

CHAPTER FOUR – LAYING BARE THE BONES OF THE SNAKE

*How quickly nature falls into revolt
When gold becomes her object! – William Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part 1.*

Meston's report had barely covered Palmerston's bleak igneous surfaces with a green hue of botanical terms when hundreds of European and Chinese miners descended upon the Russell River catchment and started to strip away the layers of green and black in the search for gold. Cutting deep terraces and tunnels through these sediments of time and washing away the screened effluvia down the tributaries of the Russell River, the miners laid bare the bones of the country created by the rainbow snake, *Yamani*.

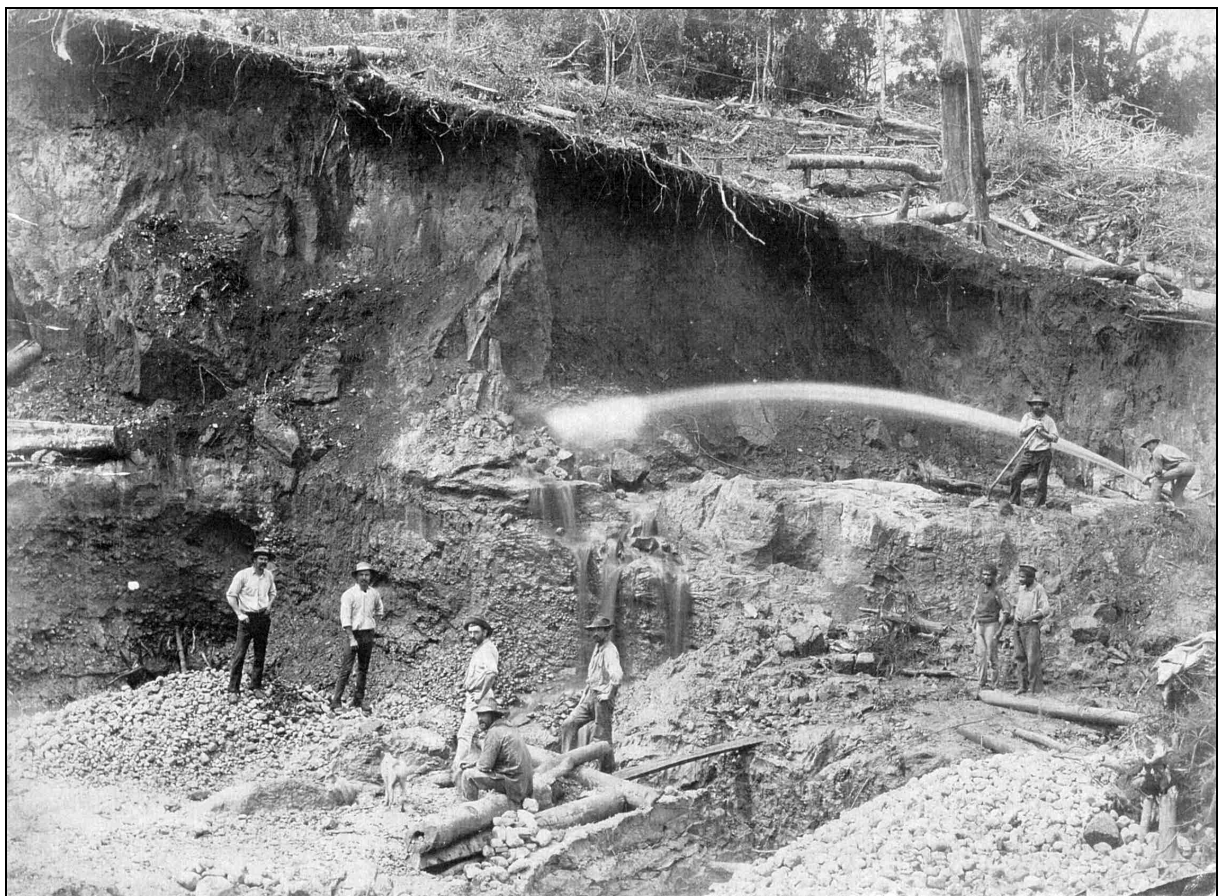


Figure 10: 'Gold sluicing at Union Gold Mine, Russell River, 1890s' (Photo courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).

In its heyday, in the 1890s, the mining town of Boonjie boasted a store, a hotel, a butcher's shop and a bakery (Short 1988: 37). It serviced the hundred or so white miners working the upper reaches of the Russell River Goldfield (sometimes also called the Boonjie Goldfield) from the time of its discovery by Christie Palmerston and George Clarke in 1886 until its demise in the early 1900s. In the late 1880s, the mining encampment at Boonjie marked the first white settlement in what later became, in 1907, the Parish of Malanda. Today, the only physical reminder of the township and its mining past is what remains of the wooden building that once was the store. What happened to Boonjie seems to have been the fate of so many

mining towns around Australia. What is often overlooked in the history of these towns is that these now degraded spaces of abandoned shafts and worked-over mullock heaps have become Aboriginal spaces once again. In some places, the spatial memory of a prior but brief European presence has vanished along with the miners and the mining infrastructure. Like so many other accounts of mining in Australia, the story about Boonjie and the Russell River Goldfield is largely a story about the exploits and gains of the Europeans. As in Palmerston's diaries of prospecting along the Russell River, Aboriginal people seem to only appear in these early scenes of 'golden soil and wealth for toil' as human packhorses and unpaid labourers (Figure 10).

The memories of Ngadjon-Jii people, and the stories they tell about gold-prospecting on the upper reaches of the Russell River, take us beyond the still black and white images of the era, where Aboriginal workers are glimpsed as part of the background of white exploitation. The stories that unfold in this chapter tell a more complex and entangled tale of Aboriginal-European relations than statements by pioneer historians that "native labour, men and women, were engaged by the miners at Boonjie, to dig water races for sluicing" (Johnston 1983: 10). They also tell us more about the production of the mining landscape that emerged around Boonjie at the end of the nineteenth century. Importantly, these stories tell us something about the reproduction of an Indigenous sense of locality and landscape that is also subject to the context-producing drive of Europeans, both as individuals and as a more omnipotent colonial presence.

THE 'KING' OF BOONJIE

Emma Johnston's mother, Molly Raymond (*Bundjabili*, Figure 11), identified in some settler accounts, as the "last Ngadjan Aborigine who could remember the arrival of the first Europeans to the Malanda area" (Eacham Historical Society 1995: 6), was born around 1890 in an Aboriginal camp near the headwaters of the Russell River.



Figure 11: Molly Raymond, Malanda, ca. early 1990s (Photo courtesy Yvonne Canendo).

In the same year of Granny Molly's birth, and at nearly the same place, Fred Brown built the store and hotel that became the centre of the mining township of Boonjie. If the establishment of Boonjie marked the first white settlement in the Eacham Shire, then it could also be said that Boonjie was the first Aboriginal fringe camp in the region. However, as Auntie Emma Johnston explains, Boonjie was an Aboriginal camp well before the arrival of the miners:

I remember just a little bit of this place. They used to have sports down here. The white people. Yeah Mum [Molly Raymond] and them used to live down here. Over there where Casanelli's [the name of an European farmer] is now that's where the camp was, all around there. Casanelli's only been here 30 or 40 years. Down that side, that's where the men folk would camp, women folk would go over there, and if they were going to have kids they would go over there. Cousin Dick was born over there. Auntie Kitty Clarke she had her son over there, Dick Illin.



Figure 12: 'A group of Aborigines, Upper Russell River 1895, with implements and body markings' (Photo courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).

Emma Johnston's mother, Molly Raymond, grew up at the Boonjie camp. Here she lived with her mother, *Gungudja* (Sally Beard), and her maternal grandfather, *Ngadja* (Barry Clarke), as well as with many other Ngadjon-Jii people. While Molly was born at Boonjie in the first years

of contact with Europeans, a number of her relatives were born at Boonjie in the pre-contact period. They included, Molly's mother, *Gungudja*, Mosie (brother of *Gungudja*), as well as some of the children of *Ngadja*, *Wundajila* (Jack Clarke), *Tagadja* (Joe Clarke), *Juruwayu* (Polly Clarke) and Willie Clarke. Senior Ngadjon-Jii people identify Boonjie as a "big camp, all the Murris were there at Boonjie".

The first Europeans in the region referred to the Aborigines of the upper Russell River as the 'Boonjie tribe' (Figure 12). According to May, "the Boonjie tribe seems to have located the Johnstone River and followed it towards Malanda, as most of the aboriginals still alive in the Malanda district lived originally in the goldfield country" (1969: 3A).

Ngadjon-Jii people refer to the 'goldfield country' as *Ngadja's* country. With the arrival of the Europeans, *Ngadja's* country was also called Barry's Pocket:

Grandad Barry [Ngadja] was here. This is his ground. They called it Barry's Pocket. He lived here with his five wives. This was early days. Migalu [white people] gave him a plaque and crowned him as a king. My mum [Dinah Calico] was little then. Grandad Barry had a daughter called Jinny, and those two were small, they used to say, "Grandad don't walk around with that thing. It looks heavy. Take it off". And he said, "No I can't do that". And they said, "Why". "Because I'm King". When they took his body from around here, that plaque went with him. Our old grandfather died at Boonjie. The old people mummified him. They dried out his body. They took it over to Germany. We still looking for him. - Auntie Jessie Calico

Ngadjon-Jii people are correct in thinking that their ancestor was taken to Germany. From European records, it is possible to piece together something of what happened to the mummified body of *Ngadja*. In early 1905, the German ethnologist, Hermann Klaatsch, made a brief expedition to the 'Bellenden Ker Mountains'. Klaatsch was in Australia at the time to "attack the problem of the origin of the Australian blacks, and of their import in relation to the whole development of mankind" (Klaatsch 1907: 576). His investigations into this issue involved studying the skeletons and skulls of Australian Aborigines and comparing them with "primitive man in Europe" (loc. cit.). Accordingly, his excursions into the rainforests of North Queensland were primarily to collect 'specimens'. On this subject, Klaatsch writes:

A most important field for the investigation proved to be the Bellenden Kerr [sic] Mountains inland from Cairns, where a great number of half-civilised and free-living tribes are located. Some of these were found to be in a good condition, but others were in a state of decay, largely owing to the introduction of opium by the Chinese. One of the best specimens collected here was the mummy of an old chief, "Naicha" of "Boonjie" (Upper Russel [sic] River), which had been perfectly smoked eight months after death. The negotiations with the relatives for the possession were difficult, but successful (Klaatsch 1907: 578).

Appended to Klaatsch's somewhat obscure article are a number of photographs of 'natives' of the Cairns district, including two photographs of the mummified corpse. A frontal view of the "mummy of native chief" shows the corpse with a 'king plate' inscribed with the words, "Naicha, King Boonjie".

As the anthropologist, L. R. Hiatt, remarks "the colonists had adopted the practice of rewarding particular natives for their services by giving them brass breast plates inscribed

with a royal title” (Hiatt 1996: 82)¹³. For Ngadjon-Jii people today, the bestowal of a ‘king plate’ upon *Ngadja* is perceived by them as European acknowledgement of traditional structures of authority within their society. While early European accounts of Aboriginal society indicate that certain individuals were accorded the status of ‘men of high degree’ (Elkin 1945) or ‘elders’, they consistently note, however, the absence of chiefs or headmen, and formal institutions of government. As Hiatt observes, it was only in the later part of the nineteenth century, particularly after the 1874 publication of the Reverend George Taplin’s report of ‘chiefs’ among the ‘Narrinyeri nation’ at the mouth of the Murray River, that a more authoritarian, in contrast to the previous libertarian, view of Aboriginal political life emerged (Hiatt 1996: 86-87). The creation of Aboriginal ‘kings’ and ‘princes’ reflected more the colonists’ own cultural traditions of ‘finding a chief’, than it did those of Aboriginal society (cf Sahlins 1981, 1985). Moreover, the projection of European cultural categories upon Aboriginal society served the political interests of individual colonists and the government alike. This said, so-called Aboriginal ‘kings’ also played an important role in brokering relations between colonial agents and Indigenous people (see Trigger 1992; Sutton 1998). This mediatory role is apparent in one report of the annual ‘Blanket Day’ ceremony in Cairns:

About 115 blacks mustered in the police yard and each received the regulation blanket ... Inspector Durham then invested two aborigines with a brass plate and chain each, declaring them the Kings of the Cairns and Barron tribes respectively and urging them to all in their power to put down tribal fights and prevent lawlessness. He said that the police would protect the blacks so long as they did no wrong and the new kings would have to assist the police in every way to prevent the aboriginals breaking the laws (cited in Birtles 1968: 341).

This ‘structure of the conjuncture’ (Sahlins 1985) – in which European categories came to be embodied by the Indigenous and the ‘natives’ in turn were, often with some difficulty, integrated into the colonial order –, was enacted over and over again as one of the dominant cultural schemes of colonialism. While over time the categories changed – ‘kings’ were replaced by other government appointments – the structural asymmetries between black and white remained.

The anthropologist, Norman B. Tindale, provides further information on Emma Johnston’s great grandfather, *Ngadja*. In the file notes for his unpublished manuscript ‘Little People of the Rainforest’, Tindale has a photograph of a mummified corpse (Figure 13). On the back of this photograph, Tindale identifies the corpse as being that of “Na:tja after mummification June 1904”. This is probably the same person Tindale refers to as “a rather tall ... clever man of the tribe who died in 1904” named ‘Nga:tja’ (Tindale 1974: 183). Tindale notes that the photographic “plate reads Narcha 1897”. While Tindale queries whether the photograph was taken by the Cairns photographer Alfred Atkinson, he writes that the “ceremony was witnessed by Klaatsch in June 1904” [Dr Hermann Klaatsch] (Tindale nd). In another reference, Tindale refers to the corpse in the photograph as “King Narda of the Boonjie tribe via Atherton” (Tindale nd). In yet another reference, Tindale observes that the Australian Museum in Sydney has two mummified Aboriginal corpses. The first is a woman named ‘Con-mo’. Tindale notes that the corpse is decorated in red ochre and is said to be from the ‘Ding-al-Booron tribe’. Tindale believes this tribe to be the ‘Dungara horde of the Irukandji tribe” on the lower Barron River (Tindale nd). The second ‘mummy’ is from the “Lake

¹³ Edmund Kennedy is arguably the first European to initiate this practice in North Queensland. In May 1848, Kennedy and his party landed at a small bay between Tam O’Shanter Point and the mouth of the Hull River (near Mission Beach). A number of natives gathered on the beach to witness Kennedy’s landing. To the Europeans, the Aborigines seemed peaceful. Kennedy presented the natives with two, round tin plates with his initials stamped in them, and chains with which they could hang the plates around their necks (Jones 1961: 31).

Eacham tribe". This specimen is called "Koo-ee". Tindale is unsure of the meaning of this name (Tindale nd).

Christie Palmerston was the first European to witness and record details of a Ngadjon-Jii mortuary ceremony. On September 24, 1886 he witnessed a 'Coway' ceremony performed for an old man called 'Nooychoo'. This ceremony took place in Ngadjon-Jii country not far from 'Pantapo' bora ground, between Wairambah and Kiandra Creeks. According to Palmerston, "there are several hundred of aborigines called together for the special purpose of mummifying the corpse" (cited in Savage 1992: 219). Palmerston records that 'Wallajar', the elder brother of the deceased was present at the ceremony, as were a "dozen of the



Figure 13: 'Aboriginal mummy of King Narcha of the Boonjie Tribe, 1890s' (Photo courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).

dead man's sons" (Savage 1992: 218). Palmerston eyes the "well-cured mummy of a still older brother, named 'Monumbaloo'" and writes that he "would have liked to have taken it for the British Museum" (loc. cit.), but decided that discretion was required, given that he was severely out-numbered at the time.

In his three volumes on the *Queensland Aborigines* (1984), Walter E. Roth provides a series of photographs of Ngadjon-Jii mortuary practices and states, "on the Russell River [the] desiccation process appears to be highly developed, the 'mummy' being ornamented" (Roth 1984: 393). He also notes that 'desiccation' is reserved for "very distinguished males" and that upon 'desiccation' the corpse is tied up and "carried about for months" (loc. cit.). Roth's observations accord with Ngadjon-Jii accounts that the mummified corpse of *Ngadja*, replete with king plate, was carried around by his last wife, Jessie Calico's great grandmother, Sarah Horsey, until it was taken by Klaatsch in 1905.

Perhaps it is more appropriate to speak of Auntie Jessie's 'granny' carrying around the body of the 'King of Boonjie', Barry Clarke, rather than the corpse of *Ngadja*. For the bestowal of the king plate had transformed the identity and status of *Ngadja*. Forever. As Paul Carter points out, "at the very moment he is named, the Aborigine becomes someone else or nobody" (Carter 1987: 331). The heaviness that Auntie Jessie's mother so perceptively refers to when asking her grandfather to remove the breast plate is arguably the weight of enslavement, the bonds of debt-peonage that went with this object of colonial oppression masquerading as a symbol of Aboriginal power.

THE CREATION OF ABORIGINAL LABOUR

The European accounts of what happened to the body of *Ngadja* provide some insight into Aboriginal life in the early years of contact with Europeans. Some twenty years after the opening of the Russell River Goldfield, it appears that Ngadjon-Jii people are still living on their ancestral lands and undertaking a range of ceremonies and cultural practices. While these accounts point to a culturally more complex view of the early contact period, they also succinctly capture European attitudes of the time, particularly those ideas about race clumsily based on social Darwinian principles. As Palmerston's comments and Klaatsch's actions indicate, propping up these racist ideas meant that even Aboriginal people themselves were not beyond appropriation by Europeans – "carried away as cultural treasure by the victors" (Carter 1987: 327). Some idea of the nature and degree of European appropriation and exploitation of Aborigines can be found in the recollections of Ngadjon-Jii people:

My mum [Molly Raymond] told me her and Arnold's granny, Lydia, used to go through Boonjie to Kiandra [Creek] when they were kids. They worked on the gold sluices washing the gold. Granny Molly ran away from old Boonjie when the police came out. Police chased them as they were half castes. When Molly saw the buliman [police] she ran away along the river [Russell River] all the way to Kiandra Creek. They caught Lydia and took her away [to Yarrabah]. But Molly got away. – Auntie Emma Johnston

Palmerston's diaries and interviews with the press of the day provide some insight into the processes by which rainforest Aboriginal people were transformed into 'black labourers'. Palmerston talks of 'giving' various European items, pocket handkerchiefs, matches, blankets, and his own shirt, to the Aborigines he encounters in the rainforest in return for them acting as temporary 'swagmen' (see Savage 1992: 219). There is no suggestion of his 'boys' being paid wages for their labour. Palmerston's 'boys' are fed and clothed as payment, a 'method' which the Government Geologist, Robert L. Jack, reports as being both "expensive and troublesome" (Jack 1888: 2). Palmerston further suggests that treating the Aborigines 'kindly' not only amounts to a form of symbolic payment but also somehow atoned

for the overall brutality of Aboriginal exploitation. As he states in an 1887 press interview, “Blackfellows ... have generally been shot down by any whites who have come into contact with them” (cited in Savage 1992: 237). As his diaries testify, Palmerston himself is not beyond ‘rifling’ (ibid: 218) the Aborigines he comes into contact with. Behind Palmerston’s actions lies his ‘belief’ “that the country must be cleared and utilised by means of black labour” (ibid: 239). According to Palmerston, Europeans could not be enticed to work for the same kind of pittance provided to Aboriginal workers or “work for a master in the scrubs” (loc. cit.). As Palmerston comments, a ‘white man’ toils so that he can make “a home for himself and his family” and enjoy the future riches and ‘snug comforts’ of such efforts (loc. cit.).



Figure 14: ‘Sluicing gold at the Mayflower Claim on the Russell River using hydraulic sluicing, ca. 1890s’ (Photo courtesy of the Cairns Historical Society).

Palmerston’s remarks imply that ‘black labour’ is not compelled by such capitalist visions of prosperity and independence, making Aborigines ideal subjects for future “training as carriers

and clearers” (ibid: 240). Critical to realising this future role for the ‘native blacks’ are the Aboriginal ‘boys’ recruited by Palmerston and other Europeans. Identified by the colonists as ‘half-civilised natives’, they often procured Aborigines from the rainforests to work as carriers or some years later, brought them into government ration depots.

Early European reports speak of Aborigines working with gold miners on the upper reaches of the Russell River. For example, by 1890 Fred Brown had built more than three and half miles of water race to his ‘Astronomer claim’ “and engaged dozens of aboriginals (men and women) in sluicing operations” (May 1969: 4B) (Figure 14). Like Christie Palmerston, Fred Brown “fed and clothed the blacks in return for their work” (loc. cit.). Ernie Raymont recalls what his ‘granny’ told him about Fred Brown and his relationships with the Aboriginal people of the area:

Granny Molly said fella called Brown owned the store at Boonjie. He was good to Murri. He was with Granny Lucy when the miners were there.

Lucy Brown (aka Lucy Bullion) or *Bindiri* was one of *Ngadja*’s four wives. Lucy’s sister, *Yuyarli*, had a relationship with another Boonjie miner, Tom Anderson, and was also known by her European name, Lucy Anderson.

The labour potential of Aboriginal people on the Russell River Goldfield also attracted the attention of European selectors in the vicinity of Atherton. To combat Aboriginal raids on corn crops and livestock, largely brought about by European clearing of the rainforest homes of Indigenous groups, selectors raised a subscription to buy rations for the “marauding wild blacks if the government provided a matching grant” (Birtles 1995: 21). A number of selectors volunteered “to assist in the training of select Aborigines in domestic or farm labour” (loc. cit.). One selector proposed that:

Some of the selectors should go out to the Russell [goldfield], and with promises of free-rations get some of the gins and picaninnies to camp in one of the grass pockets near the Barron [River] (Cairns Post, 1 February 1888, cited in Birtles 1995: 21).

As Birtles reports, in 1888 “the government approved a pound for pound subsidy” (Birtles 1995: 21) and the European community around Atherton “subscribed liberally”. As a result of the subsidy, large numbers of Aborigines were removed from their rainforest homes to government camps located around the main ration depots at Atherton and Kuranda. In this period, 1890-1895, the Aboriginal population of these two camps doubled to more than 800 inhabitants (loc. cit.). From these fringe camps, selectors were able to recruit Aboriginal labour.

There are other reports of the time that suggest local Aborigines were enlisted by ‘the whites’, namely Christie Palmerston, to prevent the ‘Chinese’ from infiltrating the more productive gold-bearing areas in the headwaters of the Russell River (May 1969: 4B). These early accounts suggest that Palmerston, “supported by a body of armed blacks” (Savage 1992: 252), forced the Chinese diggers on the Russell River Goldfield to purchase their supplies from him and extorted payments from them in return for their safe passage to and from the diggings.

Palmerston’s alleged actions highlight the role of terror and violence in the political economy of the goldfields at this time. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the shooting of Aboriginal people was still a commonplace way for Europeans to deal with property theft by the Indigenous population. In his 1888 survey of the ‘Geology of the Russell River’, Robert L. Jack reports several incidences of ‘larceny’, ‘attacks’ and ‘murders’ by both ‘absolute savages’ and ‘half civilised blacks’ (Jack 1888). In turn, Meston’s 1889 report clearly speaks

of the “wholesale murder” (Meston 1889: 9) of Aborigines by miners and other Europeans for “the sake of gain” (loc. cit.). In a situation similar to that described by Michael Taussig regarding the operation of the Peruvian Amazon (rubber) Company, on the Russell River Goldfield the use of terror and violence was rationalised as a means of extracting both gold and Aboriginal labour. Yet, to take Taussig’s point further, on the Russell River Goldfield in the 1880s and 1890s, “there was neither a commodity form of labour nor a market for it” (Taussig 1987: 53). What did exist were Aborigines “with their quite different modes of exchange and valuation, coexisting with various forms of colonial domination: patronage, concubinage, slavery and debt-peonage” (loc. cit.). On the Russell River, it was labour, a “free wage-labour contract with capital” (ibid: 69) that was scarce, and not Aborigines or gold. As Palmerston’s diaries and Meston’s report so chillingly reveal, the slaughter of Aboriginal people by the colonists was not because of the rationality of ‘economic gain’, but because of their alleged savagery and cannibalistic traditions. For Europeans, it was this very innate savagery that drove Aborigines to kill whites. Both colonists and Europeans alike were caught up in the ‘terrifying mythologies’ of what Taussig calls the ‘colonial mirror of production’. In this murky terrain, the “terror and tortures [the colonists] devised mirrored the horror of the savagery they both feared and fictionalised” (Taussig 1987: 133).

What is not often revealed in these accounts of the early days of mining is the sexual labour that took place in the name of discovery and progress. As Auntie Emma Johnston’s story reveals, her mother, Molly, and her auntie, Lydia, were being pursued by the troopers of the Native Mounted Police because of the colour of their skin. Molly and Lydia both had European genitors.

Many years after this event, Molly was interviewed by Norman Tindale at Mona Mona settlement. Molly and her daughter, Emma, had apparently been sent to Mona Mona for being “cheeky” to the policeman in Malanda. In late 1938, Tindale records that Molly’s biological father was ‘Fred Wakely’, a European mining inspector. In an interview with R. M. W. Dixon in the 1960s, Molly further reports that her father was “one of the first white men on the goldfields, a Russian geologist” (Dixon 1983: 175). Molly’s comments about the identity of her European genitor suggest a degree of familiarity. However, Ngadjon-Jii accounts speak of Molly’s mother, *Gungudja*, living with a series of Aboriginal husbands, *Wundadjla* (Jack Clarke), *Walba*, and *Tagadja* (Joe Clarke), and of Molly being “grown up” by one of these men. As Auntie Emma Johnston explains:

Molly and Polly [Molly’s sister] took name of Clarke. Grandad Joe reared Molly and Polly, that’s why they took name Clarke. Molly said that whiteman was her father. She also said that Joe was her father too.

Ngadjon-Jii people recall that one of *Gungudja*’s tribal husbands speared Joe Beard, one of the Europeans who also consorted with *Gungudja*. This latter association accounts for *Gungudja*’s European name, Sally Beard. From local accounts, it appears that several Boonjie miners consorted with Ngadjon-Jii women and fathered children. As Taussig observes, the concubinage of Indigenous women constituted a form of colonial “control over the human body” (Taussig 1987: 60) and, I would add, also over the wider social body. When the concubinage of Aboriginal women is linked to a form of debt-peonage system, where Aboriginal men worked as human packhorses and girls and women as domestic servants for nothing more than rations and cast-off clothes, European domination of Aboriginal people gave the appearance, to whites at least, of a benevolent paternalism. This fiction of power parading as avuncular protectionism is particularly evident in the ‘removal’ policies of the time.

While Molly escaped the troopers that day, her ‘sister’, Lydia, wasn’t so fortunate. She was removed to the Anglican Mission at Cape Grafton known as Yarrabah (operating since 1893 when it was known as the Bellenden Ker Reserve). Lydia, like so many other Aboriginal

people in North Queensland, was caught up in the Act – the *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* of 1897. As the name implies, the ‘Act’ ostensibly provided for the ‘protection’ of Aborigines from the depredations of both European and Chinese alike, although the Chinese were more commonly identified in European accounts as the source of Aboriginal “contamination and immorality” (Birtles 1982: 61). Under the ‘Act’, the removal of ‘aboriginal half-castes’ to church missions was not just a matter of protection and preservation, but was also regarded as a means to their ‘improvement’ and ultimate civilisation. Supporters of the ‘Act’ advocated that complete segregation for three or four generations would be necessary before Aborigines could “match European productivity and reliability” (Birtles 1995: 22). Lydia, who was born “in the bush” at Boonjie around 1896 (see Tindale 1938-39), spent the rest of her life being ‘civilised’ at Yarrabah and died there in the 1940s.

The accounts of degeneration and demoralisation one finds so readily in early European accounts of Aborigines on the Atherton Tableland reflect as much European practices as they do the reality of Aboriginal circumstances and conditions. Archibald Meston, in his 1896 report on the conditions of the ‘Aboriginals of North Queensland’ – the basis for the 1897 Act – was appalled by the spread of disease, especially syphilis, and the degree of opium addiction and alcoholism among Aborigines. He also comments on other forms of European abuse and misappropriation, particularly the theft of ‘Aboriginal blankets’ (Meston 1896).

Meston’s report was closely followed by the first attempt at a census of Aboriginal people in North Queensland. Organised by William Parry-Okeden, as part of his investigation into the work of the Native Mounted Police, the census also represented the first systematic attempt by the government to map tribal areas and names (Parry-Okeden 1897). The census was based upon the number of blankets distributed to Aborigines by the police. As Paul Carter points out, if Aborigines could not be counted, “how could blankets be ordered or bullets” (Carter 1897: 321). For the Atherton area, the census gave a figure of 400 Aborigines and listed three so-called ‘tribal’ names, ‘Eaton’, ‘Hucheon’ and ‘Tuffelcey’ (Parry-Okeden 1897). The ‘tribal’ names listed on Parry-Okeden’s map are barely recognisable as the names of the rainforest Aboriginal groups recorded by Norman Tindale in the late 1930s¹⁴.

While a number of ‘tribal’ names first came into view on the government census of 1897, it is clear that by this time many Indigenous personal names had already been supplanted by Europeans ones. Ignoring Indigenous names and giving Aborigines English names allowed missionaries and government protectors to undertake their primary task – to census (see Carter 1987: 332). Naming Aboriginal people in this way turned them into facts, against which useful statistical information could be piled up. Written into police records or on blanket distribution lists as simple syllabic forms, Polly, Jimmy, Lucy, Jinny, etc., Aboriginal people thus entered the ledger book of white history.

Auntie Jessie Calico talks about how *Ngadja* came to be also known as Barry Clarke:

Grandad got his name from people called Clarke who used to be here. That’s how most of them got their name from the people that came in here and worked here. That’s where they got their name from. He worked as a mule packer for Clarke.

Ngadja worked for George E. Clarke, who is said to have “made the first discovery of payable gold” (May 1969: 4A) at ‘Goorka Goorka’ on the Russell River field. Edgar Short observes that *Ngadja*’s son, Joe Clarke, as the surname suggests, was also “employed by George Clarke” (Short 1988: 63). In his account of the ‘Nation Builders’ of the Malanda

¹⁴ Tindale identifies ‘Eaton’ and ‘Hucheon’ as alternative appellations for the ‘Ngatjan’ tribe (Tindale 1974: 183), while Tuffelcey is interpreted by Tindale as referring to ‘Tjapukai’.

region, Short identifies some of the “old miners” that were still around when he and his family arrived in 1912. By this time, however, the Boonjie Goldfield “had almost petered out” (loc. cit.). Short notes that the owner of the Boonjie hotel and store, Fred Brown, was still in the area, as was Tom Denyer and Tom Anderson. A number of Ngadjon-Jii ancestors, notably Jim Brown, Emily Denyer and Lucy Anderson, derive their European surnames from their association with these men.

THE OLD PEOPLE’S TRACK

In settler histories, George Clarke is also synonymous with ‘Clarke’s Track’ (aka the ‘Mailman’s Track’), which ran from “Herberton through what are now named the Crater, Jaggan, Lamonds [sic] Hill, along Gourka Road and then along the Mulgrave River to Cairns” (May 1969: 4A). While European accounts give the impression that George Clarke blazed the track through virgin rainforest, Ngadjon-Jii people speak of the same pathway as an Indigenous one – “the old people’s track”. This track links Lamins Hill to the coast, via the Mulgrave River valley. In the northeast, this walking track is said to mark the boundary between Ngadjon-Jii and Yidinydji people. According to Ngadjon-Jii people, the old people’s track “goes down past Raymont’s Farm, swings back to Malanda, and comes out near Jaggan” (pers. comm. Ernie Raymont).

As noted in chapter three, the existence of Aboriginal walking tracks in this region was recognised by Europeans as early as 1886. As the historian Paul Savage (1992: 215) points out, Christie Palmerston’s ability to move through dense rainforest, sometimes at night, strongly suggests that he used Aboriginal walking tracks, guided as he was by local Aborigines. Indeed, Palmerston mentions the existence of ‘native paths’ throughout his account of his exploration of the Russell River. For example, in the vicinity of Kiandra Creek, near the ‘Lady Olive Goldfields’, Palmerston writes that:

[W]e then saw running along the mountain’s narrow summit north and south a very large native path, following it north, and it soon trended to the north-east ... it led us into a narrow, but long open-capped mountain, named by the aborigines “Yunkka”... (cited in Savage 1992: 205).

Robert Logan Jack, who was accompanied by Palmerston on his geological survey of the Russell River in 1888, also reports the use of Aboriginal walking tracks. He writes that:

[I]n about three-quarters of a mile up a steep basaltic spur on the right bank of Moochoopa Creek (following an old native track) ... we joined the road at a bora ground named Toopan (Jack 1888: 3).

A few years later, Archibald Meston also talks about using an Aboriginal ‘road’ as he moves up the Russell River valley on his scientific expedition of the area (Meston 1889: 108). As Paul Carter points out, European explorers did more than just use native roads, they appropriated them to serve their own ends:

The first roads followed Aboriginal tracks from spring to spring ... The squatters, the drovers with their flocks and herds, the shearers and the teamsters used these native ways and, to gain access to stations, added to them. The big junctions where tracks met or crossed ... became natural campsites from which settlements grew (cited in Carter 1987: 339).

The route taken by Palmerston on his 1886 exploration of the Russell River and its headwaters closely approximates another Ngadjon-Jii walking track which passes Lamin’s Hill, and proceeds to follow the Russell River, winding around the southern base of Mt Bartle

Frere to the coastal plains at Pawngilly. In the words of Auntie Emma Johnston, this track is an:

Old people's track, follows ridge, goes down to Chucklunga Creek, coming down from mountain [Mt Bartle Frere]. Chucklunga goes into Russell River. Follows Jampee Creek. Molly [Emma's mother] used to roam around Jajaba Creek, Majuba Creek before Josephine Falls. Went down to Mulabar. Molly went all the way to Pawngilly [Bungili].

Auntie Jessie Calico recalls that the Russell River track was used by her 'granny', Polly Calico:

Granny Jane [Denyer] used to swim across the Russell River in flood, swim across to Babinda, carrying clothes on her head. They used to talk about Jajaba Creek, used to walk there. Molly Raymond and Polly Calico used to go to Jajaba.

On a trip to Golden Hole on the lower Russell River, Ernie Raymont talked about how his grandmother, Molly Raymond, and great grandmother, *Gungudja*:

Come down to this area. They followed the seasons. They'd come down here and when it got a bit warmer they'd move back up the river. They'd come down from Top Camp, Boonjie, from around Butchers Creek area. When the food ran out that end they came down this end. They were all top Russell River mob, Ngunyanbara Ngadjon-Jii.

The Aboriginal trails along the Russell River were part of a regional network of Aboriginal tracks that connected Ngadjon-Jii people to other groups in the region:

People used to walk from Top Camp to Tumoulin bora ground for corroboree and from Top Camp to Millaa Millaa for corroboree. Granny Molly [Raymond] walked from Top Camp to Tumoulin around the edge of Bromfield Swamp [Biinyabul]. All scrub then. Walked through thick scrub around that swamp. They took yellow walnut with them to trade with Dyirbal people. – Auntie Jessie Calico

Connecting the bora grounds to each other were walking trails kept clear by constant use (pers. comm. Trevor Johnston). The Ngadjon-Jii had several of these major walking trails, mostly from the Tablelands down to the coast. There is a well-remembered trail that starts from near Old Boonjie and passes below Broken Nose on the southern slopes of Mt Bartle Frere (Jeffers 1992).

Ngadjon-Jii people also used these tracks to visit relatives living elsewhere:

When Murri went to Mulgrave they followed the old people's track down. They call it Clarke's Track now. We'd go down there and see our uncles down at Mulgrave, Uncle Tommy Land and Tom Allen. When we were at Top Camp we came over here to Boonjie. I came over with my grandma [Gungudja], she brought me over. We used to like walking around. Just visiting. – Auntie Emma Johnston

The tracks also facilitated the bi-directional movement of trade objects, such as mother-of-pearl shell from the coast, and woven dilly bags from the inland areas.

My grandmother [Polly Calico] had a dilly bag [djandju] with a red handkerchief wrapped around pearl-shell pendants in it. We were told never to touch them. They traded pearl-shell from the coast. She had that dilly bag when we were living in 'The Jungle'. – Auntie Jessie Calico

As Auntie Jessie Calico's comments indicate, these tracks enabled Ngadjon-Jii people to readily move between the coastal lowlands and the upland rainforests. For Ngadjon-Jii people, these tracks provide an important historical link between themselves and their ancestors, whose footsteps they literally walk in as they travel along these walk pads. The walking tracks also represent a physical record of Ngadjon-Jii people's own distinctive occupation of the rainforests. They can also be regarded as the socially-constructed equivalents of 'song lines' or 'Dreaming Tracks' and, as such, constitute an integral dimension of Aboriginal life and land tenure¹⁵. For Ngadjon-Jii people, it is these tracks, and the forest of meaning wound into them, that binds space together and creates as much a landscape of memory as one of physical meandering.

BACK TO BOONJIE

In an interesting reversal of history, Ngadjon-Jii people used the old people's tracks in the late 1960s when prospecting for gold along the tributaries of the Russell River after "being kicked off the farms" when equal wages for Aboriginal people eventuated in the late 1960s. As Emma Johnston's son, Trevor, explains:

Ngadjon people helped clear the land and the women worked on the farms. When the land was cleared people weren't employed any more. From 1966 when Aborigines got independence people got kicked off the farms. They also got fed up with the way they were treated. Some people went and worked in forestry, other went looking for gold.

Reclaiming many of the Indigenous pathways appropriated by Europeans in days gone by, Trevor Johnston recalls their gold-fossicking days:

We did gold chasing around Carr's Hill [near Butchers Creek], and down on Kiandra, Combo and Coolamon Creek. Once I tried camping at The Astronomer [a former gold claim] but packed up in the middle of the night because the spirits were too strong. We used to go to Gulgagulga country for gold. I would go fossicking with Auntie Jessie, my mum [Emma Johnston], and Auntie Elsie Battle. We'd get water from creeks, like Coolamon Creek. We'd be out in the scrub for months. School holidays all the kids would come down and join us. We'd all live off bush tucker.

We went panning for gold. We would dig dirt from corners of the creek and wash it out with sluice. My granny Molly used to go digging for gold. Granny Molly used to blow the rain away. She told the spirits to take the rain away.

¹⁵As this statement implies, land tenure consists of more than merely the control over material resources or is solely concerned with issues of economic productivity. As the work of a number of anthropologists in Australia demonstrates (Berndt 1970; Myers 1986; Williams 1986), land tenure relates to the social and metaphysical dimensions of human existence. Following on from the proposition of tenure as a system of social and cosmological relations, Ingold argues that it may also be the case that "tenure in hunting and gathering societies is not of surface area, but of sites and paths within a [cultural] landscape" (Ingold 1986: 153).

She could also make it rain, talk lingo. Granny Molly would make rain with a fire-stick.

Trevor and his family continued to live with 'spirits' and 'chase' gold around the headwaters of the Russell River up until the late 1980s when the declaration of the region as part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area made 'gold chasing' an illegal activity. For Ngadjon-Jii people, the declaration of their rainforested country as a World Heritage Area signalled a new era of permits and permissions, of surveillance and intervention. Like many other rainforest Aboriginal people, 1988 heralded a new era of protectionism, this time dressed up as *conservation* on a universal scale.

CONCLUSION

These days, the terraces and sluices constructed by the likes of Fred Brown and his Aboriginal workforce have mostly been reclaimed by the rainforest or washed away by the torrential rains that fall each wet season in this region. Notwithstanding the landscape-shaping force of these natural processes, it is still possible to discern the earthworks of the early European miners at the sites of former claims, such as 'The Astronomer', or on the 'Lady Olive Goldfield'.

Today, these relics of a former time are located on the periphery of European settlement, rather than constituting the centre of this settlement, as was the case in the late nineteenth century. Boonjie and the Russell River Goldfield were not obliterated by the axes and fires that followed, but were largely forgotten in the founding of the Parish of Malanda.