

## CHAPTER SIX – BUYU

*Most Australian country dwellers know from the outside the places where the Dark People live in separate communities. – C. D. Rowley, Outcasts in White Society*

In late 2002, Ngadjon-Jii people built a *midja* in the Malanda Conservation Park (Figure 24). Constructed of various species of palm fronds, the pliable trunks of several rainforest saplings, ginger leaves and bladey grass collected from Wooroonooran National Park, the erection of the *midja* was ostensibly part of a larger research project investigating the architectural form of traditional rainforest dwellings. It was soon apparent, however, that the building of the *midja* was more than just a demonstration for scientific purposes. As Ngadjon-Jii people wove the palm fronds (*djungganyu* and *bibiya*) into the shell-like infrastructure of bound (*barrga*) and staked saplings (*djungganyu*), they talked about the many years spent living in *midja* in the *buyu* (rainforest) on the edge of the Malanda township.



**Figure 24:** Ngadjon-Jii people and the *Midja* they built in the Malanda Conservation Park, 2002 (Photo: Roger Wilkinson).

Most of these rainforest ‘camps’ are located in what is now the Malanda Falls National Park (an area of 15.2 hectares) or in the Malanda Conservation Park (5.62 hectares), situated

immediately across the road from the national park<sup>20</sup>. Ngadjon-Jii people also lived in *midja*-based camps in the only remaining pocket of privately-owned rainforest in Malanda called 'The Jungle'. Owned by a member of the English family, 'The Jungle' adjoins the south-eastern boundary of the Malanda Falls National Park.

The European tenure history of these pockets of rainforest is interesting. When the Parish of Malanda was originally surveyed in 1906, the area around the waterfalls on the North Johnstone River, and a stretch of the river itself, was declared a reserve to protect the source of the future town's water supply. However, this small reserve was surrounded by a number of selections, all of which bordered the river. As Peter English points out, some of the original reserve area was 'given' to Patrick English as compensation for the portions of his selection that were resumed by the authorities for the township of Malanda (English 1964: 33). In 1973, the Eacham Shire Council purchased a further eight acres for inclusion in the Malanda Falls Reserve. Most of the original reserve area today forms the Malanda Falls National Park. Some of the original reserve area also forms part of the Malanda Conservation Park. Most of the area enclosed by the conservation park, however, was originally part of the selection allotted to R. Cook in 1907. Little, if anything, is known about what became of R. Cook. In 1956, the council purchased seventeen acres of the adjoining block from the estate of James English in order to establish the Malanda Caravan Park, which borders the conservation park (Eacham Historical Society 1995: 63). 'The Jungle', sometimes also known as the 'English Jungle', is part of the original block (portion 60) allocated to James English and remains part of the English family estate called 'Oakhill'. In 1977, the Eacham Shire Council, with a \$30,000 offer of assistance from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), attempted to purchase 'The Jungle' from the English family. However, the asking price of \$150,000 was well beyond the council's financial means and the issue was shelved (ibid: 65).

Somehow, in the hundred years since they were first enclosed by Europeans, initially on paper and then later with barbed wire, these pockets of rainforest survived the settler's axes and local council administration. However, it wasn't until the 1990s that these two areas were declared protected areas<sup>21</sup>. The somewhat retarded gazettal of these two areas as protected areas reflects the anti-conservation attitude of the Eacham Shire Council in the relatively recent past. As council minutes reveal, in 1987 the council lodged objections "against World Heritage listing of North Queensland Rainforests" (Eacham Historical Society 1995: 65), suggesting that 'farm forestry' was a more sustainable response to rainforest conservation. Prior to this, in 1980, concerned about the introduction of 'exotic diseases', the council registered its opposition to the establishment of a wilderness area in Cape York Peninsula (loc. cit.). In many ways, the council's position regarding the Aboriginal residents of the shire

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<sup>20</sup> While the Malanda-Atherton Road appears to separate what appears to be the Malanda Conservation Park from the area identified in on-site signage as the Malanda Falls National Park, the matter of boundaries is not so simple. The area administered by QPWS includes land on both sides of the road. A thirteen and half hectare area of the national park is located on the southeastern side of the road, while a 1.7 hectare area on the other side of the road, around the falls and associated swimming pool is also designated national park land. The boundary between the conservation park, administered by the Eacham Shire Council, and the area that falls within the jurisdiction of QPWS is not physically marked on the ground, however. The issue of names is equally confusing. On site, the QPWS-administered area is identified as the Malanda Falls National Park. On paper, QPWS refers to this same area as the Malanda Conservation Park. For the purposes of this chapter, I shall refer to the rainforested area north of the Malanda-Atherton Road as the Malanda Conservation Park, while the section of rainforest on the southeastern side of the road is identified as the Malanda Falls National Park.

<sup>21</sup> Some of the area that today forms the Malanda Conservation Park and the Malanda Falls National Park was declared a reserve for the purposes of camping and water in 1939. Later, in 1975, it was declared a reserve for environmental purposes. It was only in 1994 that the area was declared a conservation park and national park.

is the antithesis of its opposition to environmental protection measures in the 1980s. As council minutes indicate, an 'Aboriginal settlement' still existed in Malanda as late as 1990 and the "poor condition of [the] dwellings" in this fringe camp on Reservoir Road is the subject of council attention and intervention (ibid: 66).

There is something ironic about the fact that the most recent Ngadjon-Jii experience of living in a rainforest environment occurred within the physical and administrative confines of the Malanda township. While living so close to the tended gardens and ordered houses of European settlement, Ngadjon-Jii people seemed as invisible to settler society as the elusive tree-climbing kangaroos, which cling on to life in one of the last remaining patches of eponymously-named 'mabi forest' in the region.

## BUYU

In the past one hundred years, the natural environment of this part of North Queensland has undergone something of a rhetorical transformation; from vilified 'scrub' to idolised 'rainforest'. As Terry Birtles points out, while the botanical term 'tropical rainforest' was coined in 1903, it was not widely applied to the vegetation of this region until the late 1970s (Birtles 1982: 32). Prior to this, Europeans referred to these forests as 'scrub', 'bush', 'jungle' and 'myall woods'<sup>22</sup> (loc cit.). As the use of the term 'myall' indicates, some of these appellations were also applied in a derogatory fashion to denote the Aboriginal occupiers of these forested areas. A range of adjectives were commonly appended to these noun forms – 'impenetrable', 'inhospitable', 'dank' and 'dark'. As Birtles points out, these lexical combinations evoked images of inferior, tangled forests harbouring a plethora of unseen dangers – sicknesses such as 'jungle fever' and 'tropical ague' (Birtles 1995: 3-4) and the lurking threat of murderous savages. Construed in this way, the 'scrub' not only "constituted an obstacle to agricultural settlement ... a nuisance to be removed to expose the soil for cultivation" (ibid: 3), but also an impediment to social progress and civility. Terms like 'scrub' and 'jungle' denote more than just a geographical object. As the use of the word 'jungle' illustrates, they also evoke cultural memories from other colonial settings<sup>23</sup>. Speaking of the tropical forests of Colombia, Taussig suggests that terms such as 'jungle' stand as "colonially intensified metaphor[s]" (Taussig 1987: 75), whereby the "brutal destructiveness imputed to the natural world serves to embody even more destructive relations in human society" (loc. cit.). For all these cultural reasons, it seems only natural that Ngadjon-Jii people would inhabit the last remaining stands of rainforest on the periphery of white settlement.

What was 'scrub' in the past is today promoted and more commonly spoken of as 'rainforest'. Since the mid-1970s, these rainforests have been scientifically mapped and classified as a series of vegetation types and complexes (see Tracey and Webb 1975; Tracey 1982). The remnant rainforests that form the Malanda Falls National Park and the Malanda Conservation Park are regarded as an 'overlap area', exhibiting features of 'Type 1b' forests and 'Type 5b' (Tracey 1982: 28). Type 5b forests, often referred to as 'mabi rainforests' after the Ngadjon-Jii term for the Lumholtz tree-climbing kangaroo, are "now practically all cleared" (Tracey 1982: 2). The Malanda forest "indicates greater moisture availability" (loc. cit.), where "tree stratification is more diffuse ... and fern epiphytes are more common on tree trunks" (ibid: 28-29).

As McDonald and Lane identify in a set of impressive statistics, the rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area contain the "highest concentration" of primitive flowering plants

<sup>22</sup> Birtles states that the term 'myall' was originally applied to a "species of wattle (*Acacia pendula*), found widely in country not settled by Europeans" (Birtles 1995: 4).

<sup>23</sup> As Birtles points out, the term 'scrub' is borrowed from the old Danish word (Birtles 1995: 3), while 'bush' had Dutch origins. 'Jungle', on the other hand, derives from the Hindustani term, *jangal* (ibid: 3).

found anywhere in the world (McDonald and Lane 2000: 7). They also contain “30% of all marsupials on the continent, 60% of the bat species, 30% of all frog species, 23% of the reptiles, 62% of the butterflies and 18% of the birds” (ibid: 7). The scientific view of this area as a series of unique natural ecosystems comprised of plants and animals of universal significance, contrasts with Ngadjon-Jii ideas about *buyu*.

As previously indicated, *buyu* denotes a sentient and sentimental spatial experience. *Buyu* is alive, but not just with a range of biological objects, such as the plants and animals referred to by McDonald and Lane (McDonald and Lane 2000). The presence and, at times, unpredictable behaviour of a variety of powerful totemic and ancestral beings, such as *Yamani*, *gubi* rocks and eels, *Yawi*, *Guyngnun*, and the spirits of the ‘old people’, animates *buyu* as well. These non-human or post-human forces are part of a terrain that is simultaneously ecological, social and cosmological in nature.

Ngadjon-Jii actions don’t just take place against the rainforested backdrop of this Indigenous ‘Dreamtime’. Rather, Ngadjon-Jii people engage with and enact this already cultured historical space in their everyday landed practices. Highlighting the quotidian experience of the ‘Dreamtime’, Elizabeth Povinelli talks about how “on fishing trips Dreamings surge from beneath motor-powered dinghies” (Povinelli 1993: 169).

Landscapes, as Barbara Bender observes, “are created by people – through their experience and engagement with the world around them” (Bender 1993: 1). As Bender’s comments suggest, *buyu* also denotes a very humanised space, where people and place are mutually evocative. Through the small rituals of everyday social life, Ngadjon-Jii people produce the experience of *buyu* as a situated structure of sentiments and values. These feelings and experiences, which are an integral aspect of the meaning of locality, are inscribed on Ngadjon-Jii people through such practices as the bestowal of individual totems and personal names. In turn, these practices locate people in “socially and spatially defined communities” (Appadurai 1996: 179). As this suggests, local knowledge is “about producing reliably local subjects as well as about producing reliably local neighbourhoods within which such subjects can be recognised and organised” (ibid: 181). Following Appadurai’s comments on the ‘production of locality’, *buyu* can be regarded as denoting an actual spatial referent, ‘rainforest’, as well as the relational and contextual qualities of social life, which are realised in this physical setting. Seen in this light, Ngadjon-Jii people’s experience of living in *buyu* on the outskirts of Malanda amounts to more than just survival on the fringes of a white neighbourhood. Their stories also point to the stresses and challenges of producing locality and local subjects in colonised and radically altered contexts.

## LIVING ON THE EDGE

Throughout Australia, Aboriginal fringe camps were, and continue to be, an element of rural and city landscapes that are largely avoided or denied by Europeans. At one level, these encampments are the tangible products of local by-laws and state legislation that historically banned Aboriginal people from town areas. At another level, these segregated spaces are also created by, and through, the racialised practices of everyday life in country towns and cities throughout Australia. As Gillian Cowlishaw remarks, “the racial division is deeply embedded in the history of many Australian country towns and in the understanding of the residents” (Cowlishaw 1997: 179).

As Cowlishaw’s comments indicate, these racialised identities and histories are often expressed in spatial terms. For example, Benedict Anderson’s work reveals how in the Netherlands East Indies ethno-typologies were often spatialised, so that people and place became immutably fixed in the emerging cartography of colonial knowledge of the other. This ‘grammar’ of ethnic-racial typologies, most apparent in the census, reached its denouement

in the convergence of the census with the Mercatorian map. As Anderson remarks, “by a sort of demographic triangulation, the census filled in politically the formal topography of the map” (Anderson 1991: 174).

In the entangled “ethnoscape” (Appadurai 1990: 7) of difference enacted both in space and as space, it is easy to see how a person’s ethnic affiliation or cultural identity is readily understood in terms of an association with place, i.e. ‘Chinatown’. In the Australian context, ‘fringe camps’ are not only synonymous with Aboriginal people, but the expression itself serves as a loaded spatial marker of a distinctively racist history. The supposedly ‘run-down’ and ‘dirty’ condition of these encampments not only forms the basis for European attempts to obliterate these ‘blots’ on the landscape, but it also serves to symbolise the ragged and shabby nature of the European-Aboriginal interactions. This is a point made by Neil Jarman (1993) in his discussion of the militarised landscape of Belfast. As Jarman remarks:

*[t]he violence that marked the beginning of the Troubles was expended on property as much as on people. Boundaries between differing faiths were reinforced by the firing of homes ... [d]ereliction became the hallmark of the interfaces (Jarman 1993: 111).*

As the history of Northern Ireland, the Middle East and elsewhere graphically demonstrates, the politics of identity and power articulates itself through space and is, primarily, about space.

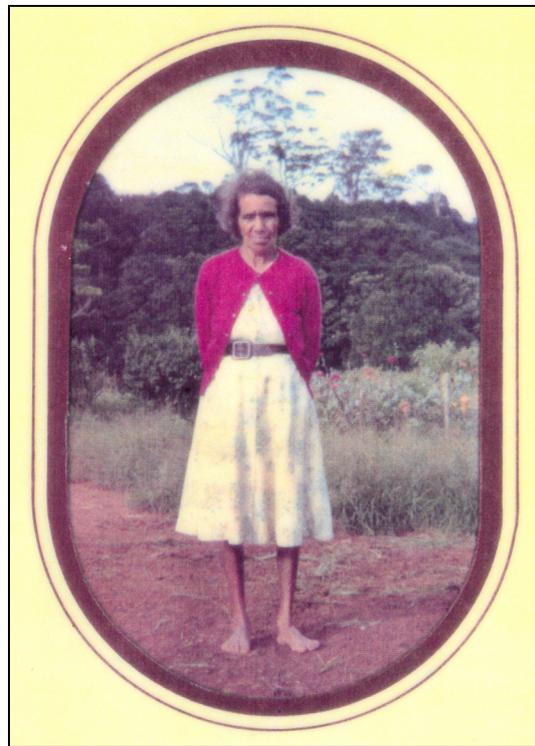
As these comments suggest, space is part of “an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification” (Massey 1994: 3). This is brutally evident in the bucolic context of the Atherton Tableland, as it is in places that more readily spring to mind, such as Northern Ireland or the Middle East. To paraphrase Edward Said (1993: 7), Ngadjon-Jii town camps can be regarded as ‘geographies which struggle’, disturbing the notion of space as somehow inherently fixed or settled.

These exclusionary spaces or segregated places cannot just be regarded as transitory, ‘non-places’ (cf Auge 1995) or as aesthetic blights on the landscape, readily shunned or removed, as rural communities and the Australian nation ‘comes of age’. Rather, these ‘troubled’ spaces occupy an important place in the social consciousness of a group or a people. As the anthropologist Jeff Collmann remarks, “Aborigines who have adopted new ways of life in the face of new circumstances cannot be simply dismissed as deviant, detribalised, or somehow less than full members of the community” (Collman 1988: 4). Writing of the fringe camps around Alice Springs, Collmann argues against the commonly held view of these encampments as the “symptom of individual affliction and group decay” (Collman 1988: 3). Rather, he argues that the establishment of fringe camps constitutes an important political act, which allows Aboriginal people to assert more control over the “impingement of white power” in their everyday life (loc. cit.). As Collmann concludes, Aboriginal fringe camps are, paradoxically, a response to those European policies and programs designed to prevent their very development. As these comments suggest, the work of producing locality and neighbourhoods is often “at odds with the projects of the nation-state” (Appadurai 1996: 191). Indeed, as the following section illustrates, *midja*, as social formations located in *buyu*, represent Aboriginal spaces where the ‘techniques of nationhood’ are either weak or contested (ibid: 190). At the same time, as Arjun Appadurai points out, the “task of producing locality, (as a structure of feeling, a property of social life, and an ideology of situated community) is increasingly a struggle” (ibid: 189). The production of locality is thus always a risky and fragile achievement.

## MIDJA IN THE MIDST

Ngadjon-Jii elder, Ernie Raymont, and I are walking along a cattle pad in a cleared paddock on the edge of Malanda. We are following the western fence line of the Malanda Falls National Park, towards the banks of the North Johnstone River. Uncle Ernie knows this area well from the time when he and members of his immediate family lived along the edge of the river in the 1950s and 1960s:

*When we came in from the Johnston's Farm [in the 1950s] there were camps up there in 'The Jungle' and below the waterfall [the Malanda Falls] at 'Bottom Camp'. Nobody [Aboriginal people that is] lived in town when we lived here on the North Johnstone River. Some people lived at the barracks at the Malanda Hotel. They worked for the English family. Grandad Ben English lived in a camp over there in what is now the industrial centre on the way out of Malanda. He was still there when I went out to work, he was there until he died, that would have been mid 1960s.*



**Figure 25:** Molly Raymond standing in front of J. K.'s Farm, ca. 1960s (Photo courtesy of Yvonne Canendo).

Prior to living at the camp on the banks of the North Johnstone River, Ernie Raymont and a number of other Ngadjon-Jii people lived at 'Bottom Camp'. Sometimes known as the 'Falls Camp', this camp was located in the rainforest that today forms the Malanda Conservation Park. Auntie Jessie Calico recalls life at 'Bottom Camp' in the 1950s:

*After we shifted from the Malanda Falls we went to the bottom of the falls, in the scrub again. They used to show us how to get our yellow walnut, gungi, and show us how to collect it, and how to sit down and grind it, throw it on the coals and, take it out and let it cool, us kids used to smash all the shells, then we used to sit down and grind all that thing into flour. We toast it up and then*

*throw it back into the dilly bag, dgundgu, you call it puntoo (Dugulbarra) I think, then we would have to take it down into the river and just where there is a stream they used to show us how to divert the water ... and then down here at the bottom where there is say a little fall there, put the dilly bag there, hang it, of course, you have got dingii leaf on the bottom, then they get that dingii leaf and make it like a funnel, then the water flows into that, that's to cure that thing... we used to eat mainly at night time, there was always plenty of other stuff in the scrub to eat during the day ... like that little red thing we call guiyu, we might get quandong or white apple ... lawyer cane, berries and all that stuff. At night we had a proper feed. ... Lawyer cane, if you stick that in the fire green it will frighten the Quinkan away, that noise it makes ... they taught us how to go down in the water and catch fish and djunki and mowut ... those little djumbun, little beetles (wood larvae), they used to just eat the wood, to us they were clean so we used to eat it, we were still in the scrub then ... from there we came out of the scrub and onto the cleared paddock [J. K.'s Farm]. (cited in Johnston 1994: 20).*

Some fifty years later, as we walk through the cleared paddocks abutting the national park, Ernie Raymont explains where we're going:

*We're heading towards the junction of Williams Creek and the North Johnstone River. There was a car track between the rainforest and fence line. We lived in a patch of rainforest where the William Creek comes into the North Johnstone River. At the junction there was a little island, they got some logs from the rainforest and made a sort of a bridge. When we went to town we used to walk along the edge of the river and then gradually walk up the top. We had to cross another farmer's block to get into town. This track here was constantly used by our people.*

As Ernie's comments indicate, Ngadjon-Jii people moved along different tracks and roads than those used by Europeans. Movement from one place to another wasn't simply a matter of Euclidean geometry, of taking the shortest linear route, as most Europeans want to do. Ernie's description of how he and other Ngadjon-Jii people walked into town from the fringe camp on the North Johnstone River is far from a direct route. In some ways, this meandering track along the river and through the remaining patches of rainforest bordering the watercourse reflects traditional ways of walking in step with the lie of the land – aligning themselves to the “inclines, folds and pockets” (Carter 1996: 2) of this ground. This ‘wandering state’, as Paul Carter calls Aboriginal historical space and its enactment, are as much journeys about country as they are travels produced by the very nature of the country itself.

However, as hinted at in Uncle Ernie's comments, these journeys from camp to town, and from camp to camp, are movements through space that is deeply racialised. Ernie Raymont and other Ngadjon-Jii people constantly surveilled their steps and actions to avoid surveillance from others, notably white authorities. Many of the Ngadjon-Jii people who walked along the river “up into town”, worked for the English family at the Malanda Hotel. Ernie Raymont recalls that he worked “at the pub, washing bottles, cleaning up”. Some older Ngadjon-Jii people, like the two widows Jenny Spear (*Gurguny*) and Fanny Wright (*Banajawa*), who worked in the laundry at the Malanda Hotel, “camped at the back of the pub”. Keith Hanrahan, son of Mary English and Jack Hanrahan, who owned and operated the Malanda Hotel from 1922 to 1976, recalls these two Aboriginal workers:

*Jennie Denyer and Fanny Wright, two aboriginal women took charge of the laundry during the fifties ... These aboriginals were a type of pygmy, were very black and of short stature (Hanrahan 1991: 11).*

The camp on the banks of the North Johnstone River was located on ground Ngadjon-Jii people knew as “J. K.’s Farm” (Figure 25). ‘J. K.’ refers to James English’s son, James Kevin English. As previously mentioned, the English family is widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent family in the settlement and development of the town of Malanda. In 1907, the English family ‘took up’ many of the selections in and around the township. Ernie Raymont describes the nature of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the English family:

*Englishs owned all the land around town. Charlie English owned Bottom Camp [Ngadjon-Jii camp below the Malanda Falls]. Top Camp in ‘The Jungle’ was also owned by the English family. Englishs were the family that cleared Malanda. The English family looked after us to stop government taking us to Palm Island. We didn’t have to pay them to camp on that land. Aboriginal people worked for the Englishs. Molly Raymond worked for them as a domestic. Elsie Battle also worked for them. Jim Brown used to work at the pub now and then.*

Ernie Raymont’s comments point to some of the contradictions inherent in the policies of separation, such as the prohibited area ordinances that prevailed throughout much of rural Australia in the twentieth century. While Europeans felt that towns represented an array of ‘demoralising influences’ in the form of alcohol, opium, “prostitution, idleness and disorder” (Merlan 1998: 5), from which Aborigines should be protected, they also relied upon the cheap labour provided by Aboriginal people. Local regulations regarding the movement of Aboriginal people dealt with the attraction-repulsion elements of this situation by stipulating that only Aboriginal people gainfully employed by Europeans were permitted in town areas during daylight hours. In Malanda, the farcical contradictions embedded in the practices of protectionism were played out on a daily basis, as Ngadjon-Jii people walked into town each morning to work at the ‘English’s Pub’. The Aboriginal encampments in the rainforested edges of town thus served white labour needs as well as allowing Ngadjon-Jii people to access traditional food resources, and thus augment the rations paid as wages when they went “up town”.

While Ngadjon-Jii people may have worked at the English’s Hotel, and camped on J. K.’s Farm, they made this cleared space, brushed with European history, a distinctively Indigenous one:

*Some Ngadjon-Jii people had their camp, inside the [national] park, in the late 1950s and 1960s. They had a grass hut made out of bladey grass. There was Tommy Mitchell, his wife, Alice [Emma Johnston’s sister], and their kids, Ena and Stanley, that’s all that was staying in that place. It was all made out of natural rainforest material. They had a stove and also collected wood from the park. In the late 1960s they moved into Atherton. Nobody ever came and told them they couldn’t stop there. We just thought must be all right. No one came around.*

*All the same mob lived here. Grandad Jimmy Brown and Grandad Tommy Land, my grandmother’s brother [Molly Raymond’s brother]. My dad, he was staying here in a humpy, then all us kids. Auntie Jinny Brown, she stayed with us too. After she lost her husband, she still worked around town. Then Eddie Mitchell [Ernie’s matrilineal parallel cousin] and his wife came to stay with us. Eddie was always with us. We were never short of relatives coming to visit us or stay with us.*

*That scrub on the other side of the river, and this one here on the North Johnstone side was always there. We’d go down the bank to the river to get our water. The camp on the English’s Farm had no electricity, no piped water,*

*no fridges, we used to use kerosene lamps. To wash clothes had a boiler on the banks of the river. We had clothes baskets made of lawyer cane vine.*

*This is where the men folk had their house. That was always Murri Law. All the men folk one side and the women and children on the other side. Older men stayed separate from their wives.*

*We all stayed in the same place, we always made room. We had lino [linoleum] on the dirt floor and people camped there. Our house had an iron roof and the walls were iron. We put down the lino that people threw out of their house. They used to come down and leave it for us across the river there. We used to walk across the river to get it. – Uncle Ernie Raymont*

While officially Malanda didn't have an 'Aboriginal Reserve' until the mid 1960s, the camps that Ngadjon-Jii people created and occupied on the outskirts of town were regarded by whites as such, and certainly they conformed to the conditions that characterised Aboriginal Reserves in other parts of the continent. The lack of electricity, water and sewerage services at the Ngadjon-Jii camp is indicative of the conditions prevailing in Aboriginal fringe camps throughout Australia at this time (and even later). As Peggy Brock observes, "white families ... pointed to these conditions as an excuse for their racially motivated demands that Aborigines be moved out of their towns" (Brock 1993: 103). Ernie Raymont's description of the physical and social parameters of camp life in Malanda evoke images more often associated with the 'deep south' of America, rather than the far north of Australia. While Ernie's family were officially exempt from the 'Act' at the time they lived on the banks of the North Johnstone River, this seemed to matter little to the white pioneers that comprised the settler society of Malanda:

*We were exempt then. We didn't live in town. We lived on the edge. I don't think Malanda people knew that such an act existed. We were an exempted family. We got exempted in 1943. But people didn't know that we could live with whites. Exempted families couldn't live on the Reserve.*

*The Settlement is over there. That's where the Reserve is. When we lived here, the reserve just started. In the 1960s. They had buildings then but they couldn't get anyone to live there. Later they got some old people from the Malanda Hotel to live there. Jinny Spear was put in a reserve house by herself. – Uncle Ernie Raymont*

'The Settlement', as the Aboriginal Reserve in Malanda is more commonly known, was established on the southern outskirts of the town in 1964 (Figure 26). Ngadjon-Jii people remember that 'The Settlement' land was originally part of a local dairy farm and was purchased by the National Party government of the day to give Aboriginal people "a chance". As Ernie Raymont recalls:

*They were closing down all the missions around that time and so they set up the Reserve for those people. People came from Yarrabah, Woorabinda and Mona Mona. They were all mixed up. Later when those people moved back to their traditional country, some Ngadjon-Jii people went and lived on 'The Settlement'.*

Like other states in Australia, in the early 1960s the Queensland Government was encouraging Aboriginal people to move away from missions by providing housing, education and other services, which would enable Aboriginal people to better integrate into non-Aboriginal society (see Brock 1993: 18). In the case of 'The Settlement' in Malanda, the

Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs erected a number of dwellings on the block and were basically responsible for its administration. Similar encampments were established by the Department in the Tableland towns of Ravenshoe and Mt Garnet.



**Figure 26:** The Aboriginal Settlement in Malanda, ca. mid 1990s (Photo: Yvonne Canendo).

Uncle Ernie's cousin went to live on 'The Settlement' in the mid-1990s after the reserve had been 'handed back' to Aboriginal people as inalienable freehold land, controlled by an Aboriginal land trust. In the 1990s, the transfer of former Aboriginal reserves to Indigenous land trusts happened in many of the rural townships throughout North Queensland. The original buildings on the Malanda Aboriginal Reserve were eventually condemned by the Eacham Shire Council some years after the transfer and were subsequently demolished. Today, 'The Settlement', a one-hectare strip of cleared land adjoining the Malanda Falls National Park and 'English's Jungle', stands as an overgrown reminder of the nature of Aboriginal-European relations on the Atherton Tableland, and elsewhere in Australia.

## LIVING IN CHANGE

Ernie Raymont's family eventually left the camp on J. K.'s Farm and went "out working" on other European-owned properties in the district. However, they left the camp more for cultural reasons than economic ones:

*My oldest brother and Grandad Jim Brown died. So people moved away from the scrub [the camp on J. K.'s Farm].*

The untimely deaths of a number of Ngadjon-Jii people is also given as the reason why Ngadjon-Jii people moved from their previous camps around the Malanda Falls and at 'The

Jungle'. As we stand in the Malanda Conservation Park, Ernie Raymont points to a Ngadjon-Jii burial ground in the midst of the rainforest:

*Over in that area there, that's where all the people are buried. Before Bottom Camp, people had their camps around here. Before us mob came here to live, this mob was camping here before World War II. Some of the old people died here and that's where they buried them. We had our camps back here when I was a kid. Only one old person died there. Grandad Mick Calico died here. Police came and took his body away.*

Today, some of the area that formed part of the old people's camp lies under the St Vincent's Aged Care facility, which adjoins the conservation park.

While death instigates major shifts in the social landscape for Ngadjon-Jii people, the actions of Europeans are linked to, and are often invoked, as the basis for other changes in this landscape. Pointing to the trees on the other side of the barbed wire fence, in what is now the national park, Uncle Ernie talks about some of the environmental changes that have taken place on the outskirts of town in the past fifty years:

*This was all cleared. It was cleared years ago. Nothing growing here. The trees were planted by the Johnstone River Tree-planting Group. That was in the 1970s and 1980s when conservation became a big issue on the Tableland. Their house was in here, the Mitchell's house, on the other side of the fence. In the park now. It was all clear then. The only patch of rainforest that was here then was down here along the river [the North Johnstone River]. There was a patch of rainforest left here. They chopped down the original rainforest, the farmers, that rainforest was our windbreak. It protected us from the storms.*

Ngadjon-Jii people, like Ernie, can also recall the time when a sawmill operated in what is now the national park, and the main road to Atherton cut through the area today enclosed by the conservation park. As Tranter records, the sawmill was established and operated by John Prince from 1910 to around 1920. John Prince's selection "adjoined the Malanda Falls Reserve", and his claim to fame is that he "felled the first thirty acres of scrub ... in the Malanda area" (Eacham Historical Society 1995: 20)<sup>24</sup>. As we walk through the Malanda Falls National Park, some eighty years after the cessation of the sawmill's operation, Ngadjon-Jii people point to where the "whites chopped trees. They cut timber in the park and milled the logs on site. But didn't touch trees along the river".

Widespread clearing of the rainforest is one of the more visually obvious changes that have taken place in the Malanda region over the past one hundred years. However, as the recollections of Ngadjon-Jii people attest, there are other transformations that have occurred, largely on the periphery of most people's vision:

*Dangadja [Atherton Oak], blue fruit, it's eatable [sic] by our people. Tastes like almonds. It's one of the fruits in the rainforest that's got no toxin in it. When they drop to the floor of the rainforest, then it's ripe. This change of climate has really confused the trees. I've seen them over at Lake Eacham last month [October], they were dropping there. I thought it seemed strange.*

*When I was a kid, the lemon aspen would only flower and fruit about this time of the year. Around Christmas time. But now the climate has changed they are*

<sup>24</sup> English records that the sawmill operated by John Prince was "located a couple of hundred yards beyond the Malanda Falls" (English 1964: 36).

*now flowering and fruiting in the middle of the year. It's got warmer. This change of climate has really confused the trees. It also effects mungara, brush turkeys.*

*You have a couple of thunderstorms at this time of the year and that ignites something in the turkey. That's when the male and female come together and the male starts gathering the leaves. When he builds the nest so high that's when he opens it up and the female lays her eggs. What happens then, after she finishes laying the eggs, in the meantime it's thundering and lightening, we getting a lot of rain, thunderstorm rain. The temperature in the nest it's steaming. But it's not happening like that now. What is happening today, we don't get any more thunderstorms. We do get rain but it's coming from the coast. It's just drizzle and it's very hot. We don't get that steamy weather like we should and also that thunderstorm rain. The temperature in the nest has been reduced. And so that changes the sex of the turkeys, get more males and less females these days. I only noticed this about five years ago when I first started working here. There used to be a lot of turkeys here, but nowadays there are not so many. What is going to happen is that eventually there'll be no turkeys.*

*In the early days we had native quolls in these rainforests<sup>25</sup>. What happened here is that the quolls got used to people. They started going onto the dairy farmer's properties and eating all the chickens. What happened, the farmers ended up shooting them and laying baits. That's why we used to have a large population of scrub turkeys here because we didn't have that natural process. When I was a kid there was that natural process going on. The quolls used to kill the turkeys. That natural process has been upset. I think it comes from a lot more use of the land. Very few Europeans went in the rainforest, only Aboriginal people used rainforest. There is still a large population of quolls over at Bartle Frere, closer to the bigger national parks. – Uncle Ernie Raymont*

Speaking of another endangered rainforest species, Ernie Raymont explains some recent movements of the Lumholtz's tree-climbing kangaroo:

*Mabi is my totem. I'm not allowed to eat the tree-climbing kangaroo. It's my totem. He's my countryman. I'm not allowed to eat my countryman. They've started to move out too, with the warming in the climate. They've gone over to the mountain ranges over there, near the Crater [Mt Hypipamee]. It's a lot higher and a lot cooler for them there too. So they are getting away from the lowlands to the highlands where it's a lot cooler. Most of the dairy farms up here on the Tableland still got patches of rainforest on their property. So they go from one rainforest to the other. People don't know this is going on.*

Ernie Raymont's identification of environmental change as the intersection of local factors with global processes points to changes in relationships and the occurrence of certain events only apparent from a lifetime of living in rainforest country. In this sense, Ernie Raymont's knowledge of the rainforest gives form to Ngadjon-Jii cultural memories about the production of the landscapes we see today. As Ernie's comments suggest, these landscapes are the product of social and natural relationships, interacting in unpredictable ways, at a number of different levels. This talk of change signals a growing sense among Ngadjon-Jii people of a

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<sup>25</sup> In his account of the 'early days' of Malanda, English notes that "in those times there were wild bush animals called tiger cats and they appeared to take a great liking for the taste of poultry" (English 1964: 30).

gulf between their recalled past and their experienced present. To ameliorate this sense of distance and difference, Ngadjon-Jii people employ their cultural knowledge about living in *buyu* as a “central resource[s] for how to live in change” (Merlan 1997: 237).

The changes that Ernie and other Ngadjon-Jii people speak of in terms of ‘loss’ and ‘confusion’ are heralded by some European pioneers in the area as significant milestones on the road to progress and prosperity. Speaking of Jack Hanrahan, long-time owner and operator of the Malanda Hotel, Peter English writes:

*One who first saw the Tableland as virgin scrub, saw huge changes in roads, buildings, factories, education, transport ... (English 1964: 52).*

While Ernie and other Ngadjon-Jii people talk about the loss of terrestrial species and habitat, they also speak of some of the changes in the aquatic environment or *bana*:

*We'd go fishing in the river at the English's Farm. Caught eel, jewfish. There was no perch or black bream in those days. In the late 1940s the Lions Club, or could have been Rotary, brought black bream fingerlings and put them into 'The Falls'. There used to be native fish in the river before then. Piga is name of native fish used to see in the river. You can still see them today but not as many. Eel and jewfish not as thick as they used to be now. Lots more in the early days. The eels come down in the wet season. The swimming hole is a good fishing spot but we're not supposed to fish at 'The Falls' now.*

The introduction of tilapia species into the waters of Lake Eacham and the subsequent extinction of the native rainbow fish constitutes one of the Tableland's more infamous cases of environmental insensitivity in an aquatic context. While these comments highlight the dangers of introducing exotic species into a native landscape, they also point to the impact of other forms of European legislation upon Indigenous people.

## EDGE EFFECTS

The declaration of the remaining rainforests on the outskirts of Malanda as protected areas in the 1990s effectively, at the stroke of a pen, transformed traditional cultural practices into a series of illegal activities. As Gillian Cowlshaw observes, the use of legislation and “local ordinances provides the basis for the criminalisation of Aboriginal activities and mechanisms for control” (Cowlshaw 1997: 177).

This is not the first time that a change in European tenure has transformed Ngadjon-Jii people into potential criminals. As they travel throughout their traditional lands they regularly encounter ‘Keep Out’ and ‘Trespassers will be Prosecuted’ signs, or find that the tracks they customarily used are now closed-off by electric fences and locked gates. Their responses to these physical obstacles and declared exclusionary spaces are always contextual and highly relational. In an ironic reversal of Fred Myers’ identification of the content of Aboriginal ownership as “the right to be asked” (Myers 1986: 99), Ngadjon-Jii people sometimes feel that they need to “ask permission” from European landowners. At other times, it is clear that there is a form of understanding between a long-time property-owner and Ngadjon-Jii people, which only requires that gates are closed and things are left as they are. These evolved rituals of colonisation and survival appear not to apply in the more de-personalised setting of public spaces, such as a national park. This said, Ngadjon-Jii people’s continued use of these spaces is achieved by maintaining a strategic invisibility and silence about their actions.

Ngadjon-Jii people continue to hunt brush turkeys, collect their eggs, and harvest wild fruits and nuts from these now 'protected' rainforested locales. However, they do so in an environment of uncertainty and fear. There is the constant fear of being apprehended by the authorities and the ongoing uncertainty about whether these long-standing, cultural practices amount to legal rights under the recent Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993*. Ngadjon-Jii people, like so many Aboriginal people throughout Australia, don't assume the existence of rights in an electorate of former One Nation supporters<sup>26</sup>. History appears to confirm this particular understanding of 'whiteman's law'.

As McDonald and Lane point out in 'Securing the Wet Tropics', the 1988 declaration of the rainforests of North Queensland as the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area ignored the rights and interests of at least twenty-thousand Aboriginal people (see also Dale *et al.* 2000: 187). The listing basically amounted to a form of 'green imperialism' in the more benign guise of environmental protection. As this example illustrates, all too often in Australia's past there has been a real lack of Indigenous involvement in conservation measures and strategies, amounting to a profound social experience of marginalisation or invisibility. As a corrective to this situation, contemporary environmental discourses emphasise equity and social justice. To achieve the kind of democratisation proposed, co-management, community-based or, more recently, integrated management strategies are often advocated. In the current context, where the concept of crisis has reached fashionable proportions, the notion of joint management is proposed as some form of magic cure for environmental ailments and social injustices. As this suggests, co-management strategies now represent novel and enticing alternatives for the likes of policy makers and environmental managers. While joint or integrated management may be the most recent buzzword in many parts of Australia, it has also become the latest password for skirting the sensitive political issues of Native Title and Indigenous sovereignty.

Ngadjon-Jii people have responded to the physical and rhetorical reality of environmental protectionism by re-inventing themselves as 'cultural rangers'. Their status as 'rangers' serves to legitimate access to, and use of, rainforest enclaves now designated as protected areas. For Ngadjon-Jii people, there are several such areas on their traditional lands<sup>27</sup>. Whereas previously their very status as Aboriginal people confined Ngadjon-Jii people to these marginal spaces, nowadays Ngadjon-Jii people are required to literally wear their Indigenous status as an achievement badge on their sleeves in order to execute many of their customary practices. However, in the new era of environmental managerialism, it is not sufficient to just be Indigenous. If they wish to be employed by the peak environmental agency that administers the remaining pockets of rainforest on their traditional lands, Ngadjon-Jii people are now required to be 'experts' or 'specialists'. To achieve this status as an 'Indigenous Expert', Ngadjon-Jii people undertake relevant TAFE-based 'capacity-building' courses for a number of years. In the past, one Ngadjon-Jii person was employed as a ranger at Lake Eacham National Park by Queensland's Environmental Protection Agency. However, not one of the twenty or so 'trained' Ngadjon-Jii rangers is officially employed in that capacity today. Instead, as overly qualified 'experts', these Ngadjon-Jii men and women work on country as CDEP<sup>28</sup>-paid rangers. Minus the epaulettes and the official imprimatur of environmental bureaucracy, Ngadjon-Jii people continue to do what they have always done. Like so many other Aboriginal people in Australia, they go about the routine task of producing locality, landscapes and their own identities in the myriad ways they've mastered to minimise the effects of white intervention in their lives.

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<sup>26</sup> In recent state and national elections, Malanda emerged as the heartland for supporters of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party.

<sup>27</sup> They include; Malanda Falls National Park, Malanda Conservation Park, Topaz Road National Park, Lake Eacham National Park, Curtain Fig Tree National Park, and Wooroonooran National Park.

<sup>28</sup> Often called 'work for the dole', CDEP refers to the federally funded 'Community Development Employment Program'.

## IMPACTS AND THREATS

On the surface of things, it appears that protected area management is one of the few areas of contemporary rural life open to Ngadjon-Jii people where cultural difference is positively acknowledged, and is not the basis for discriminatory spatial practices.

Yet, perhaps we have to ask ourselves: what or who is being managed here? Is it the case that the discourse of environmental management is really about the management of resources or environments? Or is it really a question of 'managing people'? Or, is it more a case of managing the production of particular kinds of subjects – Aboriginal people as the original conservationists or exemplars of good management? The discourse of environmental management constructs a world where there are no 'owners'; there are only managers, resource users, stakeholders and, more recently, investors. This is a world, which disenfranchises people as effectively as any colonial regime or centralised state.

Increasingly, Aboriginal people are referred to as land managers. While the classification of Aboriginal people as 'managers' appears to be egalitarian in motivation and empowering in impact, it effectively denies the very basis of Indigenous people's identity and influence. That is, their cultural difference. While classed as 'environmental managers', Aboriginal people rarely possess the experience and expertise associated with European forms of management. In this scenario, capacity building amounts to training Aboriginal people as rangers, according to the principles of scientific management. Many Aboriginal people resist attempts to categorise them as managers and choose instead to identify themselves as 'Traditional Owners'. The legal recognition of Native Title in Australia lends support to their demands for the acknowledgment of their distinctive and unique status as the original occupiers.

As managers and rangers in the new equitable, sustainable and efficient environmental management regimes, Aboriginal expressions of 'caring for country' are, at best, given token recognition in terms of the environment significance of these practices. For example, the use of fire by Aboriginal people is recognised by some western management agencies as having a conservation value. Other Aboriginal beliefs and practices, however, are either ignored or there is a complete disavowal of their environmental relevance. All too often, as the recently formulated Commonwealth of Australia Coastal Policy (DEST 1995: 27-31) indicates, political commitment to and support for Aboriginal environmental 'management' practices amounts to nothing more than 'consultation', 'involvement', 'participation', 'promotion', 'encouragement', 'acknowledgment', and of course, 'engagement' in non-Indigenous management arrangements.

In the accumulating literature on environmental management, particularly the material on co- and integrated management, there is a tendency to speak of traditional knowledge or local practices as if they are abstract systems, akin to scientific knowledge, shared by every member of the community. Moreover, the principles that inform these belief systems are regarded as not only eminently discoverable but ultimately replicable in a number of different contexts. The dehistoricising universalism implied in the widespread application of scientific knowledge is now accorded to Aboriginal beliefs and practices. Aboriginal knowledge is now assigned a privileged position as an environmental canon or it is elevated to the status of an ethno-science. However, this does not necessarily make these 'sciences' or the canon stable or universal. It merely globalises them.

Attempts to transform Aboriginal ways of knowing and using country, and the social and cultural virtuosity associated with this, into transcendental and disembodied information systems or management practices raises serious questions about where and how Aboriginal people fit into this scenario, or whether they figure at all.

## NEW SPACES, OLD PLACES

In a recent commemorative history of the Eacham Shire, the president of the Eacham Historical Society observed that:

*In 1995, Aborigines living in the Eacham Shire appear to be reasonably well integrated into the general stream of present day society. Aborigines no longer live in camps on the edge of town, however, in their hearts they probably still cherish their dreaming” (Eacham Historical Society 1995: 6).*

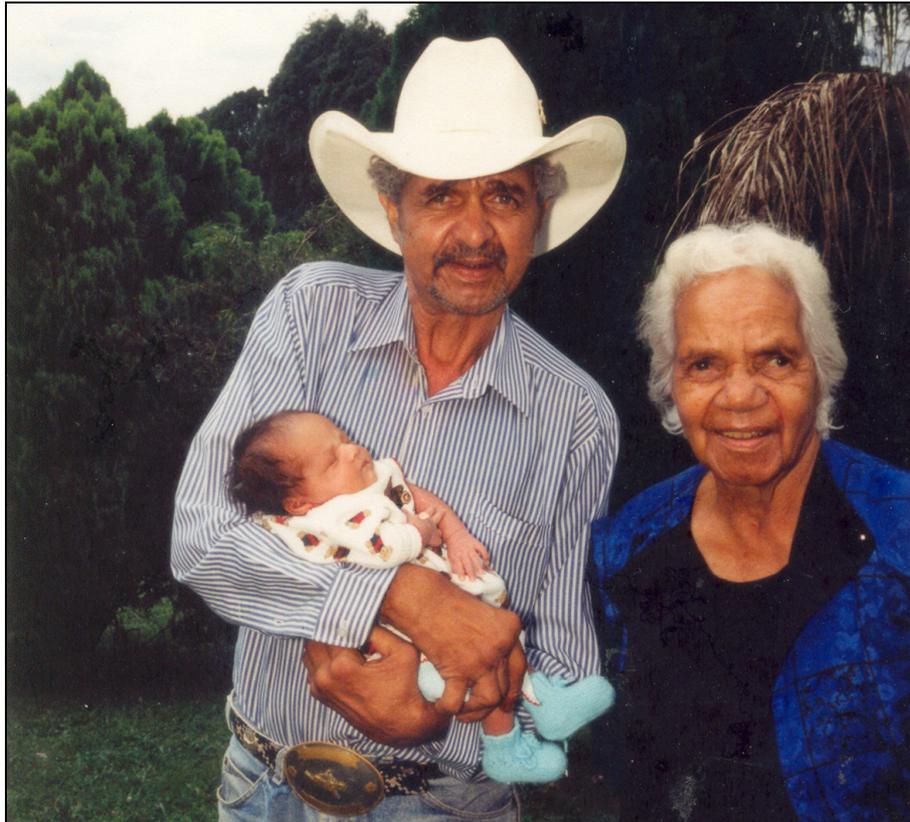


**Figure 27:** Location of Ngadjon-Jii camps and dwellings, and other places of historical significance in Malanda (Photo: Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Graphics: Birgit Kuehn).

Henry Tranter's comments paint an interesting picture of the social and physical landscape of Malanda (Figure 27). In this view, Ngadjon-Jii people's experience of living in rainforest camps on the 'edge of town' is portrayed as part of a civic past best forgotten, left behind in the wash of assimilation. These comments also strongly suggest that Ngadjon-Jii people today no longer live on the edge of white society, let alone on the edge of town. Integrated into the mainstream, it appears that the original colonial project of enlightenment has finally succeeded in the closing moments of the twentieth century. The Dreaming now nothing more than a faint pang in people's hearts. There is something unsettling about this comforting, two-

dimensional scene of contemporary life in Malanda. Notwithstanding Ngadjon-Jii people's experience of living in change, some things remain the same.

Auntie Emma Johnston and other Ngadjon-Jii people in Malanda continue to live on the edge of town, nowadays in rudimentary public housing (Figure 28). From this site on the outskirts of town, Ngadjon-Jii people travel along the rainforested corridor of the North Johnstone River back to their camps at 'The Jungle', and in the two protected areas – Malanda Conservation Park and the Malanda Falls National Park. Walking along the river from their new Besser block 'camp', they go hunting and fishing in the remaining pockets of rainforest.



**Figure 28:** Trevor Johnston, holding his grandson, with his mother Emma Johnston outside their *Besser Block* 'camp' on the outskirts of Malanda, ca. early 2000 (Photo courtesy of Yvonne Canendo).

This 'fringe camp' on the periphery of town is the centre of Ngadjon-Jii people's social world. Like the situation with their former camps in the rainforest, 'family' and other Aboriginal people move in and out of this place. Some people camp the night, others just call-in for a 'cuppa' and a chat. While the term 'camp' implies a spatial referent, 'camp' for Ngadjon-Jii people invariably invokes the presence of people. In this sense, 'camp' can be regarded as a relational concept expressing a connection between a person and a place, or between a group of people and their country. The concept of 'camp' encapsulates a sense of belonging – belonging to country and belonging to other Aboriginal people connected to that country. As such, 'camp' refers to those places Ngadjon-Jii people regard as their "home" and where they feel "at home". Thus, while living on the margins is a place historically familiar to people, unthinkable as it may be to the settlers in Malanda, it's also the place where Ngadjon-Jii people want to be – camping back on the edge of *buyu*.