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Please knock before you enter:

An investigation of how Rainforest Aboriginal people regulate outsiders  
and the implications for western research and researchers.

Thesis submitted by

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in June, 2006

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Indigenous Australian Studies  
James Cook University

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## DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)*, the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (1997)*, the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines (2001)*, and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (2001)*. The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Review Committee (approval number: H1311).

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## STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the Noonuccal, Quandamooopah and Bidjara Ancestors, *Peoples* and Country. I also acknowledge the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Ancestors, *Peoples* and Country for their patience and persistence in teaching Outsiders. In particular I acknowledge Mr Peter Fischer, Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Elder for his trust, faith and the blessing of his Law. I also acknowledge the Ancestors of the *Lands, Waterways* and *Spirit* systems of the many locations where I worked, visited, lived and rested during this research study and made safe its journey. This includes mostly locations within Queensland, but also other places in Australia and then also Canada (Alberta and Manitoba).

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## ABSTRACT

The regulation of Outsiders to Aboriginal Country is theorised by scholars as invasion and contact, race relations, frontiers and acculturation. In these theories Aboriginal *People* are represented as powerless and hopeless in the face of their inevitable assimilation. Aboriginal regulation of Outsiders is rarely investigated for Aboriginal agency. This research study investigated the agency of a Rainforest Aboriginal Community, the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji of Far North Queensland, Australia in the regulation of Outsiders to their Country of past, present and future.

A major feature of this research study is its development of an Indigenist research paradigm founded on the principles of cultural respect and cultural safety and embedded in Aboriginal ontology, epistemology and axiology. It is through an ontological premise of relatedness and with the use of traditional devices such as First Stories and visual Stories that this Indigenist research paradigm makes transparent the assumptions, theory, methodology and ethics of the research study. The theoretical framework, called relatedness theory, is comprised of three conditions: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing. These conditions articulate particular orientations to knowing, being and doing that are available to Aboriginal scholars. Thus, Indigenist research methodology is both an inquiry and immersion process that is named after the Quampie, the pearl shell and consists of four phases. The first phase begins by working through the three conditions of relatedness theory. The second phase is an inquiry process structured by eight research procedures. The third phase is the immersion in the research study contexts. The fourth phase engages three Indigenist research projects of critique, re-framing and harmonisation to re-present the research Stories. Quampie methodology, as Indigenist research methodology, requires culturally rigorous choices to be made for methods for data collection. Thus the research study

utilised multiple methods for data collection. These are the analysis of literature produced by the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji and the analysis of selected literature about them; field visits and Storywork. Storywork is a culturally safe, culturally respectful and culturally relevant research method based on Aboriginal epistemology, communication protocols and discourse.

This research study found the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji have always exerted agency in the regulation of Outsiders and this is theorised in three forms of relatedness: *ngarrbal* meaning 'stranger' is an Outsider who is unknown; *waybal* meaning 'whiteman' is an Outsider who is known about, and *jarwon* meaning 'friend' is an Outsider who is known. Each form of relatedness is regulated according to the types and levels of physical, social, emotional, cultural and economic relatedness between Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji and the Outsiders. These are either direct or indirect regulations that occur in limited interactions, limited engagements or sustained engagements. Accordingly, *ngarrbal*, or 'stranger' is regarded as a temporary state of relatedness by the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji who regulate and mediate the interactions through series of enfoldments and evolvments. These are established as processes of 'coming amongst' and 'coming alongside' the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji in relatedness as 'another'. Outsiders achieve this in fulfilling conditions of honesty, co-operation and respect and at the same time, maintain their own identity and autonomy so that relatedness is expanded and not diminished or replaced. Thereby, the agency of Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji, in the regulation of Outsiders of past, present and future, is as *madja*, meaning boss, in that they have never excluded anyone who fulfils these conditions but have equally protected their own relatedness.

The implications and challenges for western research and researchers is to engage research as an interface where conceptual, cultural and historical spaces interface or come alongside each other based on new relationships to knowledge, to research and to self. Thus, Protocols for research developed for this research study demonstrate these different relationships in a research agreement that gives greater agency to the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji. The Protocols state seven rules for research to direct culturally safe and culturally respectful researcher behaviour and ensure researcher responsibilities and accountabilities to the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji, the research study and the academy are fulfilled. This stronger dialogic and self-reflexive researcher role works towards addressing, if not neutralising, issues of power of researcher over researched. When research is transformed in this way, it is itself, transformative and works towards achieving Aboriginal sovereignty in research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF ACCESS.....	ii
STATEMENT OF SOURCES.....	iii
DECLARATION ON ETHICS .....	iv
STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS AND .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xv
RESEARCH CEREMONY, PREPARATION PHASE: THE CEREMONY OF RESEARCH	xvi
Quandamoojah Cultural Traditions, Conventions and Expectations .....	xvii
Storywork: a Meta-process .....	xix
Writing Decisions and Meeting Cultural and Academic Conventions.....	xx
Structure of the Dissertation .....	xxii
WHERE HAVE OUR STORIES GONE? PREPARATION PHASE, RESEARCH	
CEREMONY PHASE ONE .....	1
Chapter One: Introduction and Background.....	2
Aboriginal Research: Early Patterns in the Dispossession of Our Stories.....	2
Aboriginal Research: Recent Patterns in the Dispossession of Our Stories .....	7
Aboriginal Research: Changing Patterns and Different Ways of Researching .....	8
Aboriginal Research: Invisibility, Dispossession and Native Title Research.....	10
The Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji and the Research Study.....	15
The Research Study: Assumptions, Questions and the Upgrade.....	19
Conclusion .....	20
SEARCHING FOR THE OLD STORIES: INITIAL PHASE, RESEARCH CEREMONY	
PHASE ONE.....	23
Chapter Two: Reviewing the Literature .....	24
Aboriginal Research Stories: Invasion, Colonialism and Outsiders.....	25
Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Contact Experiences in Far North Queensland .....	26
Invasion and Race Relations in Far North Queensland .....	29
<i>Tin Mining and Logging</i> .....	29
<i>Sugar and Agriculture</i> .....	31
<i>Marine-based Industries</i> .....	33
<i>Queensland Government</i> .....	38
Aboriginal Agency and Outsiders: Implications for the Research Study .....	44
Aboriginal Research Scholarship.....	47

<i>Critical Race Theory</i> .....	47
<i>Whiteness Studies</i> .....	49
Aboriginal Post-colonialism .....	50
<i>Decolonisation and Aboriginal Research</i> .....	52
Aboriginal Post-colonialism and Aboriginal Research in Australia .....	62
Implications for the Research Study .....	65
Conclusion .....	67
<b>THE STORIES OF RELATEDNESS: INITIAL PHASE, RESEARCH CEREMONY PHASE</b>	
ONE .....	69
Chapter Three: Indigenist Research Theory .....	70
Quandamoo pah Ontology: Worldview, Stories and Relatedness .....	71
Quandamoo pah Ontology and the First Story of Worldview .....	73
<i>The Ancestral Core</i> .....	73
<i>The Spirits</i> .....	74
<i>The Entities of Quandamoo pah</i> .....	75
<i>The Filter</i> .....	77
Relatedness: An Ontological Premise .....	78
<i>The Depths of Relatedness</i> .....	79
The Quam pie Story: Epistemology and Relatedness .....	81
Marine Mud .....	83
The Ancestral Core .....	84
The Three Knowledge Bands .....	84
Ways of Knowing .....	85
<i>Ways of Knowing: Knowing How We are Related</i> .....	88
Ways of Being .....	92
<i>Respecting Relatedness</i> .....	93
<i>Relatedness and Responsibility</i> .....	94
<i>Relatedness and Accountability</i> .....	95
Ways of Doing .....	96
<i>Ways of Doing: Processes of Living Relatedness</i> .....	96
<i>Ways of Doing: Practices of Living Relatedness</i> .....	98
Defining Ontology .....	99
<i>Ontology and Indigenist Research Paradigm</i> .....	100
Defining Epistemology .....	103
Relatedness Theory and Indigenist Research Projects .....	104
<i>Relatedness Theory: Ways of Knowing and the Project of Critique</i> .....	104
<i>Relatedness Theory: Ways of Being and the Project of Re-framing</i> .....	107

<i>Relatedness Theory: Ways of Doing and the Project of Harmonisation</i> .....	109
Conclusion .....	110
A WAY TO GATHER AND REMEMBER THE STORIES: RESEARCH CEREMONY	
PHASE TWO, CORE PHASE.....	112
Chapter Four: Indigenist Research Methodology .....	113
Indigenist Research: Answering Questions of Methodology .....	113
Phase One: Starting Out in Relatedness .....	116
Phase Two: the Research Interface .....	118
Phase Three: Inquiry and Immersion.....	121
<i>Storywork: Fishing for Information</i> .....	121
Phase Four: Indigenist Research Projects and Re-search .....	124
<i>Ways of Knowing: Indigenist Research Project of Critique</i> .....	124
<i>Ways of Being: Indigenist Research Project of Re-framing</i> .....	125
<i>Ways of Doing: Indigenist Research Project of Harmonisation</i> .....	126
Indigenist Research Methodology, Relatedness and Heuristic Indwelling.....	127
Quampie Methodology: Concluding Comments .....	128
Quampie Methodology and the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Research Study.....	129
Phase Two: Research before Buru.....	130
<i>Analysis of Key Studies of Burungu and Kuku-Yalanji Peoples</i> .....	130
<i>Pre-study Visits to Mossman and Buru</i> .....	130
<i>Articulating an Indigenist Research Paradigm</i> .....	131
Phase Three: Research at Buru .....	132
<i>Buru Study Visits</i> .....	132
<i>Storyworking with Mr Fischer</i> .....	133
<i>Analysis of Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Literature</i> .....	133
<i>Analysis of Wet Tropics World Heritage Area Literature</i> .....	134
Phase Four: Research after Buru .....	134
<i>Research and the Project of Critique</i> .....	135
<i>Research and the Project of Re-framing</i> .....	136
<i>Research and the Project of Harmonisation</i> .....	136
Conclusion.....	137
“WE BEEN HERE FIRST” (Fischer, 2001a), THE RESEARCH STORIES: RESEARCH	
CEREMONY PHASE TWO, CORE PHASE .....	138
Chapter Five: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Regulation of Outsiders .....	139
( Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Research Stories, Relatedness and Outsiders ).....	140
( The Buru Boundary Signs: the Anchor Point for Research Stories ).....	141
( Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Entities ).....	142

( <i>Buru Ancestors and Creators: Research Stories</i> ).....	143
( <i>Land: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Research Stories</i> ).....	143
( <i>Waterways: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Research Stories</i> ).....	144
( <i>Climate: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Research Stories</i> ).....	145
( <i>Plants: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Research Stories</i> ).....	146
( <i>Animals: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Re-search Stories</i> ).....	147
( <i>Skies: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Re-search Stories</i> ).....	148
( <i>People: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji re-search Stories</i> ).....	148
( <i>Elders: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Life Stage Relatedness</i> ).....	149
( <i>Youth: Burungu Life Stage Relatedness</i> ).....	150
( <i>Family: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Relatedness</i> ).....	150
( <i>Community: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Relatedness</i> ).....	151
( <i>People – People: Regulating Relatedness</i> ).....	152
( <i>Burungu Kuku-Yalanji Regulation of ngarrbal, waybal and jarwon as madja</i> ).....	154
( <i>Who or what is an Outsider?</i> ).....	155
( <i>Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Regulation of Ngarrbal: Indirect and Direct regulation</i> ).....	155
( <i>Indirect Regulation</i> ).....	156
( <i>Direct Regulation</i> ).....	157
( <i>Burungu Kuku-Yalanji Regulation of Waybal: Limited Interaction, Limited Engagement</i> ).....	159
( <i>Limited Interaction and Limited Engagement</i> ).....	159
( <i>Missions and Missionaries</i> ).....	159
( <i>Visitors</i> ).....	161
( <i>Research and Researchers</i> ).....	161
( <i>“Please respect our Land...Please respect the wishes of our elders”</i> : Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Regulation of <i>Jarwon</i> : Sustained Engagement ).....	162
( <i>‘Enjoy your stay and thankyou’</i> Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji as <i>madja</i> and the Regulation of Tourists ).....	163
( <i>Regulating Tourists: Limited Interaction, Indirect and Direct Regulation</i> ).....	164
( <i>Direct Regulation: Respect the Land</i> ).....	164
( <i>Direct Regulation: Protect the Land</i> ).....	165
( <i>Indirect Regulation: Respect the Land</i> ).....	166
( <i>Yalakuda Ngulkur Bajaku</i> : Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji as <i>madja</i> ).....	167
( <i>Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji as madja: Coming Amongst and Coming Alongside</i> ).....	168
( <i>Coming Amongst: Regulating People in Country</i> ).....	168
( <i>Inviting Specific People to Buru</i> ).....	169
( <i>Coming Alongside: Regulating Outsiders</i> ).....	170

( 'Talk the True Word': Honesty ).....	170
( 'Walk One Way Together': Cooperation ).....	171
( Showing Respect ).....	171
( Regulating Relatedness: Away from Buru ).....	172
( Summarising the Research Stories ).....	172
Conclusion .....	173
<b>RE-SEARCH AFTER BURU: RESEARCH CEREMONY PHASE THREE, FINAL PHASE</b> .....	176
Chapter Six: Implications for Aboriginal Research and Indigenist Researchers.....	177
Re-search Stories: Protocols for Research.....	177
Coming Amongst and Coming Alongside the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Entities.....	178
'Coming Alongside' the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji: Protocols for Research .....	179
Protocols for Research.....	183
<i>Research Rules: Respect for Self and Others</i> .....	184
<i>Researcher Responsibility: Obeying the Research Rules</i> .....	185
Table 1. Researcher Strategies for Self-regulation. ....	186
<i>Researcher Accountability</i> .....	187
Reality Checking and Member Checking: Relevance and Rigour in Re-search .....	189
<i>Presenting the Protocols to Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji at Buru</i> .....	190
<i>Presenting the Protocols to Mr Fischer</i> .....	192
The Research Interface: Aboriginal Research, Indigenist Research and Researchers.....	195
Coming Amongst and Coming Alongside: Implications for Indigenist Researchers.....	197
and Aboriginal research.....	197
Conclusion .....	200
<b>CONCLUDING THE RESEARCH STUDY: RESEARCH CEREMONY PHASE FOUR, CLOSING PHASE</b> .....	202
Chapter Seven: Significance, Limitations, Application And Thesis Statement .....	203
Research Study Original Contributions to Knowledge.....	203
<i>New Relationships to Knowledge: Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Regulation of Outsiders</i> .....	203
<i>Indigenist Research: New Relationships to Research</i> .....	204
Limitations of the Research Study and Further Applications.....	206
<i>Application of Indigenist Research Scholarship</i> .....	208
Conclusion: Research Study Thesis Statement.....	209
REFERENCES .....	211
APPENDIX A.....	231
APPENDIX B .....	232

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: RESEARCHER STRATEGIES FOR SELF-REGULATION.....	186
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## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: QUANDAMOOPAH WORLDVIEW FIRST STORY.....	72
FIGURE 2: QUAMPIE FIRST STORY.....	82
FIGURE 3: QUAMPIE METHODOLOGY MATRIX.....	115
FIGURE 4: BURUNGU, KUKU-YALANJI NORTHERN BOUNDARY SIGN.....	140
FIGURE 5: REPRODUCTION OF BURUNGU, KUKU-YALANJI PROTOCOLS FOR RESEARCH.....	182
FIGURE 6: RESEARCH INTERFACE.....	196

Please knock before you enter: an investigation of how Rainforest Aboriginal people regulate outsiders and the implications for western research and researchers.

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#### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, research is regarded as a ceremony (Wilson, 2001) and consists of a number of discernable phases, each with protocols to be observed and honoured. With this notion of research as ceremony, this dissertation is written whereby certain chapters contribute to a phase of the research ceremony. In doing so, two sets of conventions and expectations are acknowledged. The first are those in being an Aboriginal woman. The second are those I subscribe to as a researcher, particularly in the conduct of the research study and in observing academic conventions and literary expectations in writing a doctoral dissertation. In some cases, the standard rules for English literacy are extended by using a different font to signify a different speaker and where some common nouns are regarded as proper nouns and are capitalised. The purpose is to establish and confirm the different and distinct sets of relatedness to these words. In keeping with the traditions of my *People*, the Noonuccal *People* of Quandamooopah three precepts exist. The first is that the words that express the lives, realities, knoweldges and beliefs of my *People* are presented prior to discussion of the many writers, researchers, and scholars referred to or cited. Thus the Story of how Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1993) came to be named thus, is included as a prologue to each chapter. The second precept is the role of the First Stories, as traditional devices (Youngblood-Henderson, 2002) to articulate Noonuccal, Quandamooopah ontology and epistemology. All that has been achieved in

this research study is possible because of these First Stories. These represent Ancestral knowledges, that are then translated and articulated as images. Unlike English literary conventions, these First Stories are my 'word', my Law as a Noonuccal, Quandamooopah woman and so they are not illustrations of the written word. The third precept is with regards to the visual Stories. These differ to First Stories in that they are not Law, but more so the articulation of particular concepts and developments resulting from this research study.

Based on the principles of Indigenist research (Rigney, 1997, 1999, 2001) the research paradigm developed in this research study is a major feature as it is embedded in and articulates Quandamooopah ontology, epistemology and axiology. Quandamooopah is the Ancestral Country of the Noonuccal, Koenpil and Ngugi *Peoples* of south-east Queensland, Australia. Quandamooopah ontology or worldview is articulated in a First Story that shows the relatedness between the Ancestors, Spirits, Filter and seven Entities (*People, Land, Animals, Plants, Skies, Waterways and Climate*). Each Entity has its own identity and role in this First Story but they also exist in relatedness. Relatedness is defined as the sets of conditions, processes and practices that occur amongst and between the Creators and Ancestors; the *Spirits*; the Filter and the Entities (Martin, 2006). This relatedness occurs across contexts and is maintained within conditions that are: physical, spiritual, political, geographical, intellectual, emotional, social, historical, sensory, instinctive and intuitive.

Quandamooopah epistemology is articulated in the First Story of the Quampie, the pearl shell and relatedness theory (Martin, 2006). Relatedness theory is comprised of three components, each with its own conditions. Ways of Knowing requires knowing your Stories of relatedness, of who you are and where you come from. Ways

of Being requires these Stories of relatedness to be respected by being responsible and accountable to your own Stories and the Stories of other Entities. Thus axiology is an integral and inbuilt feature of Aboriginal knowledges and these are not separate systems. Ways of Doing requires living Stories of relatedness ensuring that the processes and practices of daily living serve, and are served by relatedness (Martin, 2006).

When applied to research, the Quampie Story structures Indigenist research methodology as Quampie methodology. Articulated in a visual Story, Quampie methodology gives guidance for making research decisions, undertaking processes of immersion and carrying out procedures of inquiry in relatedness to Aboriginal ontology, epistemology and axiology. Quampie methodology is more than a monological inquiry as it is both an inquiry and immersion process that consists of four phases (Martin, 2006).

The first phase begins by working through relatedness theory and its three components (Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing) and their conditions. The second phase is the inquiry structured by eight western research procedures: articulating the research assumptions, designing the research questions, undertaking the literature review, refining the research design, research conduct, undertaking analysis of the data collected, interpretation of the data as findings, and reporting and dissemination of these findings. This phase also signifies engagement of the research interface. The third phase is the immersion in the research study contexts. This is not just physical and social, but historical, political, intellectual and cultural. The fourth phase engages the three Indigenist research projects of critique, re-framing and harmonisation to ultimately re-present, rather than represent, the research Stories. It is the ontological premise of relatedness and the use of traditional devices (ie. First

Stories and visual Stories) that this Indigenist research paradigm makes transparent the power relations of the assumptions, theory, methodology and ethics of the research study. Therefore Quampie methodology, as Indigenist research methodology, requires culturally rigorous choices to be made for methods for the design and conduct of data collection. One difference is in defining and using Storywork (Archibald, 2001) as a culturally safe, culturally respectful and culturally relevant research method based on Aboriginal epistemology and axiology and communication protocols. Storywork is not just a method to collect data, but is a discourse where relatedness is engaged and maintained. In the same way the First Stories and visual Stories are not ‘art’, Storywork is not interviewing or narrative inquiry.

The methodology includes the processes engaged to gain access and become known to the research participants. This then utilised multiple methods for data collection. These are the analysis of literature produced by the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji and the analysis of selected literature about them; field visits and field notes, and Storywork with an Elder of the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji.

That which is currently known about Aboriginal regulation of Outsiders has largely been researched, constructed and represented by non-Aboriginal scholars, based on non-Aboriginal theories. A critique of this scholarship reveals the construction of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships occur in a number of discernable phases:

- contact that is short-term (Broome, 2002; Kelly & Lenthall, 1997; Rowley, 1974; Swain, 1993; Wearne, 1980);
- invasion and the extermination (Broome, 2002; Evans, 1988; Lippmann, 1991; Miller, 1982);

- culture contact or culture clash (Broome, 2002; Rowley, 1974);
- race relations (Evans, Saunders & Cronin, 1988; Hollinsworth, 1998; Loos, 1982, 1993; Reynolds, 1990, 1993) and the segregation of Aboriginal *Peoples* from non-Aboriginal society for their protection (Donovan, 2002, Kidd, 1997; Wearne, 1980) and,
- accommodation and assimilation (Coombs, 1994; Rowley, 1974; Stanner, 1969, Wearne, 1980) theorised as flaws and deficiencies of Aboriginal *Peoples* and Aboriginal cultures (Coombs, 1994; Rowley, 1974, Swain, 1993).

This research study investigated the agency of a Rainforest Aboriginal Community, the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji of Far North Queensland, Australia in the regulation of Outsiders to their Country of past, present and future. The Kuku-Yalanji Ancestral Country encompasses, in western terms, the *Land* and *Waterways* from the Daintree River, north to the Annan River and inland to the Mount Spurgeon area (Anderson, 1984; Johnston, 1996). It consists of mountains, hills and valleys that are part of the Great Dividing Range that spans the eastern side of Australia. There are a number of freshwater *Waterways* including four major rivers and numerous creeks fed from high up in the mountains and that eventually flow into the seas of the Great Barrier Reef. It is part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area because of its unique characteristics of its rainforest *Plants*, *Animals* and *Climate*.

This research study found the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji have always exerted agency in the regulation of Outsiders and this is theorised in three forms of relatedness: *ngarrbal* meaning ‘stranger’ is an Outsider who is unknown; *waybal* meaning ‘whiteman’ is an Outsider who is known about, and *jarwon* meaning ‘friend’ is an Outsider who is known. Each form of relatedness is regulated according to the

types and levels of physical, social, emotional, cultural and economic relatedness between Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji and the Outsiders. These are either direct or indirect regulations that occur in limited interactions, limited engagements or sustained engagements. Accordingly, *ngarrbal*, or ‘stranger’ is regarded as a temporary state of relatedness by the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji who regulate and mediate the interactions through series of enfoldments and evolvments. These are established as processes of ‘coming amongst’ and ‘coming alongside’ the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji in relatedness as ‘another’. Outsiders achieve this in fulfilling conditions of honesty, co-operation and respect and at the same time, maintain their own identity and autonomy so that relatedness is expanded and not diminished or replaced. Thereby, the agency of Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji, in the regulation of Outsiders of past, present and future, is as *madja*, meaning boss, in that they have never excluded anyone who fulfils these conditions but they have equally protected their own relatedness (Martin, 2006).

This requires a stronger dialogic and self-reflexive researcher role towards addressing, if not neutralising, issues of power of researcher over researched. Thus, Protocols for research developed for this research study demonstrate different these sets of relatedness in a research agreement that gives greater agency to the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji as participants, and not as research objects. The Protocols state seven rules for research to direct culturally safe and culturally respectful researcher behaviour and ensure researcher responsibilities and accountabilities to the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji, the research study and the academy are fulfilled. The seven research rules are:

- Respect Aboriginal *Land*: also encompassing respect for the *Waterways, Climate, Animals, Plants* and *Skies*;

- Respect Aboriginal Laws: to give honour to the Aboriginal Elders as keepers of their Ancestral laws;
- Respect Aboriginal Elders: as the ultimate authority;
- Respect Aboriginal culture: as Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing;
- Respect Aboriginal Community: acknowledging this as a form of relatedness amongst Aboriginal *People*;
- Respect Aboriginal families: respecting the autonomy and authority of families;
- Respect Aboriginal futures: acknowledging relatedness of past and present for forming a future and thus accepting responsibility for this relatedness (Martin, 2006).

The implications and challenges for western research and researchers is to engage research as an interface (Nakata, 2001) where conceptual, cultural and historical contexts converge, or come alongside each other, based on different forms of relatedness to knowledge, to research and to self. This is articulated as a visual Story where the macro and micro contexts of the research study interface with the personal and public contexts. These contexts are at once autonomous, but equally inter-related. Thus, the Indigenist research interface is no longer a site of resistance, but a site of decolonisation and transformation.

There are two theses posited from this research study in terms of the implications for research and Indigenist researchers and the regulation of Outsiders by a Rainforest Aboriginal group. The thesis posited in terms of research and researchers is stated in the research study title to 'knock before you enter'. Researchers are not to assume they are entering a 'frontier', or to perpetuate the fiction of terra nullius

(ideological, physical or intellectual), but to work from a paradigm of relatedness.

Where the research study set out to examine the regulation of Outsiders by a Rainforest Aboriginal group, the thesis of this research study is this agency has always been exercised and is attributed to the simple but profound respect for and regulation of relatedness. With relatedness as the premise and impetus, there is no such thing as Outsider, or Other, but of Another.