

CHAPTER TWO – YAMANI

It is a sacred one, the water at Lake Eacham. I won't go and swim in it, because it is too sacred. It's got a Yamani. – Auntie Emma Johnston

On the outskirts of the Tableland town of Malanda, we stand and admire a mosaic-tiled mural – the product of a community Millennium project (Figure 2). Erected on the edge of a patch of relic rainforest, the mural also demarcates all that remains of what once was, until as recently as 1907, a vast and verdant land. In a fitting, and somewhat ironic statement about white millenarian activities, the mural depicts the Ngadjon-Jii account of the creation of the very country we are standing on. The mural, like the landscape around us, is the work of both Ngadjon-Jii people and Europeans, a co-production that both captures and belies the last hundred years of Aboriginal-European engagement and disenchantment.



Figure 2: Mosaic-tiled mural depicting the creation of the Crater Lakes and the surrounding country, Malanda Conservation Park (Photo: Roger Wilkinson).

Pointing to and touching the various features, Warren Canendo (*Wundadjila*), a Ngadjon-Jii man in his mid thirties, and one of the artists who worked on the mural, explains:

Here's the kangaroo. Those young fellas were trying to spear that kangaroo. But they missed and hit a flame tree. That's a sacred tree for Ngadjon-Jii mob. Those young fellas not supposed to be out hunting. They'd just gone through

Law. Their elders told them they had to stay put, not go hunting. But they didn't listen. When they pulled their spear out, a grub fell out, a witchetty grub. They started cutting down that tree to get more grubs. When they cut down that tree, the ground began to shake. Those two fellas had made that Yamani angry. Then the sky grew dark, then all these people here, back at the camp, the earth went from underneath them, sucked them in, whoosh, they all got drowned. Where they were camped became Lake Eacham, Bana Wiingina. These are all the volcanoes. The Seven Sisters.

The mural graphically depicts how two newly initiated men broke important cultural taboos and the earth-shattering consequences of angering the rainbow serpent or *Yamani* that is said by Ngadjon-Jii people to inhabit many of the waters of the region². In this respect, the mural stands as a vivid reminder to all about the morality of dwelling in place and alerts us to some of the dangers of living in a sentient landscape. Deborah Bird Rose refers to this Aboriginal view of country as a “place that gives and receives life”, as a ‘nourishing terrain’ (Bird Rose 1996: 7).

The mural also reminds us that landscapes are formidable and yet fleeting achievements, which bring together complex cultural and natural forces. As the linguist, R. M. W. Dixon observes, the account of the origin of the crater lakes on the Atherton Tableland is a “plausible account of a volcanic eruption” (Dixon 1991: 41), which, according to scientists, occurred some thirteen thousand years ago. In one of the versions recorded by Dixon, his Ma:Mu informant, George Watson, stated that when the eruption occurred, the country around the lakes was “not jungle – just open scrub” (loc. cit.). The work of the palaeobotanist A. P. Kershaw confirms this view, suggesting that the rainforest on the Tableland is only about 7,600 years old (Kershaw 1978, 1980). A conclusion that certainly challenges the recently popular depiction of the rainforests of the Wet Tropics as primeval stands dating from the dawn of time.

In more recent times, Ngadjon-Jii portrayals of the creation of geographical objects and the origin of fauna and flora are to be found hanging in public spaces, the very colonial-looking tea-rooms at Lake Barrine for example, or are presented as pivotal features of community places such as local council parks and gardens throughout the Malanda region. In some respects, this emphasis upon the visual and the picturesque serves to landscape not just country, but also culture. In other respects, it points to one of the many ways that Ngadjon-Jii people encounter and engage with a rapidly changing physical environment in a manner that enacts and retains this already Aboriginal cultural space. Here, country is not a setting against which stories are told or recalled. These stories are themselves enactments of country and it is through these and other means that country comes into being and is kept alive. This chapter explores aspects of this spatial experience. In saying this, I think it is important to point out here that what follows is not a ‘Ngadjon-Jii history’ of space. It does not purport to imitate or replace the kind of history that Warren and other Ngadjon-Jii people tell themselves. Rather, it is an attempt to convey something of the ordinary and extra-ordinary nature of the day-to-day spatial experience of Ngadjon-Jii people in the Malanda district.

² Dixon observes that among ‘Dyirbal’ language group speakers, which includes Ngadjon-Jii people, the “most important spirit was the rainbow, who it was believed could turn into a snake”. He also notes that Dyirbal speakers regard this spirit as dangerous and it was for this reason that “they would not leave the camp at night, or bathe in dangerous pools” (Dixon 1972: 24-25).

BARRINY

In late 2004, we visited Lake Barrine, one of the crater lakes featured in the Ngadjon-Jii mural. The lake, known to Europeans as early as 1889, has been a popular spot with tourists since at least the early 1920s, and the Edwardian-style tea rooms perched on the edge of the lake appear to date from around this period. At regular times throughout the day, boat tours are conducted around the lake, where the operator informs the passengers of the natural values of this watery setting. Little if anything is said about the Aboriginal significance of these waters or the surrounding countryside. This interpretive act is left to a single painting, tucked away on the downstairs walls of the tea-rooms, flanked by a jumble of pioneer memorabilia and the cross-sectioned stump of a giant rainforest tree. Brushed in eye-catching colours by Warren's cousin, Vanessa Gertz (*Gundja*), for those who can read it the painting tells the story of the creation of *Barriny* (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The creation of *Barriny* - Lake Barrine (Painting: Vanessa Gertz, Photo: Roger Wilkinson).

There is that black bird, that story-bird now, that Spotted Drongo. That's Lake Barrine, this here [pointing to another lake-like feature] is that swamp, not Hasties, the one up there behind Butchers Creek. On that dairy farm. Nan, what the name of that water? That's where that water moved from there now. Where that waterhole is, where that swamp there is now, years and years ago, back in the old Dreaming, it used to be real cold, and lot of storms and lightening must have hit a log and lit the log up for fire. All these birds were all cold sitting on the edge of the swamp. They see that big Yamani there and he's all warm. They all shivering because they cold. They used to fly down

there and try and get a bit of fire-stick to get warm and every time they did he would chase them away. And this Spotted Drongo came there one time. All the birds reckoned they were cold, and told him that the Yamani wouldn't let them grab the fire, and he said wait, wait until the Yamani asleep. Spotted Drongo grabbed that firestick, and as he was coming out of the swamp the Yamani woken up and got wild with him. He flipped his tail and when he did this he hit the back of the bird's tail and split it. That's how come got that fork in that tail of the Spotted Drongo. He managed to get up to the top with that fire-stick and all the birds were singing out, real happy they got that fire-stick. That Yamani got the shits with them mob, with those birds then and that is when he moved to Lake Barrine. Early in the morning. They reckon if you see it from an aeroplane you can see that the trail of the lava flow, where he come all the way to here. He went through the earth and made that track, and the water follow him here, and he bin come here, to Lake Barrine, he left early in the morning. Barriny, 'early morning'. When those birds woke up that water was gone, but they didn't worry because they all warm. They got their fire-stick.

Barriny, that's early morning, they reckon this lake going to move again. He was supposed to move from that road over there but they cemented it all down there and put the wall there. Nan and that reckon he's going to break that down and go. – Warren Canendo

At this point in Warren's narration, Emma Johnston, Warren's maternal grandmother, turns to me and somewhat surprises me by asking, "Do you believe that?" Before I can respond, Auntie Emma answers her own rhetorical question:

Yeah I believe it. I believe all the Murri stories. They reckon this water, the Yamani, going to move again. I don't think it's going to stay in one place. So my mum told me that. He not going to stay here [at Lake Barrine]. He's been here a long time, might be sick of this place.

Given the overlay of European architecture and the inescapable presence of so many ageing tourists supping on scones and tea, it is perhaps not so surprising that Warren's grandmother feels the need to challenge this comforting scene with questions about belief. In some respects, the idea of such extraordinary events taking place in an environment physically constrained and, in many ways, obliterated by a history of European settlement seems fantastic, even romantic³. And yet, throughout the district of Malanda, similar poetic⁴ happenings take place within the physical space of a dairy farm, occur nowadays in spaces called 'swamps', 'scrub' and 'jungle', or are recollected in a landscape overlaid with the prosaic names of European pioneers. Warren's comments about how European roadworks had cemented in the rainbow snake point to a dynamic and, at times, destructive landscape in which violence and deformation are integral processes.

These comments remind us that spatial narratives or 'topogenies' (Fox 1997) represent conceptual orders, which sometimes, but not always, have a physical manifestation. Recited stories about places are often detailed accounts of absences, or of spaces and structures, which no longer have a material presence. Notwithstanding the apparent lack of physical form, the significance of these spaces continues to be remembered and recalled (see Henry and Greer 1996).

³ I use the term 'romantic' here to try and capture the kind of sentiments Stephen Greenblatt (1990) speaks of when using the concepts of 'resonance' and 'wonder' to characterise what he calls the 'new historicism'. This involves capturing the mysterious, the sensual, the dangerous, the erotic and nostalgic qualities ascribed to particular places or spaces.

⁴ The reference to 'poetic' here draws upon the Greek root of this term, 'poiein', 'to make'.

In the same way that Annette Weiner (1996) argues that there are some objects which are never exchanged because of their acknowledged capacity to authenticate cosmology, then there are some places which, regardless of their disfigurement or, in some cases, complete obliteration, continue to be socially recognised as important loci for the convergence of memory and meaning. In other words, some places invite commentary and people tell stories about them. Again, similar to Weiner's 'Inalienable Possessions', these places are not isolated 'memory palaces' (Yates 1966). Rather, their uniqueness derives from those cultural traditions, which link these sites into a wider netscape of memory.

DJILAN

Travelling down Gadalof Road we enter 'Little Siberia'. Trevor Johnston, Auntie Emma's son, points out the farms owned by Bill Hominko and Leandro Illin, two of the 'white Russians' who settled in the district in the 1920s. Trevor's mum tells everyone in the car that the place looks just the same as it did when she was 'kid' living around here in the 1920s. We are looking for the place where Emma Johnston used to live among the farms and fences that line Gadalof Road. We pass Wall's Dairy Farm. This is where the waters of Lake Barrine came from – from the volcanic crater just behind the milking shed. On the gate to the farm hangs a sign announcing the name of the property, 'Yamani Stud'. The sign is meant as an act of reconciliation, recognising the prior cultural meaning of the place. Yet, it seems like an act of appropriation as we gather outside of the gate and the Ngadjon-Jii discuss among themselves who is going to ask permission to go in.

Auntie Jessie Calico, a Ngadjon-Jii elder born in the 'bush' at the junction of the Ithaca and North Johnstone Rivers sometime around 1930, calls the crater on the dairy farm *Djilan*:

Djilan was also a bora ground. I think they used to live on the edge of that bora ground. I'm not sure, we'll find out from Mrs J [Emma Johnston], she might remember. She lived here with her mother and grandma. It was not far from here to go over there, where Anderson's Farm is, they had a camp there at Bundjabili. This is where they said the slaughter started. This is where it started. People were running away, running trying to get away from the troopers. So they took off that way up to Lamins Hill way. Tom has a story, Tommy English⁵. He said, "I'll tell you that story, how Butchers Creek got its name. That's where all the blacks killed the whites". We fella reckon wrong, you got it back to front. It wasn't that way at all. It was you fella, all the white fellas killing our people, shooting our people. How could we attack you. Our people never had guns, your people did.

At this point, Auntie Emma Johnston joins us, and feels compelled to retell the story as a corrective to the European account of events:

They mustered all the people from Djilan bora ground to Bundjabili bora ground and killed them all. Happened when my mother, Molly, was alive. She was only a kid then herself. No one survived that massacre at Butchers Creek. Story had something to do with women. While men were out hunting, whitemen used to come and rape the women. When the men came back they found the whitefellas. Chased them away with spears and killed them. One got

⁵ The antecedents of the English family are widely recognised in the community as the first Europeans to take up selections in the Parish of Malanda. In the years that followed settlement in 1907, members of the English family have played a prominent role in public life, owning and operating the Malanda Hotel and occupying the position of Mayor of the Eacham Shire Council for several years. The main streets of Malanda are named after the members of this pioneering family.

away and told the police. Police came and shot everyone here at Butchers Creek, at Bundjabili bora ground. Big slaughter there. They left the men to rot. It was bad thing to do. My mother's sister, Polly, got shot at Butchers Creek. Tommy Langton was there too [Emma's mother's brother]. He went up a hollow log when the shooting was going on. Police came to the camp and see that little boy walking around and they took him to Gordonvale. He went to a white family. That's how he got his name, Tommy Allen, from the white people who grew him up.

Standing with our backs to Butchers Creek, taking in the surrounding enclosed and cleared land, it is perhaps surprising to the casual observer that these seemingly domesticated spaces are still the battlegrounds upon which history is contested. As the name Butchers Creek brazenly attests, and as William Faulkner once observed, "the past is not over, it's not even past". More than a hundred years later it is apparent that the creation of open fields and agricultural vistas by the European settlers failed to clear away the doubt, silence the whispers or hide the history of what happened at *Bundjabili*.

While the details of the massacre at *Bundjabili* have been quietly preserved in Ngadjon-Jii oral history, some of these details have also been recorded by Europeans. Local amateur historian Jack May, in his homage to the miners of the Russell River Goldfield, refers to the other kind of clearing that occurred in the region at the turn of the twentieth century:

Stories are told by old Aboriginals of many massacred on the Russell field. The Aboriginals were always searching for food, and any discreet raid on a prospector's camp would bring forth a posse of police from Cairns to clear the bush. Many hundreds are reported to have been shot down in this manner. Butchers Creek is reported to have received its name from such a slaughter on its banks (May 1978: 22).

Archibald Meston also records that at least one Aboriginal person from the area of the Russell River was killed by Europeans in retaliation for the murder of two white diggers on the Russell River Goldfield (Meston 1889: 3, 9). Referring to the incident described in Meston's report on his expedition to the Bellenden-Ker Range, Norman Tindale writes in an unpublished manuscript that:

In June 1889 there were murders of white diggers by the Aborigines on the Upper Russell River and Constable Whelan spent part of July 1889 there. Meston's own camp was visited during the night by an aboriginal hungry for meat and was detected by a Thursday Island helper and hunted away with a rifle shot. Meston was guided to Mt Bartle Frere by Jab:a ... Shortly after he learned that his guide had been one of those concerned in the murders on the Russell River having killed two of the diggers with his own hands. It appears he was killed but history does not say whether before or after judicial enquiry (Tindale nd).

In his unpublished journal of the 'Adelaide and Harvard Universities' Expedition to North Queensland, 1938-1939', Tindale also records a massacre of 'Idinji' people in 1884 at nearby Skull Pocket⁶, now located on the shores of Lake Tinaroo. Tindale's European informant,

⁶ Throughout the Atherton Tableland, one encounters a number of locations called 'pocket' (e.g. Dingo Pocket, Pinnacle Pocket, Purcell Pocket, Long Pocket, Barry's Pocket). In the first years of European settlement, a 'pocket' referred to a small clearing in the rainforest. Many of the cleared spaces that Europeans came to occupy and call a 'pocket' were originally Aboriginal bora grounds. While the rainforested setting of many of these pockets has been cleared, the memory of the original form of these spaces is still conveyed by the retention of the name.

Jack Kane, who was eighteen at the time the massacre took place, participated in the police raid that culminated in the killings (Tindale 1938-1939: 413).

Often labelled 'black-armband history', the recollections of Ngadjon-Jii people, together with those all too brief references to Aboriginal killings in a handful of European accounts, offer "less glorious memories of the colonial encounter" (Strang 2003: 120). One is reminded here of Simon Schama's recent work, 'Landscape and Memory' (1995). Schama excavates through layers of social memory and visual representation, to reveal the many historical associations and varied cultural meanings of 'natural' objects and places. In the course of his scholarly burrowing, Schama warns the reader that not all landscapes are "places of delight", nor are all memories "pastoral picnics" (1995: 18). Here Simon Schama is referring to the horror and public tragedy often encountered on the "trail of social memory" (loc. cit.).

On the relationship between violence and space, Liisa Malkki observes that throughout the 'mythico-historical' accounts of her Hutu informants, and in media reports of later violence in Burundi in 1993, there are numerous reports of violations to "the most holy and valued places" (Malkki 1995: 292). The violence that Malkki records against these sacred and revered spaces is also reported in a number of other regional conflicts. For example, in the former state of Yugoslavia, "sacred and beautiful places" were deliberately targeted with the intention of "removing them so completely as to erase the evidence that people of another religion or ethnicity had once lived in a particular place" (Woollacott 2001: 14).

In the literature on the anthropology of landscape or the ethnography of place, these kinds of dismembered places and distorted spaces barely rate a mention. However, the destruction and disfigurement of these places is not simply the result of wanton acts of vandalism or the inevitable collateral damage associated with a zone of conflict. Malkki makes a similar point when she argues that the techniques of killing and the bodily sites upon which violence is enacted are neither haphazard nor accidental. Rather, as Malkki demonstrates, highly elaborated techniques of cruelty are already "symbolically meaningful", in much the same way that the convergence of violence upon specific places is already directed by certain "symbolic schemes" (Malkki 1995: 92).

In the violence enacted upon space, what once were holy venues or valued community places are replaced by disordered and disfigured spaces. Often, however, the erasures associated with this spatial disfigurement are in themselves transformative, reshaping old landscapes and creating new spaces. In the process, what once was sacred is rendered profane, and what might appear as mundane space is transformed into a sacred site. This complex process of spatial erasure and transformation is evident in Rwanda where, in the aftermath of the 1994 'genocide', ordinary buildings physically deformed by the violence have become national memorials to the tens of thousands of people killed in or around them (Brittain 2001: 3).

As the Rwanda example suggests, the violations enacted on place not only stand as powerful memorials of violent events and histories, but they can also give shape to on-going social processes of reformation and reconciliation. Though, judging by the near absence of any mention of Aboriginal massacres and killings in the numerous commemorative histories of the area, it seems that this kind of 're-visioning' of the history of Malanda is still some way off.

GUBI

Somewhere near *Djilan* bora ground is a *gubi* stone, a 'magic rock'. After spending some time looking for it, Auntie Emma suggests that the rock could have been moved when the 'whitefellas' cleared the area. Disappointed at not being able to relocate this stone, later in the day we drove through Glen Allyn and stopped at Short's Creek to look at another *gubi* place. As we walk off the road and along the banks of the creek, towards the waterfall, Yvonne, Auntie Emma's daughter, recalls:

We used to go fishing all up and down this creek and come back to here [pointing to the waterfall]. This is Short's Creek. There was an old fella named Short, he used to live on a farm over there, near the old school [at Glen Allyn]. And it was named Short after him. We used to get eel, used to be platypus here, used to get turtles here.

Climbing up the banks of the creek we return to the road and stand on the bridge over Short's Creek. Yvonne points to a large rock mid-stream in the creek:

*There's that big rock there, Nana said. They'd sit there and that eel would come down and lick their skin and put all that slime over them. Clean all our sores too. Nobody could catch him. Got to talk lingo for him to come out. This one is the *gubi djaban*. Those *gubi eel* move, they don't stay in same water for long. Since whiteman opened up place they drive *gubi* away. Have to ask mum and them about it.*

*There's a big flat stone there. If you had arthritis, put leg under stone and big *djaban* would eat it. *Gubi eel*. *Gubi* is like witchcraft, sorcery, clever. Old people talk special language to that eel. *Djaban* was a human being. *Gubi* are clever people. Grandmother told me that story. She's dead and gone. – Auntie Emma Johnston*

Europeans reported on the phenomenon of *gubi* among rainforest Aboriginal groups more than a hundred years ago. For example, Walter E. Roth, the Northern Protector of Aborigines at the time, reports that among the Aborigines of the lower Tully River there are men, known as 'doctors' or 'ko-bi', who have the power to remove spirit-inflicted sickness (1900: 53). Based on his explorations in the region around 1914, the Swedish naturalist, Eric Mjöberg writes of Aboriginal 'medicine men' and their use of a 'pointing bone' to bring about sickness and even death (1918: 209). He also mentions that 'medicine men' have the ability to cure illness. According to Mjöberg, in certain tribes the medicine man derives his power from an "important nature spirit who has taken the form of a colossal water snake and is, greatly revered" (1918: 209). More recently in a 1972 book on the Dyirbal language group, which includes 'Ngadyan' as one of six local dialects, R. M. W. Dixon specifically refers to Aboriginal 'doctors', known as *gubi* (Roth's 'ko-bi'). These men have "a thorough knowledge of their environment and of the customs and beliefs of the tribe" (Dixon 1972: 36). In his discussion of *gubi*, Dixon further reports that the "last known cannibalism was in 1940, when an Aboriginal man was deliberately killed for excessive sexual misconduct" (loc. cit.). The *gubi* who was the 'prime mover' for this death was one of Dixon's most knowledgeable informants.

The cultural practices associated with the concept of *gubi*, for example Aboriginal 'doctors' and ritual killings, emerge in more sensational terms in early European depictions of the region as 'cannibal' country. Writing of the Aborigines of Mt Bartle Frere and the Bellenden-Ker Range, Meston proclaims that:

All these blacks are cannibals of a particularly bad type. They kill and eat their women and children, and occasionally they kill and eat their men. It is possible the custom arises out of an irrestrainable craving for fresh food, in a violent reaction against prolonged vegetarianism ... Plenty to eat is the one sole study of their existence. It forms the subject of their dreams by night and stimulates all their faculties during the day (Meston 1889: 8).

Similar comments are made by Christie Palmerston, who called the Aborigines of the upper Russell River area 'great cannibals' (cited in Savage 1992: 237), while the Government Geologist, Robert L. Jack, reported that "cannibalism prevailed among the blacks of this district" (Jack 1888: 1). Jack notes that these 'hideous orgies' have been described by Palmerston and printed in the newspaper, *Queensland Figaro*.

A few decades later, Edgar Short, whose family took up a selection around the watercourse they later named 'Short's Creek' in 1912, observed "cannibalism had gone out of fashion by the time we arrived, due to the penalties imposed by the whites" (Short 1988: 60). However, he also reports "any middle aged Aboriginal then living would have tasted human flesh" (loc. cit.). Short further reports that Joe Clarke⁷, their Aboriginal worker on the farm, was known as 'murdering Joe' on account of the Europeans, Chinese and Aborigines he was suspected of killing, and in some instances, also consuming⁸. Short attempts to make a case for a more benevolent approach to the Aborigines by making due allowance for the fact that "the Aborigines were only ignorant and barbarous savages" (ibid: 61). According to Short, some of the 'nasty practices' of the Aborigines, such as "killing and eating surplus female children" (loc. cit.) are merely practical ways of maintaining an optimal tribal size.

Leaving aside the current debate in anthropology about whether or not cannibalism actually occurred (see Sahlins 2003; Obeyesekere 2003), the issue here is the effect of the belief among Europeans that it did exist. Depictions of rainforest Aboriginal people as 'cannibals' in late nineteenth and early twentieth century accounts are integral to the 'terrifying mythologies' produced by Europeans about the 'horrors' of the jungle and the 'natives' that inhabited it (see Taussig 1987). As Michael Taussig observes, the narrative creation of Indigenes as 'wild', 'uncivilised', and as 'superstitious pagans' is part of a political economy of colonial violence where the savagery attributed to the Aborigines mirrors the barbarous acts perpetrated by the colonists (Taussig 1987: 134). As Edgar Short writes in his recollections of early days in the Malanda district, stories about Aborigines told by miners who had worked on the Boonjje goldfields in the 1880s and 1890s were regarded as:

definite proof of a degree of savage inhumanity which put the Abo [sic] quite beyond the pale, revealing their barbarous and cruel nature, and making them fair game to be shot down like animals at any time (Short 1988: 60).

For Ngadjon-Jii people today, stories about 'cannibal time' and their 'man-eating' ancestors stand as affirmations of the potency and pervasive powers of indigeneity. These fantastic accounts about the mystical powers and magical abilities possessed by *gubi* men or attributed to eels and rocks, among other things, constitute vital forms of social action which challenge and, at times, violate the objective and reasoned histories of European colonisation. Ngadjon-Jii stories comprise a narrative terrain that both pre-dates the dioramic spaces of European settlement and yet also serves to mediate people's everyday experience

⁷ In accordance with the practice of levirate marriage, Emma Johnston's mother's mother, *Gungudja* (Sally Beard), was betrothed to Joe Clarke (*Tagadja*) when her first husband, *Wundadjila* (Jack Clarke), Joe's older brother, died.

⁸ Short reports that Joe Clarke initially worked for George Clarke, "one of the discoverers of the Boonjje goldfield" (Short 1988: 63), and his European name reflects this earlier association.

of this space. If this terrain is invisible to European eyes it is, in some way, because of the partial vision left by history's gaze.

BULUBA BURRGUNA

Nowadays, 'Top Camp' is a small clearing on the side of a gravel road leading to the start of the Mt Bartle Frere walking track⁹. Recently erected signage informs us that this patch of open ground on the margins of Wooroonooran National Park is not the work of Europeans (Figures 4 and 5). This cultivated space is *Buluba Burrguna*¹⁰ – a Ngadjon-Jii camp, bora ground, burial site and initiation place. Parts of *Buluba Burrguna* were bulldozed when the road was put through, while other sections are now enclosed by fences and freehold title on Whittaker's Farm, abutting the other side of the road. Auntie Jessie Calico recalls what happened at Top Camp in the early days:

First Top Camp is the initiation ground. It's where that farmhouse is now [Whittaker's Farmhouse]. People were moved off the land by Europeans. When the first whitefella came and took up land he told old people to move away. They moved to Top Camp, where we are now. Must have been in the early 1920s they moved camp from the initiation ground. Mr Dick bought land off our people for red bandana, plug of tobacco and twenty pounds. Gave it away cheap. Old people had already cleared that initiation ground. He built his house where they lived. It was a man thing that ground.

Auntie Emma was a 'kid' when Pompey Langton, the "last one", was initiated at the original Top Camp:

When they were doing Uncle Pompey, they chased me and my brother away. Not allowed to be there or see them when they did it. They took him to a different camp. Told us to go away. Women and children couldn't see it. Taboo. They had to show they were good warriors before got initiated. Had to prove themselves as hunters when they reached their manhood. All the Murri came here to be initiated.

When got married tribal way, got to get cut on chest, tribal scar. Lot of old people got those cuts. They catch an eel and put eel oil on it to heal it. They can't leave that camp for two weeks.

Had bora ground where Top Camp is now. They had corroboree there at Top Camp. Came from Millaa Millaa, Kaban, Ravenshoe for corroboree. It was a fighting ground, battleground, where they settled their differences.

Auntie Emma was one of a number of Ngadjon-Jii people who lived at Top Camp:

My mother and father, my grandmother, all lived here. Paddy Robinson lived here too. Henry Robinson's sister was born here. Old Grandma Dinah lived here. She was the last one. We came from Whittaker's Farm to bring her food.

⁹ It is possible that the name, Top Camp, derives from the alluvial workings of the same name situated at the headwaters of nearby Toohey's Creek in the 1880s (see Johnston 1983: 10).

¹⁰ R. M. W. Dixon identifies 'buluba' as the Yidiny term for a "ground for a fighting corroboree" (Dixon 1991: 194). "Ngadjon-Jii use of this term is not so surprising given that "Yidin has ... 27% vocabulary in common with the Ngadyan dialect" (Dixon 1972: 27).



Figure 4: Yvonne Canendo and Auntie Emma Johnston at the new sign at *Buluba Burrguna* (Photo: Sandra Pannell).

Jessie Calico also lived at Top Camp with her father, Billy Calico, and mother, Dinah. Auntie Jessie recalls:

That's where the graves are over there. Uncle George and Auntie Em told me they are just on the edge of the scrub, where all those stones are. I know who is there, Grandma [Emma Johnston's mother, Molly Raymond] mentioned them all. Old Grandad Joe Clarke, my Grandfather, Billy Calico, and Granny Dinah, she was married to Grandma's brother, her, and another lady from down the Mulgrave. Grandma said she didn't remember her name, and a little brother belong to Cathy's mum, his name was George. There is another one I can't think of. Six of them buried here. Three men, two ladies and this kid. Henry's uncle was the other chap buried here.

From Top Camp, Ngadjon-Jii people walked to nearby farms to work as labourers and domestic servants. They would also walk into Malanda to visit family living in pockets of rainforest on the fringe of the town. Auntie Emma also recalls walking from Top Camp to visit her 'Granny Mosie':

Alice [Emma's sister] and me went to Gulgagulga¹¹ when Mosie was living there. My granny, Gungudja, was there too [Gungudja is Mosie's sister]. We walked from Top Camp to Gulgagulga to see Mosie. He lived in a midja [traditional dwelling constructed of palm fronds]. He's my mum's uncle. I call him "Granny", that's Murri law. Mosie used to work for the miners at Boonjie. Later he worked for Harry Land.

Edgar Short identifies *Gulgagulga* as Mosie's residential camp and the place where he was later buried. In settler accounts of the Malanda region, the dirt track leading to Mosie's camp is commonly known as 'Gourka Road'. 'Mosie' himself is identified in Short's book as the Aboriginal guide who led the first party of European settlers in Malanda to the summit of Mt Bartle Frere in 1912 (Short 1988: 90). *Gulgagulga* is also mentioned in Christie Palmerston's diary of his 1886 explorations up the Russell River. Writing of his ascent of Mt Bartle Frere, Palmerston reports that the mountain bears "three native names, according to the variations of its contours" (cited in Savage 1992: 230):

The S.E. end or horn, as I have before said, is "Care-ing-ah", by some called "Tachappa", and did belong to "Nooychoo", to whose death I made lengthy reference. Its highest summit is named "warpoorra", with its open spot "Choor-a-chellem", owned by the old "Wallajar" and his elder son, "Cottabar". Its N.W. end is named "Koorka-koorka", and is possessed by an old man, whose name I forget, and whom, as yet, I have not met (Savage 1992: 230).

Palmerston further reports that the name 'Koorkakoorka' also refers to a ceremonial place:

Owing to all my aborigines having left to take part in a general fight that is to come off in a borah ground named "koorkakoorka", some three miles away, I have been prospecting Wairambar Creek by myself ... (Savage 1992: 221-222).

The Government Geologist, Robert Logan Jack, who documented the geology of the Russell River in 1888, records that in the area occupied by the upper Russell River 'natives':

[A] few cleared spots in the jungle were used for corrobories [sic] of the tribe and for hostile meetings of neighbouring tribes. These boro-grounds are

¹¹ Emma Johnston and Jessie Calico identify 'gulga' as a Ngadjon-Jii term meaning 'neck'.

probably of great antiquity, as no tradition of their origin can be gathered from the natives. The clearing of an acre of jungle with stone implements (aided perhaps by fire in the very rare dry seasons) must have been the work of a very long time (Jack 1888: 2).

In the twentieth century, Patrick (aka Paddy) English, a descendant of one of the pioneering European families in Malanda, writes about the recollections of Jim Brown, who he describes as a member of the 'Yareh tribe'¹². Jim Brown (*Burnyang*), also known as Jim Raymond, was married to Emma Johnston's mother, Molly Raymond. According to Patrick English:

Boonyang [aka Jim Brown] recalled a corroboree he attended at Gourka [Gulgagulga] about 1890. A corroboree ground or bora ground is a nice level cleared patch of ground about the size of a football field and all the tribesman not actually taking part sat in a circle round the ground and joined in a rhythm by clanking boomerangs together, clapping hands or slapping themselves on the thigh. It was usual to have only one circle of tribesmen present, but on this occasion so many attended that a double line had to be formed. This would indicate that about 1000 were present (English 1961).

The amateur historian Jack May, speaking of the experiences of one of the first European settlers in the Tarzali region, describes the attendance of Aboriginal people from the Malanda region at a bora ground in Millaa Millaa:

Mrs J. F. Smith who was one of the earliest settlers at Tarzali [just south of Malanda] lived, in those days, a few chains away from the present Gillies Crossing on the Malanda-Millaa Millaa Railway Line, where her son Dirran, the first white child in the Dirran area, was born on 28/2/13. She states the Aboriginals would pass by the hut dressed only in shirts, and carrying boomerangs, shields, spears, etc., and would stop and gaze inquisitively at the hut. She says at times she could hardly breathe for fright. The blacks of course were going to a Corroboree on one of the Bora grounds in the Millaa Millaa area, but she did not know that. But she was never harmed (May 1978: 22).

May goes on to describe the events, which took place at local Aboriginal bora grounds:

The Bora grounds apparently were the public meeting grounds of the Aboriginals. On these grounds were practiced the mystic ceremonies of their forefathers. Here the old men of the tribe, weirdly pigmented, ranked in order of prowess by the head dressings of the scarlet and yellow feathers of the black and white cockatoo, held in place by the warrior head band of possum tails, bestowed upon the youths of the camp full rights of 'Warrior of the Bush'. Here the designed breast markings of the young warriors were carefully cut on the bodies of the new made men. Here too, the wrongdoers in the tribe were punished for breaches of tribal law (May 1978: 22-23).

Edgar Short recalls being taken to a corroboree "being held at the bora ground on our farm" (Short 1988: 58) by 'Utie', the Aboriginal woman who worked on Short's Farm as a domestic servant:

¹² In a brief visit to Malanda in 1972 to witness "aborigines climbing trees" (Tindale 1972: 936), Norman Tindale notes that the "tourist pamphlet calls the Malanda Aborigines the *local Yahrah tribe*" (loc. cit). Tindale remarks that his 'Ngatjan' informant, Noel Raymond, "did not know about this name" (loc. cit.).

The men were all painted and all dances were performed by them, women were not allowed to take an active part in any dance. They sat around at one side of the ground, which was lit by a couple of big bonfires, with their dresses (if any), tied around their waists, and beat time by beating two boomerangs against each other, or simply clapping their cupped hands on their bare thighs.

The men had mock fights with their shields and huge wooden swords, and threw spears at each other, turning them aside with the shields, and did apparently symbolic dances portraying certain things, but their meaning was lost on me and no one would explain (loc. cit.).

The early accounts of European explorers and settlers depict a ritual landscape replete with numerous ceremonial grounds. For example, on his expedition up the Russell River, Palmerston refers to no less than six named bora grounds, one of which he had already appropriated as his 'depot'. The ceremonial life of Aboriginal people, particularly initiation ceremonies, certainly captured the imagination of Europeans, as well as providing conveniently cleared areas for the erection of homesteads and farmhouses. While these acts of appropriation may seem rather final, the recent reclamation of 'Top Camp' by Ngadjon-Jii People demonstrates that these contestations over space are an ongoing process (Figure 5).



Figure 5: New signage at *Buluba Burrguna* ('Top Camp') declares the area a 'Restricted Access Area / Cultural and Natural Protection Area', which only Ngadjon-Jii Traditional Owners and permit holders may enter (Photo: Sandra Pannell).

Europeans, and later Aborigines, referred to participation in this ceremonial life as 'gone walkabout' (Short 1988: 65). In his recollections of early days in Malanda, K. J. Hanrahan, whose family owned and operated the Malanda Hotel from 1922 to 1976, writes:

Once a year with not a word said to anyone, during the night they would vanish, yes, gone walkabout. They would walk out into the scrub and gorges at the foot of Mt Bartle Frere ... and hunt and live off the land as their ancestors lived. After a couple of weeks away, they would reappear (Hanrahan 1991: 11).

For Europeans, however, 'walkabout' soon became a euphemism for talking about 'unreliable' and 'lazy' workers. The refusal of Aboriginal people to live in one place was regarded by Europeans as a major obstacle to their civilisation. Attempts to herd Aboriginal people into government settlements and onto church missions, where the performance of traditional ceremonies was prohibited, was an attempt by the authorities to not only consolidate their power but also perpetuate the fiction of new and empty spaces – a conjoining of *tabula rasa* and *terra nullius*. As Paul Carter comments, "the Aborigine did not travel for the sake of seeing new countries, but in order to continue to inhabit his own" (Carter 1987: 336). The wandering state of Aborigines expressed "a power over space" which, in the early years of colonisation, was largely denied to Europeans. On the settlements, in the missions, and in the townships that sprung up around the Tableland at the turn of the twentieth century, this ceremonial power over space, and the spatial experiences of Aboriginal people generally, was soon transformed into a theatrical performance.

WARMA

For Ngadjon-Jii people, the *warma* or corroborees held at *Buluba Burrguna* served to regulate social relations between themselves and other rainforest groups, such as Yidinydji and Dyrbal people. Corroborees not only created a context for exchange, notably women and ceremonial objects, but as ritual performances, they also constituted objects of exchange between different groups. Importantly, the corroborees performed at *Buluba Burrguna* facilitated and constituted a form of spatial communication between Aboriginal people speaking different dialects and languages.

It is perhaps not so surprising that references to Aboriginal 'corroborees' feature so prominently in the explorer and settler histories of this region. Certainly, Christie Palmerston reports that some of his first contacts with rainforest Aborigines along the Russell River were mediated by the performance of a corroboree or some other form of group ceremony. In these settings of encounter and entanglement between white and black, it is perhaps more appropriate to view the corroboree as a strategic 'contact ritual', rather than as simply an Indigenous entertainment (see Carter 1992: 165). In those initial engagements, it is fair to say that the corroboree was, as Paul Carter observes, "the spatial embodiment of a distinct moment in contact history" (loc. cit.).

In a contact situation, the corroboree represented an attempt by Aboriginal people to mediate a unique and distinctive event, and engage in dialogue with the newcomers. It used a form of communication, both physical and verbal gestures, that encouraged participation and negotiation of the historical space enacted in the performance and increasingly occupied by the colonists. If the corroboree started off as a contact ritual, it soon became a colonial amusement. A European invention that appeared to nullify the original political meanings of the performance.

For example, the *Wild River Times* (3 May 1890) reports that on 'Blanket Day' in Atherton (Figure 6) in 1890:

[A] collection was made amongst the whites and several pounds of tobacco purchased, to be given as rewards to the niggers for climbing large trees, corroboree, etc (cited in Birtles 1982: 58).



Figure 6: 'Blanket Issue Day for Aborigines', Atherton, ca. 1914 (Photo courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).

Aboriginal people were now being herded onto the stage of white history, or so it seemed. In late 2004, Auntie Emma, Warren Canendo, Stanley Morta, George Morta, Arnold Murray and I visited one of these stages in Malanda:

Let's stand up here like the old photos [Figure 7]. This is where they used to dance here, at The Jungle. All the tourist bus used to come up there. Used to throw boomerang, spear, they reckoned three or four bus loads. Grandad Douglas, Uncle Paddy Moran, Claudie Solomon, Noel Raymond. They were in the dance troupe. They used to just be in a lap lap. Prince Charles when he came here, even the Queen come here, Grandad Davey Douglas said to him, "I'll knock that cross off". See that cross up top there [pointing to the cross affixed to the top of the nearby Catholic Church]. He took a piece of that off. That old Pastor got sick of fixing it.

When the tourists used to come here, they used to throw that boomerang and spear, show em, they all painted up too. Then after that they would walk in there [pointing to inside The Jungle enclosure] then and do the dance then. Climb up a tree. Them old people used to get paid with a hessian bag, paid bread, rice, fruit and then a big flagon of wine. That's what this old fella here, that's Tom English's place now [pointing to the property adjoining 'The Jungle'], that's the Migalu [whitefella] now who started it all off. He used to pay them that. He used to make some good money out of them. There used to be three or four busloads they reckoned. Because Tom English used to have the

pub, had 50 rooms, the tourists used to go down there. We just got sick of being ripped off. Wasn't only that, Old Tom lost interest. He made enough djanga [money]. He lost interest after that. It went on for some years.



Figure 7: 'Aboriginal climbing tree in English's Jungle Avenue, Malanda' (Photo courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).

We used to stop on the river there, on the North Johnstone River, at great granny's camp at the Malanda Falls. That's where I learned to swim there. There was me, great nana, Granny Molly, mum, Auntie Marg, Uncle Ernie, Auntie Emma was out on the farm.

After they finished throwing the boomerang and the spear and that, they came down here and dance then at the Tea Shed. They used to get dressed up and everything there. Migalu used to come here and have a cup of tea and thing. Tourists used to chuck em money, and Tom would give them wine.

They used to have a stinging tree here to show the tourists, it was all part of the get up and go. It was fenced off for the tourists, it was to show those Europeans what a stinging tree looked like.

They used to climb these trees here. Grandad Paddy used to climb it. Auntie Jessie been tell us one time when that old fella was climbing that tree, he fell out of the tree because he slipped. And he fell on the ground and all the tourists thought it was part of the act. No, No, No. I'll tell you the true story about that. Uncle Paddy now, climbing that tree now, he got half way, he slipped. When he hit the ground, old Tommy said, "Ladies and gentlemen that's part of the act". Uncle Paddy got up and said "part of the act be fucked!" He was hurting. When he got up all those tourists were still clapping and cheering.

The Malanda Jungle was first established by James English, the patriarch of the pioneering English family, in 1928. It closed during World War II but was reopened by James English's son, Patrick English, in 1946. As local settler and historian, Henry Tranter, observes, the visit of Prince Charles in 1968 briefly revived the popularity of 'The Jungle' as a tourist attraction. The Malanda Jungle eventually closed in the 1970s (Eacham Historical Society 1995: 18).

Ngadjon-Jii people not only performed at 'The Jungle', but as the Ngadjon-Jii elder Henry Robinson once remarked, "we lived in the jungle as a tourist attraction, my mother and father were the main attraction" (Figure 8). Many other Ngadjon-Jii people camped and foraged in 'The Jungle' during the period of its operation and some of them are buried there. Ernie Raymont recalls that when his family moved off the farm at Glen Allyn, they went and lived at 'The Jungle':

When we went to 'The Jungle', the Kidners were there, Parkinsons and Henry Robinson's family. Big Mick Calico, Mick Battle and the Mitchells were also there. They were all living in midja made of ginger leaf and bladey grass. Englishs let people live there. Some people worked for Bulbul ['old man'] English.

Like other Ngadjon-Jii people living on the edge of Malanda, people who lived in 'The Jungle' worked for the English family, either as part of the 'tourist attraction' or as domestics and labourers at the English-owned Malanda Hotel.

In many ways, Ngadjon-Jii stories about the performances at 'The Jungle' point to the "double lives" that Aboriginal people lead as 'subject people'. To cite Veronica Strang's words at length, this double life meant "conforming superficially to the invaders' demands whilst doing their best to maintain, invisibly, the aspects of their culture that the new regime deemed unacceptable" (Strang 1997: 73). I would also suggest here a more ironic reading of

these performances. These boomerang-throwing, tree-climbing and lap-lap dancing performances can be seen as a form of Indigenous burlesque, parodying the whites own theatrical nostalgia for symbolic Aborigines, stripped of any spatial and historical context.



Figure 8: 'Aboriginals at their Natural Huts, English's Jungle Avenue, Malanda', ca. 1930s (Photo courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).

Moreover, actions such as knocking the cross off the church, 'charging-up' for some performances, public swearing, using the very setting of these theatrical manifestations to evade the authorities, all represent small acts of defiance. Stanley Morta explains some of the other uses of 'The Jungle':

'The Jungle' was good for running away from the Law. They used to be frightened to come in here. They couldn't find us. Back then, because the Act only finished in 1968, so they still wanted to take them away and put them in a place to try and civilise them. We used to hide out all through here. There are tracks going all roads here. Buliman [policeman] never used to come in here, they still won't come in here. He'll sit on the edge of the scrub and shine that light. He won't come into the rainforest because he know that Murri territory. He'll be in our backyard.

In the end, the theatre that was played out in one of the last remaining stands of rainforest in Malanda was an act of double representation. It not only mirrored the vestiges of a colonial consciousness but it also dismantled the illusion that this was, in any way, just an act. Perhaps, what really mattered was that these staged displays of Aboriginality allowed Ngadjon-Jii people to assert an undeniable presence in a landscape that was replete with their historical absences.

CONCLUSION

Yamani Country is a different kind of spatial exploration than that undertaken by early Europeans. It sets out to challenge the “picturesque” (Carter 1987: 339) view of landscape one encounters when travelling around the Atherton Tableland or journeying through the journals of white pioneers. This space, nowadays more fragmented with fences than forested with trees, constitutes a sentient landscape for Ngadjon-Jii people and other Aboriginal people who dwell here. The extent to which Europeans occupying the same physical space have understood the Indigenous significance of this cultured landscape is debatable. Brief references in historical texts give some idea of the degree of mutual understanding and the journeys still to be undertaken towards this end.

For example, local historian, J. May writes that:

The belt of country of volcanic origin ranging from the Crater, Bromfield Swamp, Lake Eacham and Barrine and the country around were to the blacks a “no man’s land” of “devil devils” (May 1978: 22).

As May points out, Europeans, worried about ‘hostile natives’, took advantage of these beliefs and intentionally camped in these taboo areas. In ‘North to the Timbers’, Peter English recalls that as James English pushed through the ‘scrub’ towards his selections around Malanda, he camped at Lake Eacham. As English observes:

In camping there they followed the old custom of travellers in that region, because it was held to be safe from aborigines, who were afraid of “debbil-debbils” at the lake (English 1964: 25).

Edgar Short also notes that areas of volcanic eruptions were considered “debbil debbil country, to be avoided if at all possible” (Short 1988: 60).

Archibald Meston, writing about the customs of the ‘blacks’ of Lake Eacham and Lake Barrine, notes that they have a “curious legend about an immense cedar log” (cited in Tindale nd: 151-152). Eric Mjöberg also makes some reference to the ‘great spirit’ associated with these two lakes (Mjöberg 1918: 79-80). In a similar vein, the German ethnologist, Hermann Klaatsch, states that the volcanic lake of Lake Eacham is “believed to be inhabited by a dangerous giant snake; the rainbow was the reflection of its brilliant skin” (Klaatsch 1907: 580).

Talking about his Aboriginal carriers and collectors on the 1904 ascent of Bellenden-Ker, Meston comments that:

They people the vast and solemn solitudes of the summit with weird and awful phantoms of their own imagination (Meston 1904:7).

Rather than dismissing Aboriginal beliefs and practices as mere fantasies and delusions, Eric Mjöberg acknowledges that “the Aborigine’s spiritual life is totally different from that of the white man. They have concepts and beliefs that are totally incompatible with our own” (Mjöberg 1918: 128). Arguing against government and missionary practices of the era, Mjöberg writes:

Let them enjoy their lives in their own territories! Do not poison their minds to the call of their ancestors! Do not hasten their spiritual degradation! Soon enough this fascinating people, a living example of man’s evolution, will be non existent (Mjöberg 1918: 130).

And so it seemed to many, as the land was cleared and cultivated, Indigenous culture “broke down” and the Aborigines of the rainforest disappeared from view on the pages of the settler histories of North Queensland. While marginalised and in many cases, absent from history, as the following chapters attest, Ngadjon-Jii people did not disappear when their country went up in smoke or was washed away on the Russell River Goldfield.