Breaking Down the Colonial Structures:

A Gugu Badhun Manifesto

By Janine Gertz

Abstract

This essay is a call to action to the Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation to be diligent and forthright in the work of rebuilding, renaming and reclaiming Gugu Badhun sovereignty through strategic and applied conflict with the State. It is through conflict that Gugu Badhun will experience emancipation from our colonised position. This manifesto is a declaration and petition to the Gugu Badhun people about the important work of decolonising our cultural and political identity and strengthening Gugu Badhun power.

Preface

The following is drawn from my doctoral thesis. As a manifesto, this essay reflects *my* views. As a Gugu Badhun person and a student of sociology, my community and other thinkers have shaped these views. Unless I directly quote someone, I have not included references within the manifesto. Instead, key influences have been listed at the end of the essay.

Biography

Janine Gertz is a Gugu Badhun citizen and PhD Student (Sociology) at James Cook University in Townsville. Her doctoral research project is entitled *Gugu Badhun Self-Determination: Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People at the local level*.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge all of the sovereign Aboriginal Nations within the continent now called Australia. I pay my respects to Gugu Badhun country, on which my Gugu Badhun ancestors have walked since time immemorial and my present elders who provide me with cultural guidance in my daily work. I also acknowledge the Gugu Badhun people who will hold

the responsibility of Gugu Badhun law and custom into the future because they are the reason for my work. I would particularly like to acknowledge Gugu Badhun Elder, Professor Yvonne Cadet-James for her academic and cultural mentorship. I also appreciate the academic guidance I receive from Distinguished Professor Stewart Lockie and Dr Theresa Petray at James Cook University.

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A Gugu Badhun History

he history of the Gugu Badhun people is a history of resilience, adaption and survival.

The Gugu Badhun people are the original inhabitants of the area surrounding the Upper Burdekin region and township of Greenvale in North Queensland (Figure 1). The Gugu Badhun are my people. My cultural identity and Aboriginal heritage is drawn from the Gugu Badhun through my matrilineal (Hoolihan) and patrilineal (Gertz) bloodlines and ancestry. My maternal grandfather Dick Hoolihan and my paternal great-grandfather Harry Gertz described Gugu Badhun country to linguist and anthropologist Peter Sutton in contemporary terms in the following way:

The Gugu Badhun inhabited the Upper Burdekin (on both sides of the river), north to Meadowbank, Glenharding and Wairuna Stations, where they had their border with the Warungu. Their southern border was the Clarke River, about where it joins the Burdekin. There they met the Gudjal. These three tribes, running north to south, formed something of a unity. (See Figure 2)

It is important to note that the word *inhabited* was used in the past tense. The word *inhabited* was used within the context of time and with an inference that a thriving Gugu Badhun society

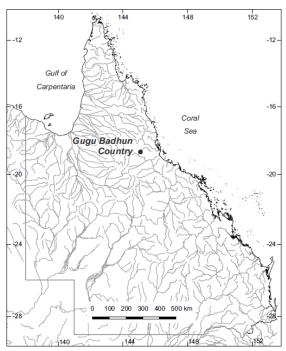


Figure 1. Queensland, Australia, showing location of Gugu Badhun country (Gugu Badhun: People of the Valley of Lagoons xv).

had once flourished on Gugu Badhun country but that it had been disrupted by colonisation. At the time of these interviews with Sutton, my great-grandfather Harry Gertz (Snr), was living and working on country at the Valley of Lagoons station. In fact, most of the interviews were conducted on country.

My great-grandfather Harry Gertz and grandfather Dick Hoolihan described Gugu Badhun country in a time before the Australian State formulated the native title legislation and its associated policy frameworks. The description "Gugu Badhun country" is a simple explanation of the physical landscape and its cultural context

from the knowledge passed down to my Gugu Badhun grandfathers via a Gugu Badhun epistemology—yarugugubadungu (English translation: Gugu Badhun country or, more correctly, "Gugu Badhun universe").

My Gugu Badhun grandmothers, grandfathers, parents, uncles and aunties, are my ancestral link and reason for my knowledge of Gugu Badhun things. They are also the link and reason for my knowledge of the conflict and violence Gugu Badhun people experienced when the pastor-alists, miners and native police arrived on Gugu Badhun country in the late 1800s. I am grateful for the sacrifices made by the Gugu Badhun people who were removed to Palm Island, Yarrabah, and elsewhere, and to those sacrifices made by those who stayed on country. All of them did what was necessary to survive. They are the reason Gugu Badhun history and knowledges have transferred to their descendants.

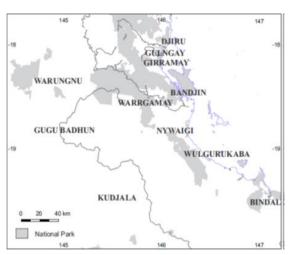


Figure 2. Language groups adjacent to Gugu Badhun country; Girringun Aboriginal Corporation map from Dreamtime Tracks brochure (Source: Adella Edwards, Connect Spatial; data: rivers and coastline—Geoscience Australia 1:1 million topographic data; national parks—Government of Queensland estate in Gugu Badhun: People of the Valley of Lagoons (4).

Despite the interruption of Gugu Badhun life on Gugu Badhun country, Gugu Badhun people have maintained an important cultural, spiritual and physical connection to our ancestral homelands. There are a small number of Gugu Badhun people living and working on country even today.

Gugu Badhun Sovereignty—We Have Been Here for Millennia

Figure 3, below, depicts Gugu Badhun's most important creation story—the story of conflict between *Numalnali*, the bronzed-winged pigeon, and *Bubunba*, the pheasant. It is our cosmology. This creation story has been passed down between generations in Gugu Badhun oral traditions and connects Gugu Badhun people to

a very old geological event on country. The story explains how the lava flow from a place called *Baganbara* (now called the Kinrara Volcano by the recent arrivals) created the physical and tangible *yarugugubadhungu*, and simultaneously affected a Gugu Badhun metaphysical cosmology, accompanied by a Gugu Badhun epistemological and



Figure 3. Numalnali and Bubunba—A Gugu Badhun Creation Story. © Harry Gertz, Shannon Gertz and Vanessa Gertz.

ontological existence. The ancient lava flow caused the creation of the mountains, valleys, and permanent spring-fed creeks that are the beginning and source of the Burdekin River—the life-giver to the Gugu Badhun plants and animals that are central to the yarugugubadhungu. By the most conservative estimate, a volcanic eruption happened 7000 years ago, however, this creation story relates to a lava flow which potentially links this oral tradition to a geological event which occurred closer to 50,000 years ago. Even cautiously erring on the side of 7000 years, the fact that this oral tradition has been transmitted through at least 230 generations of Gugu Badhun history highlights the existence of a stable, structured society that has facilitated the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next.

The Numalnali and Bubunba painting is a

statement of Gugu Badhun sovereignty, of our spiritual and cultural connection and responsibility to country. It is also a statement that the natural resources on Gugu Badhun country have sustained and been maintained by the Gugu Badhun people for millennia. It is a declaration that Gugu Badhun ancestors have come from and returned to Gugu Badhun country in a never-ending cycle of connectedness to yarugugubadhungu which replenishes and regenerates each generation of Gugu Badhun people, plants and animals.

The Gugu Badhun Nation will soon embark on a Nation-Building process influenced and inspired by the work undertaken by the Native Nations Institute at the University of Arizona. The Native Nations Institute's description of Nation-Building¹ refers to the:

efforts Aboriginal nations make to increase their capacity for self-rule and for self-determined, sustainable community and economic development. Nationbuilding involves building institutions of self-government that appropriate to the nation and that are effective in addressing the challenges. It involves developing capacity to make strategically informed decisions about its affairs and to implement those decisions. It involves a comprehensive effort to

¹ (<u>https://nni.arizona.edu/programs-projects/what-native-nation-building</u>)

rebuild societies that work. In other words, a nation-building approach understands that Aboriginal Nations are not merely interests or community groups, but governing nations confronting real world, classic problems of human societies.

Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation like many other Indigenous people are experiencing the impacts of colonisation. Gugu Badhun people are working towards a self-determined future that ensures the practices and preservation of Gugu Badhun country, culture, and kinship through the strategies outlined in the Gugu Badhun Peoples

Community Plan: 2014–2020. The collective Nation-Building process that Gugu Badhun is about to embark on is important to maintaining and asserting a cultural and political identity that safeguards Gugu Badhun's existence into the future. This Nation-Building process is Gugu Badhun's response to colonisation and the real world dilemmas which we are forced to contend with now and into the future.

In order to survive Gugu Badhun people must break down the colonial structures that threaten our existence...

Breaking Down the Colonial Structures: A Gugu Badhun Manifesto

The uprising of the new nation and the breaking down of colonial structures are the result of one of two causes: either of a violent struggle of the people in their own right, or of action on the part of surrounding colonised peoples which acts as a brake on the colonial regime in question.

Frantz Fanon—Wretched of the Earth.

I desire a future where the Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation is in control of our lands, our territories and our natural resources. I call for autonomy in decision-making about Gugu Badhun matters without imposition or interference from the Australian State. My vision for Gugu Badhun people is to live and work on our ancestral lands as a community in an environment where families carry out meaningful lives free

from the burden of colonisation and the trauma that it has brought to our land. I want a future where Gugu Badhun law, language and customs are returned with peace and security to the day-to-day operations of the Gugu Badhun Nation. I call for a new phase of Gugu Badhun government that ceases to simply rejoice in Gugu Badhun survival but wholeheartedly and purposefully takes up the burden of sovereignty, self-

determination and nationhood. To achieve this utopia Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation must strive for economic independence. We must create a Gugu Badhun economy in which Gugu Badhun flourishes. Gugu Badhun country, community and culture must prosper in order for Gugu Badhun daily life to be restored.

If the Gugu Badhun Nation is to succeed in the process of rebuilding, renaming and reclaiming Gugu Badhun daily life, we must engage with the uncomfortable process of transformation. Such transformation necessitates self-examination, rejection, conflict, adaptation, change and eventual acceptance. We must break down the colonial structures imposed on Gugu Badhun by questioning our own design, asserting our own identity and bringing about a future reality that is of our own making. To "put the brakes on the colonial regime," the Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation must embark on a type of metaphysical metamorphosis that will involve scrutinizing, adapting, transforming and championing our own ontological presence.

Gugu Badhun are already engaged in this process, but our self-determination efforts need to be focused on strategic actions that magnify our survival and elevate our existence comparable to the hegemonic powers that work effectively to contain us. Our colonisers, their descendants and those who have followed them, continue to benefit from the acquisition and ongoing occupation and possession of the lands that sustained our people for eons. It is a futile

exercise to kindly ask them to step aside, much less to ask them to destroy the structures and systems that maintain their economic, social and political power. The colonisers will not give up their power so easily. They have assumed control over our lives and our country not only through force but because we have come to depend on their colonial systems and structures. As Fanon suggests in Black Skin, White Masks, "not all peoples can be colonised; only those who experience the need for dependency." Some Gugu Badhun will come to understand their dependency and will choose to surrender and accept their enslavement and colonised position within the Australian State. There is security in their dependence. For some, this truth will be traumatizing. It will awaken within them a desire for emancipation and rebellion. It is to those Gugu Badhun that I now petition and plead action.

The action of decolonisation for Gugu Badhun will be a violent phenomenon. Violent because it will mean internal conflict between those Gugu Badhun people who accept their colonised position and those Gugu Badhun people who are working towards genuine Gugu Badhun autonomy and cultural sovereignty. Violent because Gugu Badhun must reestablish a normative organisation of government, governance and decision-making that works with—but is not dependent on—the colonial system of things. Violent because the Australian State will do everything in its power to contain us.

Decolonisation will mean clashing with those we consider partners in our present circumstances, but whose position and privilege demand our dispossession. These "partners" are firmly embedded in the colonial scheme and are the ones currently occupying Gugu Badhun territory. They define our connection and access to our ancestral lands on racist terms sanctioned by the Australian State. These partners utilise and benefit from Gugu Badhun natural resources and mistakenly believe they are sharing these resources with Gugu Badhun. However, they offer "opportunities" to Gugu Badhun people in the same way that tea, sugar and flour were offered and gifted to our ancestors. These false partnerships, despite being offered by good people with good intentions, sustain and perpetuate a master-slave relationship not only in practice but in the collective consciousness of Gugu Badhun people. These opportunities do not change our power relationship or our position to the land. Whilst we continue to work with them, we need to think and act higher.

Gugu Badhun peace and security is unattainable within a society that embraces capitalism and its associated materialism and consumerism. These things are in opposition to Gugu Badhun law and threaten our existence. Strength and power is obtained through right-eousness and integrity. Leaders, motivated by wealth and power, play into the hands of the State. If their actions are not consistent with

Gugu Badhun law we must call them into account. We must not let Gugu Badhun be corrupted by things that are in opposition to Gugu Badhun law and to the protection and maintenance of Gugu Bahun country, culture and community. The challenge for Gugu Badhun is to build a Gugu Badhun economy and reclaim a way of life that sits alongside the colonial world system without being co-opted or corrupted by it.

Conflict is inevitable as Gugu Badhun define and execute a relationship that is founded on a mutual exchange of sovereignty with the State, whilst simultaneously refusing colonial burdens that represent a deliberate tactic to occupy and distract us from the real work of decolonising ourselves. It is only through this struggle and conflict that Gugu Badhun will see the end of colonisation.

Gugu Badhun must turn away from employing the philosophies and tactics of the colonists' systems and operations. Gugu Badhun must adopt a Gugu Badhun stance that focuses on actualising Gugu Badhun's future. Our struggle must commence from a theoretical foundation, because as Vladimir Lenin contends, "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." The decolonial program of work, therefore, is both intellectual and practical and must be achieved through a reciprocal and dialectical form of antagonism.

A Gugu Badhun Manifesto

1. Decolonisation!

We must emancipate ourselves and our lands, waters, plants, and animals from our colonised position.

2. Conflict!

We must not be afraid of it. Conflict is the necessary revolutionary transformation praxis. We must engage in conflict with the State. Conflict must be with anyone or anything that is a barrier to Gugu Badhun political and cultural autonomy.

3. Economic Independence!

We must create a Gugu Badhun economy that enables Gugu Badhun to reject the colonial system of violence against our people, lands, waters, plants and animals. We must create an economic situation in which Gugu Badhun culture, country, and community flourishes.

4. Sovereignty!

We must refuse and resist artificial colonial structures. We must build and maintain our own political power and identity. Gugu Badhun law, language and culture must be restored and reclaimed. We no longer ask for permission to do these things.

A Gugu Badhun Revolution

It is an undeniable and repeated fact of human history that emancipation has never been delivered conveniently in the form of a wrapped gift, complete with tied ribbon and bow. It is appropriated. Seized. Taken by those seeking liberation. This must be the strength in our will behind a front of diplomacy and tact. A violent Gugu Badhun revolution does not call for physical and deliberate armed violence. We must be realistic about our military clout. I am advocating for measured conflict with the State and those who subscribe to it. Therefore, in simultaneous conflict with the State, our transformation must include a program of conflict. Self-confrontation, internal examination and self-modification need to be an essential part of the Gugu Badhun revolutionary praxis. This program of external and internal conflict is the pathway to rebuilding, renaming and reclaiming Gugu Badhun sovereignty.

The Gugu Badhun revolution is in the style of a decolonising transformation praxis that is a strategic, premeditated and calculated program. A program that is tactical, sensible and rational in actions that operate as both shield and sword against the violent, forceful, colonial world system. Pragmatism is the key, accompanied by an idealistic hard-headedness that foreshadows a self-confident, authentic and positive Gugu Badhun reality and celebrates authenticity in

cultural identity and political integrity. The present Gugu Badhun people owe it to our ancestral lands and to the Gugu Badhun people claimed by the frontier violence. The future Gugu Badhun owe it to the culture, language, traditions interrupted by the colonial eras of "protection," "assimilation" and "reconciliation." Beyond these obligations, the revolution is Gugu Badhun law.

Gugu Badhun culture, community and country is under threat of existence, therefore recourse and response to this real world predicament must be to examine matters of Gugu Badhun sovereignty and to assert our political status and situation. Intellectual analysis of the impacts of colonisation on present-day sovereignty, self-determination and nation-building efforts are necessary in order to break down the colonial structures that surround Gugu Badhun. But reactionary examination of the impacts of colonisation is not enough. We must admit that the Gugu Badhun ontology has been affected by the colonisers' ways of being. Their ontological existence is reliant on the perpetuation of violence against Gugu Badhun peoples alienated from country and against the plants and animals that exist within Gugu Badhun lands and waters. We must separate and unravel ourselves from them and their ways of being, by creating Gugu Badhun structures and systems that exist to

The Gugu Badhun revolution is not just the struggle for economic independence. It is the struggle for human dignity and for country, culture and community—in other words, a struggle for Gugu Badhun cultural sovereignty.

maintain, protect and advance Gugu Badhun culture, community, country and economy.

Gugu Badhun need to be able to articulate and embrace a future vision that is emancipated from the legal and socio-political legacies of colonisation. Gugu Badhun must move beyond being defined as a colonised people whose lands, culture and identity are forever intertwined with our colonisers in a binary dance of perpetual opposition. I do not mean Gugu Badhun people should accept and take on the inferior, oppressed position that the colonisers expect of us. Instead, we must remove the colonisers as the subject of our actions and realise that our own worth is not dependent on recognition or approval from the State. This transformation process entails committing to a radical Gugu Badhun identity that is self-confident and endures outside the controls and boundaries of the colonial gaze.

The dilemma, then, for the Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation is how to create and implement a revolutionary praxis that does not reproduce and reinforce the hegemonic power structures of the coloniser, including their physical and structural racism and violence. Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson, warns those engaged in decolonisation projects to not

be:

so concerned with how we dismantle the master's house, that is, which set of theories we use to critique colonialism; but [be] very concerned with how we (re)build our own house, or our own houses.

Here lies a warning to the Gugu Badhun people. A caution not only to be concerned with decolonisation's end game but with the transformative processes that Gugu Badhun people engage with to get there. The means and the ends need to be consistent. Transformation commences when liberation is thought of, and reached for. Win by win, confidence and self-reliance in Gugu Badhun power rises, and Gugu Badhun will direct energies and effort towards rebuilding, renaming and reclaiming our daily lives, whilst strengthening our claim of sovereignty and self-determination.

What I am proposing is a prefigurative, decolonial, nation-building process that is accomplished through a program of strategic, intellectual and applied conflict with the State. Through this process, Gugu Badhun behave as a self-determined collective agent, holding the principle of sovereignty paramount in all our dealings. The decolonial, metaphysical meta-

morphosis that will change the Gugu Badhun Nation will radiate out from the community controlled government, governance decision-making structures of the Gugu Badhun Nation with transformative revolutionary effects generated across Gugu Badhun community, culture, country, and economy. The goal is prosperity, not necessarily in monetary terms or in the capitalist sense, but defined by Gugu Badhun measures of social, cultural, environmental and economic success. Success must have its foundations in Gugu Badhun laws and responsibilities to land, culture, our kinships and relationships with our neighboring Aboriginal Nations. These success measures must be values and methods in a style distinctly Gugu Badhun. We must not let ourselves be corrupted by the coloniser's ideas of wealth and success. Their economic values are the biggest threat to Gugu Badhun ways of doing and being.

The Gugu Badhun revolution is not just the struggle for economic independence. It is the struggle for human dignity and for country, culture and community—in other words, a struggle for Gugu Badhun cultural sovereignty. As Fanon asserts, a Gugu Badhun government that will free its lands its "people politically and

socially . . . must have an economic program and there must be a doctrine concerning the division of wealth and social relations." Every revolutionary situation draws from and is dependent on economic conditions. Gugu Badhun's goal for prosperity and our shared vision for "meaningful lives on country" stems from the deliberate alienation from our homelands. Without armed conflict this predicament means Gugu Badhun's economic development strategies will need to be pragmatic, practical, pre-figurative acts of self-determined resistance. This work has already commenced.

As Cree writer and political leader Harold Cardinal stresses "We must begin to say the 'S' word." From this I interpret Cardinal to mean we need to start using the word *sovereignty* even though it is a western construction. However Gugu Badhun Aboriginal Nation must do more than say it; we must set about the work involved in constructing it, defining it, enacting and asserting it in all its forms—culturally, spiritually, socially, legally, economically and politically. Gugu Badhun's call must be *sovereignty!*, understanding that sovereignty inevitably means conflict, and it must be embedded in all aspects of our decolonial program of work.

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