imagery used in the development of the surface water models, and the other by local knowledge systems. It also requires the selection of appropriate proximal or distance values to establish geographic ranges within which logistical use of the landscape, of the kind described earlier on in this chapter, can be related to surface water bodies in order to define seasonally accessible space in the southern Gulf Lowlands landscape.

The ethnography used in this analysis is the same as that used to map land affiliation in the Pormpuraaw township (see Chapter 3). It was mostly recorded by John Taylor in fieldwork in the years between 1969 and 1973, and included some mapping and field records from work undertaken by Lauriston Sharp in the early 1930s. Each of the 426 places that are recorded has information on a variety of properties of that location that include details of ownership in terms of clan affiliation, ritual or custom that is practiced there, site use, patterns of natural resource use and time of year of occupancy. Table 2 shows those properties that are relevant to this analysis. Figure 4.5 shows the integration of similar properties in a graphical ‘seasonal cycle’ of hunter-gatherer activities recorded by Thomson (1939). There are mismatches in the local chronologies as Taylor (1984) and Thomson (1939) recorded Kuuk Thaayore and Wik Mungkan knowledge systems respectively.

Of the 266 places recorded in Kuuk Thaayore country, the geographical focus of Taylor’s fieldwork, 100 were directly related to seasonal land use and had some information on the time of year in which they were occupied. I assigned one of five values to indicate whether a site was only occupied in the wet season, in both the wet and dry-wet seasons, in the cold season, or in sun-hot time only, or all year round.
### Annual Cycle of Activities, Based Upon, and Regulated by, Seasonal Changes—Wik Monkana Tribe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEASON</th>
<th>CORRESPONDING CALENDAR MONTHS</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS OF SEASON</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>July (hot); transitional period.</td>
<td>Height of &quot;dry&quot; season; cool at night; growing season normal.</td>
<td>1. Field break-up of large camps into small portions of one to several families new ground. Great nomadic period. Vacuum gaps. Growth of unique types of vegetation. Nurturing of fish population. Large numbers of small native birds and small game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>October. November. December (cool).</td>
<td>Climate hot; Southwest winds cause weeds to grow rapidly during the quarter.</td>
<td>2. Field break-up of large camps into small portions of one to several families new ground. Great nomadic period. Vacuum gaps. Growth of unique types of vegetation. Nurturing of fish population. Large numbers of small native birds and small game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>December (cool). January. Februrary. March (cool).</td>
<td>&quot;Wet&quot; or rainy season, occurring over a period of 2-3 months during which the great part of annual rainfall is experienced.</td>
<td>3. Field break-up of large camps into small portions of one to several families new ground. Great nomadic period. Vacuum gaps. Growth of unique types of vegetation. Nurturing of fish population. Large numbers of small native birds and small game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Regulated by Seasonal Changes—Wik Monkana Tribe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATIONAL SITES</th>
<th>PRINCIPAL FOODS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various types (see Fig. 2 and pl. xiv).</td>
<td>Fish abundant (see Art. 65). Great vegetable food located during the rainy season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4, 5 and 6</td>
<td>Type 6 and 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4-7 and 8</td>
<td>Type 7 and 8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5-7 and 8</td>
<td>Type 6 and 7.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Notes
- In the absence of suitable climate zones for many of the food plants, the use of scientific names is inadvisable.
- White rice, beans, and sweet potatoes are grown in gardens located near the rivers and streams.
- Most homes are built of mud and straw and roofs are made of reeds or grass.
- Fish are caught by hook and line or by nets.
Where the ‘season’ attribute was not recorded for any site, the ‘strategy’, ‘freshwater’, ‘group size’ and ‘staylength’ properties (see Table 4.2), and Taylor’s (1984) and Thomson’s (1939) accounts of their relative significance for dry season activity, were used to infer the probable season of occupancy of these places. For instance, places with freshwater and foraging properties such as deep or shallow water fish poisoning, or the collection of nonda or filesnake, were allocated to ‘sun-hot’ time or late dry season occupancy. Figure 4.5 justifies this reasoning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SITE NAME</td>
<td>local name of tract or ‘country’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE</td>
<td>main language spoken by owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAN AFFILIATION</td>
<td>clan estate in which site is located</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITE TYPE</td>
<td>camp, river crossing, dinner camp, tabu, story, increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGY</td>
<td>hunt and gather, hunt only, fish only, gather only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRESHWATER</td>
<td>deep or shallow poisoning, fishtrap making site, file snakes, fish, roots, crayfish, mussels, lilies, Bulguru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATERIALS</td>
<td>lancewood, gum ironwood, white clay, red paint (yellow earth), milkwood gum, shells, paperbark, Fish poison, fibre cord, hibiscus, bamboo, cotton tree, plum trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUNTING</td>
<td>wallaby, kangaroo, bandicoot, echidna, emu, flying fox, reptiles, turtles, ibis, possums, brolga, Jabiru, duck, geese, turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARINE</td>
<td>fish, sharks, rays, shellfish, crabs, prawns, turtles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORAGE</td>
<td>yams, arrowroot, nonda, mangrove beans, palm heart, bush fruits, sugar bag, geese eggs, turkey eggs, roots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUP SIZE</td>
<td>single family, several families, or ‘a big mob’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEASON</td>
<td>raak kaarthan (wet); raak wurripan (dry-wet), raak kaal kurch (cold) and raak papath (sun-hot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCCUPATION</td>
<td>less than a week, more than a week but less than a month, more than a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAYLENGTH</td>
<td>length of time a site occupied during its main season of use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Properties of each place recorded in the Pormpuraaw land information system

All of the places recorded in Taylor’s ethnography were compared with a random population of approximately the same size that was generated from Australian Map Grid coordinates over the geographical range of the Pormpuraaw DOGIT to determine whether the overall distribution of traditional places in the landscape was influenced by proximity to water. Both populations were buffered to include a 500 metre, 1000 metre and 2000 metre radius around each location and each was then spatially intersected with logistical regression models for the 1994 dry season dates and the mean odds of the presence of water each population in successive months was determined. A t-test of the independence of these two populations was then conducted separately over the three radii (Table 4.3).
### i) 500 metre radius

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td>12.923</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-2.259 (-2.226)</td>
<td>325 (260)</td>
<td>0.025 (0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-2.584 (-2.504)</td>
<td>325 (168)</td>
<td>0.010 (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>6.591</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>-1.617 (-1.608)</td>
<td>325 (308)</td>
<td>0.107 (0.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>11.438</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-3.184 (-3.130)</td>
<td>325 (245)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUGUST</td>
<td>12.923</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-2.259 (-2.226)</td>
<td>325 (260)</td>
<td>0.025 (0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>19.948</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-3.939 (-3.857)</td>
<td>325 (223)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(random n = 168, ethnographic = 158)

### ii) 1000 metre radius

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td>81.012</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-5.232 (-4.927)</td>
<td>266 (125)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td>63.594</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-4.931 (-4.644)</td>
<td>266 (125)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>28.996</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-3.064 (-2.885)</td>
<td>266 (125)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>43.563</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-4.746 (-4.469)</td>
<td>266 (125)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUGUST</td>
<td>51.976</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-4.062 (-3.826)</td>
<td>266 (125)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>61.152</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-4.975 (-4.685)</td>
<td>266 (125)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(random n = 142, ethnographic n = 126)

### iii) 2000 metre radius

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td>3.227</td>
<td>0.077</td>
<td>0.735 (1.014)</td>
<td>68 (62)</td>
<td>0.465 (0.314)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td>3.954</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.590 (0.765)</td>
<td>68 (68)</td>
<td>0.557 (0.447)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>1.271</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>0.526 (0.738)</td>
<td>68 (59)</td>
<td>0.600 (0.464)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>7.102</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-2.901 (-2.733)</td>
<td>68 (25)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUGUST</td>
<td>21.377</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-3.679 (-2.662)</td>
<td>68 (23)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER</td>
<td>4.592</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>-3.132 (-2.681)</td>
<td>68 (29)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(random n = 48, ethnographic n = 22)

F = Levene's test for Equality of Variances  
**Equal variances assumed (equal variances not assumed)**  
DF = degrees of freedom  
Significance tests at 95% confidence level

Table 4.3: *t*-test of the difference in proximity to water between actual and randomly located places in the dry season landscape

The mean values for the probable presence of water within each of the site radii on each date were higher for the mapped population than for the randomly generated one. The difference between the two populations was greater over the 1000 metre than the 500-metre radius. This difference was also evident for June, August and
September over the 2000 metre radius; however mean values for the random population are higher in March, April and May when there is also no statistically significant difference between the two populations. One would expect to encounter surface water within a search radius of 2000 metres for any part of the landscape in those three months in the early dry season, but not so in the later dry season, when sites would be positioned more strategically so that they are close to fresh water.

The distribution of those 100 Kuuk Thaayore places which had temporal information on their occupation and use within the four traditional season categories was compared with logistical regression estimates of the mean odds of the presence of water within a 250 metre radius of each site for June, August and September 1994. These months correspond with ‘cold time’ and with the start of ‘sun-hot’ time in the local calendar (Taylor 1984: Thomson 1939). The 250 metre radius was of sufficient size to include no less than about 200 pixel values in each mean estimate and also preclude any overlap in radii between sites. It was also large enough to cover any potential mismatches in the recording of geographic coordinates, either in fieldwork as most site locations were acquired in the days before GPS and were based on ‘dead reckoning’; or, due to registration errors in the geometric correction and matching together of satellite images from different dates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variation</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significance (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Observed power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>48.814</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48.814</td>
<td>90.258</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>7.272</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.424</td>
<td>4.482</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>13.283</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.642</td>
<td>12.281</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography*Month</td>
<td>1.899</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>0.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>155.217</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.541</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnography : Wet n = 14 ; Cold-wet = 22 ; Cold n = 14 ; Sunhot n = 50

Table 4.4: Factorial ANOVA of predicted surface water presence within proximity of late dry season places in Kuuk Thaayore country within local time categories

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the distribution of mean ‘odds’ values for June, August and September over the four ethnographically defined season categories illustrated a high concordance between the two chronologies (Table 4.4). This was not evident in an ANOVA model that included the March, April and May
dates when almost all areas would have a high probability of surface water in their vicinity.

Despite the agreement between the ethnographic and the surface water models there is the potential to refine later dry season chronologies even more. No consideration of site function, what actually happens at each place, was made in this analysis. There is a hierarchy to places as to whether they are residential, the number of people they support, and the length of their occupancy. Many sites are not residential at all but are locales where particular foods or materials were collected, or they were ‘dinner’ camps or resting places in movement around the landscape. Camp sites are rarely found at a waterhole but instead are a walking distance away and sometimes more than one camp can be serviced by a large waterhole at the same time. In later dry season deepwater fish poisoning for instance, men would occupy one camp site adjacent to the lagoon to be contaminated, and women and children another separate camp site which may be some distance away. A ‘mob’ might use more than one waterhole at any time. Depending on their depth and relative proximity, one waterhole may be used for drinking water, another may provide water lily, and another may supply fish. There are also finer gradations of time in local chronologies. Customarily, each of the four seasons was subdivided according to criteria such as the growth cycle of grasses, the fruiting season of plants, for instance raak may yulu – ka (bush apple time), or particular activities such as raak thangun (grass burning time). Each of these times also had a characteristic suite of foraging activities and of camping places (Taylor 1984).

Another limitation to this analysis is that the latest dry season months on which surface water distribution is modelled is September, whereas much of the evidence in the ethnography points to activities that may occur later on in the year. Logistic regression models predict conditions within the constraints of the available data. They cannot predict future states such as the presence or absence of surface water in November or December. Markov models on the other hand allow the prediction of future states in a system through the use of probability-transition matrices. They represent processes whose state at any time is dependent on previous conditions or
states at any time in that system. They have been widely used in landscape ecology studies to model vegetation succession (Avecedo et al 1995; Hobbs 1983; Usher 1981) and have been applied to the analysis of environmental change with remotely sensed imagery (Allen and Walsh 1993; Middelkoop and Janssen 1991). They are only effective with simple systems where there are clear, unambiguous, transitions that have been completely represented in the model and where there are no hysteresis effects. These effects are evident in the surface water model developed in this study in the confounding effects of fire scars on obtaining reliable wet or dry transitions because of their spectral confusion with water at the wavelengths recorded by LANDSAT satellites. These problems may be overcome in the future with remotely sensed measurements at radar or microwave wavelengths, as these types of data become available, where fire scars and water are spectrally separable.

4.5 Seasonally available space and homeland distribution in the Pormpuraaw landscape

The integration of ethnographic information on traditional land use strategies with a surface water model has provided a spatially exhaustive representation of the distribution of wetlands and of the spaces around them that are seasonally available for occupation and natural resource use. The significance of this modelled distribution has been demonstrated in terms of the seasonality of the Gulf Lowlands environment and in terms of its congruence with the spatial and temporal properties of local knowledge systems. The rest of this chapter aims to describe the geography of land allocation practice across these spaces in the distribution of homeland sites in the 1990s and early 2000s; and, to determine whether there is a social ranking to the occupation of seasonally available space that is due to proximity to the township and to the historical and geographical contingencies of the DOGIT tenure that were summarised in chapter 2 of this thesis.

4.5.1 Seasonally available space in the Pormpuraaw landscape

The main physical constraints to homeland or campsite location are the availability of dry ground in the wet season and proximity to fresh water in the dry season. Indices for defining these properties are based respectively on areas of dry ground
greater than 50 hectares in extent in February (Figure 4.6); and, areas within a five kilometre distance of water holes with a greater than 95% probability of the presence of water with a surface area of greater than 0.50 hectares in August 1994 (Figure 4.7). A five-kilometre radius approximates the country that may be covered by hunting and gathering groups in a day (see Kelly 1995 for a summary of logistical radii that have been recorded in ethnographic studies worldwide). People may be driven out to their homeland or camping place in a car but once they are there they tend to move around the country on foot. The 0.25-hectare value is used to represent a ‘large’ water body within the spatial resolution constraints of the LANDSAT TM data that were used to model surface water distribution and has no intrinsic value. The available dry ground area value of 50 hectares for the wet season corresponds, according to local stockmen, to the area required at that time of the year to sustain a ‘killer’ herd of cattle of sufficient size for a homeland group of between 15 and 20 people to subsist upon. The rationale for the group size is based on homeland population distribution in North Australia (Coombs 1984; Cooke 1995; Smith 2000) and worldwide estimates of homeland group size (Kelly 1995).

The extent of seasonally available space in Thaayore and Yir Yoront country, the landscape equivalent of ‘Thaayore side’ in the townscape, is an area of approximately 1700 km$^2$. About 1450km$^2$ is within a five kilometre radius of a later dry season (August and September) waterhole. About 200 km$^2$ of Thaayore country is outside of available wet and later dry season space, and lies in the Coast and River Plain landscape of Melaleuca Woodland, and Mangrove, Saltmarsh and Grass Plains. This is an early dry season landscape where, traditionally, numerous small groups were dispersed in foraging for waterlily, yam, birds and other wildlife around swamps (Taylor 1984; Thomson 1939) in day to day ‘encounter’ food collecting strategies of a kind that have been associated with foragers in other high biomass
Figure 4.6: Wet season flood extent in the mapped area of the Pormpuraaw landscape (February 1994)
Figure 4.7: Available space and homeland location in the Pormpuraaw landscape
Figure 4.8: The distribution of surface water on the southern Gulf Lowlands in 'Dry - Wet' time (March 1994).
tropical environments (Binford 1980; Kelly 1984) and is reflected in the distribution of swamps recorded in the surface water model for late March or 'dry - wet' time (Figure 4.8). People moved onto more permanent waterholes after these swamps had evaporated (Thomson 1939). This ‘inaccessible space’ is barely used now except for early dry season grazing and there are no homeland sites in it at present.

A ‘rule of thumb’ applied by ethnographers for estimating population distribution in relation to land area is to assume that the size of a band of people will correspond to between 20% and 30% of the carrying capacity or available biomass in an environment (Kelly 1995). If one assumes that carrying capacity is uniform over the area of seasonally available space and that in the years prior to the mission that the seven clans recorded in Thaayore country (see Chapter 3) has access to estates of comparable size then each clan nominally has about 210km$^2$ of country available to it. Kelly (1995) has surveyed the ethnographic literature and listed population densities for hunter-gatherer groups worldwide. The range of values that he recorded from Australian sources is between 8 people/100km$^2$ in desert areas to 77 people/100km$^2$ in the North Australian tropics in eastern Arnhem Land. Estimates of 40/100km$^2$ and 43 people/100km$^2$ have been recorded in Western Cape York Peninsula (Chase and Sutton 1981) and in eastern Arnhem Land (Meehan 1982) respectively. At a 20% - 30% 'carrying capacity' and a population density of between 40/100km$^2$ and 70 people/100km$^2$ this translates into each Thaayore estate being able to support between 18 and 45 people, or a total of between 120 and 300 people over the whole of Thaayore country.

Sutton (1978) reported an average clan size of 21 people in Wik Ngathan country in 1976. McConnell (1939) estimated a population of about 200 people in Wik country between the Holroyd, Kendall and Edward Rivers in 1928. All of this latter country corresponds with the land affiliations of ‘Mungkan side’ in the present day Pormpuraaw township, and has 12% more seasonally accessible land area than has Thaayore country. Sutton's and McConnell’s estimates suggest that the lower range of population values may be more appropriate, that is about 20 people in each clan
estate. This corresponds broadly with present day population levels in the Pormpuraaw township. Though McConnell, and Thomson who was in the region about five years after her, considered that the population levels that they observed were a third of those immediately prior to European contact. Von Sturmer (1980) discounted these suggestions of depopulation for Wik country for lack of evidence. There is also no evidence of Thaayore people experiencing the kind of stresses, depredations and attacks that were experienced elsewhere in the Mitchell River and Gulf country in the early years of the 20th century, and there were probably about 150 of them in the country between the Edward and Coleman Rivers at that time. The Edward River mission had a population of 213 people in 1940 (Taylor 1979) at a time when the reserve included all Kuuk Thaayore country and smaller portions of Yir Yoront and Bakanh country (see Chapter 2). So far, the model of seasonally available space demonstrates that there may be no great difference between the population size of affiliates to clan estates in the landscape in the present day township and what might be expected of the most conservative estimates of this population in the pre-Mission landscape.

4.5.2 Seasonally accessible space and homeland distribution in the Pormpuraaw landscape
As well as the area of available space in the landscape, a related constraint to present day homeland location is accessibility from the township. The greatest constraints are in the wet season when homeland occupation is only feasible on the Coastal Ridge as access to the rest of the landscape is precluded by floods. There were thirteen homelands in Pormpuraaw in 2004. At present, two homelands on the Coastal Ridge can be reached on foot, after a short river crossing, from Pormpuraaw and another is regularly visited by boat in the wet season. There are two homelands in Inland Country that have serviceable airstrips and the telecommunication and power generation facilities to make their occupation in the wet season feasible.

There are seven homelands on ‘Thaayore Side’ three of which are on the Coastal Ridge and another four of which are in Inland Country (Figure 4.7). Members of a single family occupy three of the latter homeland sites that form an almost
continuous link between contiguous clan estates in the landscape. This group is also prominent in township life as it displays the greatest specialisation there in terms of the surname, demographic, territorial specialisation and household contiguity criteria that were used to characterise homeland group identity in the township in the last chapter. The three sites on the Coastal Ridge are all occupied by separate, but closely cooperating families. They act like a ‘Mutual’ or ‘Prudential’ society and are another identifiable group in township life who take advice and direction from the leader of the longest established homeland site (the ‘modus operandi’ of these societies are discussed further in Chapter 5). These families occupy overlapping household spaces in the township and also include some people with Yir Yoront affiliations, from neighbouring households, as members of their homeland sites. A fourth homeland site is occupied by one of the ‘township’ homeland groups, those whose traditional country is in close proximity to the township, that were identified in Chapter 3.

Almost all of the available Thaayore space in the inland ‘dry season’ landscape is occupied and there are no homelands in Yir Yoront country, despite there being sufficient space for two or three homelands there. Many of the traditional owners of Yir Yoront country in the Pormpuraaw DOGIT actually live in Kowanyama. It is likely that these cross-community interests will be resolved in the future (this issue will be discussed in chapter 7) but for the present Yir Yoront people in Pormpuraaw have negotiated their current homeland interests with their neighbours on Thaayore Side rather than with their relatives in Kowanyama.

There are three sites on the Coastal Ridge on Mungkan side, which are occupied by separate families, and there are three sites in the Inland Country, only two of which are actively occupied. The surname criterion, which was used to discriminate homeland groups in the township in Chapter 3, was least effective with all of these sites as there is a common name held by people who occupy three of them, but they have quite different territorial interests in the 1990s and 2000s. A third site has only been established recently but as yet its ownership and affiliations are not clear.
Bakanh people do not have a homeland in the DOGIT even though there may be enough space to accommodate them. Instead, one Bakanh family has acquired the adjacent pastoral property of Strathgordon. Another Bakanh family are about to negotiate an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) under the *Native Title Act* (Commonwealth 1998) with pastoralists on another neighbouring property in the hope of obtaining a homeland site. These two families are ‘station people’ who came into Pormpuraaw to live from these properties in the early 1970s. They form a distinctive homeland group in township life and are, in terms of patterns of household residence, the most spatially coherent group on Mungkan side.

The Inland Country of Mungkan side has the greatest area of available space left in the landscape for homeland establishment in Pormpuraaw. This is partly due to the existence of a large ‘Katter’ lease (see Chapter 2.3) that covers the greater part of the northern half of the DOGIT. This ‘special pastoral lease’ was granted under the *Aboriginal Landholdings’ Act* (Queensland 1985) to a Mungkan side resident by the State government in about 1989 over an area that also includes the traditional country of many other local people, who were neither consulted nor included in the lease application. Another homeland was also established by another Mungkan side resident in his traditional country in an area of Coastal Ridge country adjacent to the lease. This was an independent action and one taken without recourse to either State legislation or to the Community council. The lease was the arena for a conflict of minds of almost Homeric proportions, over land use and access issues, between these two people. Their conflict was viewed throughout the Peninsula as a contest between traditional and modern values. Both men are charismatic figures and have highly developed skills of advocacy and persuasion. The lessee was promoted by some at the time in the national press and on TV, as a ‘black entrepreneur’, a model of the assimilation goals of Katter’s policy to bring local people into the lifestyles and values of mainstream Australian society (see Chapter 2.3). At the same time many others regarded him as a pariah. The traditional owner is also nationally recognised as an advocate of Aboriginal land rights. Both men exercise their influence over wide areas of the landscape. The lessee has developed a commercial cattle enterprise and
also fishing and tourism ventures. People may come and stay in their traditional
country on the lease but he controls all land use. He sees his role as being one of a
leader and a facilitator, and most of the people in Pormpuraaw accept this. The other
person is an ‘Elder’ and mentor in monitoring the development of homeland sites on
the Coastal Ridge.

4.5.3 Social space and the geography of land allocation practice in
Pormpuraaw
Seasonal accessibility from the township does not appear to be a constraint to present
day homeland establishment. There have been no homelands established by Yir
Yoront people in their country yet. This absence resonates with the low socio-
demographic status for these homeland groups, that was identified in the last chapter,
and no doubt their historically proximate status in community life (see Chapter 2.3).
Conversely, Thaayore groups who have enjoyed a core status because of the
proximity of their homeland country to the township, have occupied the greatest area
of available space.

Geographically, there is a clear seasonal contrast in the distribution of available
space between the Coastal Ridge and the Inland Country and also apparent
differences in styles of authority that are exercised over these landscapes. Differing
social properties have already been described for these landscapes in terms of the
kinds of social organisation and behaviour that takes place within them, and how
’strategy switching’ (after Gould 1991) may occur from an open and socially
permeable space inland in the dry season, to a more private and socially prescribed
space on the coast in the wet season. Pormpuraaw now has a sedentary population
and seasonal ‘switching’ no longer occurs and, it is an immutable rule that a person
may only occupy one homeland. There is a contrast in homeland organisation and
style of authority between the Coastal Ridge and the Inland Country that almost
seems to be a property of the physical landscape as it is mirrored on both Mungkan
side and Thaayore side. Loosely federated groups who take advice from an Elder
occupy the Coastal Ridge homelands; and Inland Country is largely under the control
of single families on Mungkan side and Thaayore side. There is no territorial overlap
between homelands on the Coast and the Inland but there is a flow of authority that appears to run from the coast eastwards inland, as many people from there have affiliations to places in the Inland Country, and land use activities or manoeuvres that might signal the establishment of a homeland are closely monitored from the Coastal Ridges. This is particularly so with places of ritual significance and concerns about encroachment on such places can occasionally overflow into public arguments and disputes between homeland groups in township life. The Coastal Ridges and the Inland Country may also be contrasted in terms of properties of ‘absolute space’ and ‘abstract space’ respectively (after Lefebvre 1991). The coastal landscapes are densely populated with sites of traditional significance and movement around them is much more prescribed by custom and by homeland groups than in inland landscapes. The inland landscapes are areas which are subject to more secular kinds of control with the ‘Katter’ lease covering the greater part of Mungkan side and a single family, who also have comparable pastoral enterprise interests, extending over the greater part of Thaayore side. Other generalisations about land allocation practice on the basis of landscape association may be made. Whenever I have consulted people in Pormpuraaw on land use and environmental management issues (Monaghan and Taylor 2003, Monaghan 2003a) people from Ridge Country or Inland Country homelands only refer me to people from other homelands within these respective landscapes. The owners of Coastal Ridge homelands invariably describe the properties of their country in the vernacular, whereas owners there describe the Inland Country in Aboriginal English. Permission always has to be sought before Ridge Country homelands are visited whereas access to Inland Country sites is generally more informal.

If one rotates the geographical axis, from coast-inland or closed-open, to one that is aligned north- south across the major tribal territories (for instance Mungkan side and Thaayore side) then different forms of territorial control and land allocation have been documented for Wik (Rigsby and Sutton 1982; Sutton 1981; Von Sturmer 1980), Kuuk Thaayore (Taylor 1984), and Yir Yoront people (Sharp 1937, 1958). All of them also resonate with the differences in the style of homeland authority and types of social organisation that have been described for these populations on
Mungkan side and Thaayore side so far in this thesis. Sharp’s account of Yir Yoront practice is summarised in a paper entitled ‘People Without Politics: The Australian Yir Yoront’ (1958). He describes an egocentric system of individual but universally recognised rights that are embedded in totemic and kinship systems where rights ‘were not invested collectively but with particular individuals in the clan membership’. This is a Rousseauan view of Aboriginal life where practice is conservative and unchanging and socially harmonious. He reported that local patrilineal inheritance and clan totem systems obviated the need for leaders and were fluid enough in their structures to allow the distribution of people through the landscape, and for their rights of access and use of differing areas to be mutually recognised.

‘... the Yir Yoront cannot even tolerate mild chiefs or headmen, while a leader with absolute authority over the whole group would be unthinkable’ (Sharp 1958).

The present day dispersal of Yir Yoront affiliations through Thaayore side households mirrors the social relations between these tribal groups that was recorded by Sharp (1937).

Sutton and Rigsby (1987) in a paper entitled ‘People with “Politicks”: Management of Land and Personnel in Australia’s Cape York Peninsula’ provide an alternative ‘Hobbesian’ view of land allocation practice amongst the Wik. The system that they describe is also egocentric, but is assertive and locally competitive, and emphasises the role of expediency and of the ambitions and actions of ‘big men’ in decisions about land ownership or use within any generation.

‘Succession to rights in land, language, totems, names and so on is to a significant extent a matter of the appropriation of property rights of ancestors by living actors, either for themselves or on behalf of their children or other heirs. Such choice and action contradicts the conventional wisdom that Aboriginal society is rigidly governed by “tradition”, the Dreamtime and the Law are unquestioned, succession is more or less automatic and property is largely transmitted patrilineally’ (Sutton and Rigsby 1987, 155).
They reported that rights to land are sometimes chosen by people rather than being subject to an unquestioning acceptance of what has been regulated by patrilineal inheritance. Many homeland choices are determined by demography and the need to maintain homeland groups of a viable size. Strategies included the deliberate fission or merging of groups and the consequent re-allocation of areas of the landscape to newly formed groups, or the movement of individual people between groups following an uncontested declaration of their perceived rights to the country which they wish to occupy (Sutton and Rigsby 1987). Von Sturmer (1980), who worked amongst the Wik Nganychara who live in Mungkan side and whose country includes some of the northern half of the Pormpuraaw DOGIT and part of Aurukun Shire, had a similar view of local organisation, where the leaders of homeland groups are competitive and assertive, and territorial rights may be disputed in any generation. He emphasises the authority of the ‘big man’ or ‘field boss’ in the control of territory and in particular of ritual sites which form the foci of any territory. Family or clan or homeland group loyalties aside, people may walk away from a situation if the ‘politicks’ became too uncongenial. Sutton (1978) also refers to ‘floaters’, people of no fixed abode or who cannot get on with their relations, or have unstable personalities, and who float expediently from group to group. Von Sturmer (1980) contrasts this high degree of indviduation, the capacity of people to act independently of ‘tradition’ and the patrilineal dogma, with what he described as Sharp’s ‘mechanistic social universe’ where social positions and roles were predetermined by the totemic clan system [I think rather unfairly and uncritically].

Taylor in ‘Of Acts and Axes’ (1984) describes a more sociocentric approach by Kuuk Thaayore people to land allocation that emphasises the importance of negotiation between families and kindred groups in making marriage alliances.

‘The people of the Edward River reserve conceptualised marriage, not in terms of exchanges between units constituted as lineal groups, but as alliances formed as a result of the decisions made by particular genealogically defined decision-makers’ (Taylor 1984, 176).
As well as traditional notions of kinship and land inheritance, decisions in Kuuk Thaayore society were also contingent upon current demographics, in particular the distribution of women of breeding age within the clan system; and upon geography, and the preference to concentrate land ownership and use rights in homeland groups within contiguous areas of the landscape, rather than over widely separated ‘estates’. ‘Wronghead’ marriages that did not follow the patrilineal rules but which were made in the interests of territorial contiguity could be corrected for in marriage alliances in later generations (Taylor 1984).

The above accounts of land allocation practice are sometimes reviewed in a dichotomous fashion in the literature, as if they express alternative forms of social organisation, that can be academically contested (for instance Hiatt 1986; Keen 1988; Rowse 1992). They may reflect ideological differences between the authors in the interpretation of what they observed in the field. They might also reflect some temporal differences. Historically, Sharp’s work was done during ‘Mission time’, in the early years of the Mitchell River mission, with a population though who lived in the bush and thus in ‘Wild time’, and Sutton’s and Von Sturmer’s and Taylor’s work was undertaken in ‘Department time’ in the 1970s. Nonetheless, these descriptions of practice are applicable to the same tribal groups in ‘Community time’ in the 1990s and early 2000s in Pormpuraaw. As I have described, there is also a latency in the physical landscape between closed, wet season country on the Coastal Ridges and open, dry season country inland which also provides a contrast between the ‘absolute space’ of traditional land allocation systems and the ‘abstract space’ of practices that may have arisen since the later 1980s as a consequence of changes to the DOGIT tenure and of the Katter leases. These axes are not exclusive of each other. Traditional and modern practice, and absolute and abstract space overlap and intercalate in ways in present day land allocation practice that can only be articulated spatially and whose properties will be more comprehensively explained in the context of the southern Gulf Lowlands and the role of the locally elected Community councils when the geography of land allocation practice in Kowanyama is also reviewed in the following chapter.
4.6 **Social space in Pormpuraaw**

In terms of any relative disjuncture between the social spaces in the township and the landscape then the primary or ownership and secondary or resource use rights that were mapped to the township households in the last chapter describe a potentially permeable space of land use relations in the community that are not evident in actual land use in the landscape. For instance, in the informal rights of access to land use in Thaayore territory that are evident in some Mungkan side households (Figures 3.3 – 3.6). Neither, have these modelled rights and relationships been observed in actual social behaviour in township life. Otherwise, township space and landscape space are virtually homologous in Pormpuraaw. Overall, the topology of social space in the townscape and landscape is connotative of a cognitive space of *'spaced [formal] estates'* and *'overlapping [informal] ranges'* (after Stanner 1965). Von Sturmer (1980) has proposed a model of territorial relationships in western Cape York Peninsula that can be applied to an explanation of this geometry of formal [ownership] and informal [land use] affiliations and the distribution of homelands in the Pormpuraaw landscape. Each of the concentric spaces in Figure 4.7 form an ecological domain or *'lifespace'* (after Stanner 1965) that, as discussed earlier in this chapter, may form part of a logistically organised space for subsistence purposes. Socially, they may also include separate sets of formal and informal affiliations to the clan estates within them. Topologically, Von Sturmer's territorial model includes separate core or heartland areas, *'agu kunygi'*, and adjacent *'agu ngalangu'* areas or *'company country'* which is shared with other groups whose core area is also contiguous. Core country contained occupation, ritual or story sites over which a homeland group had rights of ownership or control, and company country encompassed areas where two or more groups shared the control of sites within it. Sharp (1937) had described the equivalent space of core country as the *'homeland'* that is the area where a person had their spiritual and ritual focus and where they felt most at ease and where they had formal rights of control over occupancy and use. The same person exercised *'informal'* control over their *'range'*; The range or the 'company country' (after Von Sturmer 1980) was where the *'normal routine of social and*
economic life could be fulfilled’ (Sharp 1937). This model of core private homeland areas and open areas of mutual land use accords closely with current notions of public and private space within each of the four major landscapes of land allocation practice in Pormpuraaw that have been identified in this chapter.

The only overlap in current land use interests between homeland groups in Pormpuraaw occurs amongst those groups who occupy the Inland Country and Coastal Ridge areas on Thaayore side and Mungkan side respectively. Certainly, the Edward River continues to be a major social as well as linguistic boundary between north and south in Pormpuraaw. The boundaries between homeland spaces within each of these four landscapes are relatively permeable but less so between landscapes. Traditionally, the defence of homeland space was undertaken in the form of ‘entry’ or ‘greeting’ ceremonies that were performed by non-kindred people as they approached a campfire, and were either introduced into, or ostracised from this space (McConnell 1930; Peterson 1975; Peterson and Long 1986; Thomson 1932). For instance,

’The camp fire is the centre of family life, around which a man and his wife, or wives or children sleep and feed. Convention guards the approach to the camp fire. Certain relatives are welcomed, others are tabooed. The arrangement of the camp fires depends on the relationship of the families to one another - some relatives may camp close others only at a distance. When the tribes meet together, each takes up its position in the camp according to the direction whence the tribe has come’ (McConnell 1939, 104).

Thomson also described greeting behaviour on the lower Edward River.

’Three men, each carrying a bundle of spears, spear-thrower and fire stick, appeared out of the scrub to the north of the camp. Although their approach was at once observed, causing an under-current of excitement in camp, no apparent notice whatever was taken of the men, who approached slowly to within 40 feet of the northern fringe of the camp, where each squatted on the ground a few feet apart, placing his weapons in front of him .... Not a word was spoken, and apparently no notice whatever was taken of their presence for about 10 or 15 minutes. Then a ’big’ man left the camp unarmed and strolled casually towards the man on the left, scraped a shallow depression in the ground close to him with his foot, as a native does before sitting down, and then squatted on the ground about a yard away from
the visitor .... Still not a word was spoken. They did not even look at one another, but kept their eyes downcast. After a few minutes had elapsed the old man of the camp spoke a few words in a low tone - inaudible to me where I stood a few yards away - and the other replied in the same casual way. Still neither looked up - lest he might betray to the watching camp the slightest interest or emotion. At length the old man called the single word Bat (fire) and a boy brought out a small piece of smouldering wood which was handed to the old man from the camp. This fire the old man then placed on the ground between himself and the visitor to whom he had spoken. In former times this no doubt concluded the ceremony, but on this occasion a tobacco pipe was lighted and handed to the visitor. A second man now left the camp, strolled casually over and spoke to the man at the other end of the line, making a present, which was reciprocated. A little later all entered the camp, to be followed, in the evening, by a larger party of which they were the forerunners' (Thomson 1932 cited in Peterson 1975, 61).

Sharp (1937) commented on the unease and disquiet which Yir Yoront people between the Coleman and Mitchell Rivers felt when they were in unfamiliar country and Sutton (1978) has described procedures for the safe passage of Wik 'messengers' who travelled outside of their own country between the Edward and Archer Rivers. This involved the carrying of signs or emblems such as body markings or firesticks to identify themselves, and the requirement that they follow carefully prescribed routes for their journey which could not be deviated from (Sutton 1978). Some locations served as 'handover points' for the transfer of information to other messengers or 'mail boys'. Cashden (1983) refers to such rites of entry as forms of 'social boundary defense'.

,'An alternative strategy for defending the land is to make acceptance into the local land using group a preliminary requirement for using the resources in its territory, that is, by defending the boundaries of the social group rather than the perimeter of the territory itself' (Peterson 1976).

Social boundary defence of the kind described above, through the kinship and clan affiliation mechanisms described in Chapter 3 takes place in all aspects of daily life in Pormpuraaw and is evident in the composition and spacing of homeland groups in the townscape and in the control of homeland space in the landscape. Boundary defence has started to take a more physical expression in the landscape in recent years in the form of fencing. This expression is a particular property of the Coastal
Ridge landscape, ‘the private space’ of traditional land allocation practice as described in ethnographies of the pre-Mission years. The domestic spaces of some homeland sites have fences and locked gates around them to keep people out, with only core homeland group members who live at the site having a key to the gate. An outer perimeter fence describes the extent of homeland country and it is there to contain homeland cattle and to define the area where ‘company’ members who have not been elected as core residents but who have rights of access to that domain may camp or hunt and fish. Irrespective of any contingencies due to the geography of seasonally accessible space or the tenurial history of the community and the present day location of the township in the landscape, boundary defence, whether expressed in fencing or in social behaviour, by an individual or by a homeland group, is an abiding feature of land allocation practice whose social and spatial properties transcend both townscape and landscape in Pormpuraaw.