

Mary Ellen Jordan's *Balanda: My Year in Arnhem Land* is a memoir of a year she spent in Arnhem Land. Jordan's memoir recounts a particular experience in time: one year; that takes place in a specific location: Arnhem Land; and focused on one theme, that of being a Balanda (the Aboriginal term for a non-Aboriginal person) in the remote Aboriginal community of Maningrida. Jordan examines in detail, her actions, thoughts and ideas and tracks the changes in her views over the course of this year. In the process of telling her own experiences, Jordan also exposes her ideological self and the ethics and politics affecting the community in which she lives.

While the book begins with the opening of a Centrelink in Maningrida, the story of Jordan begins with her leaving her home in Melbourne, headed to Maningrida in a plane; and it ends on a plane, a year later, as Jordan is leaving Maningrida. She does not write about her whole life, her focus is narrowed to this one year, however, she does select a small number of experiences from outside this year to include. As a result, the reader is given limited insight into the whole life of the author, and most of this comes later in the book. Some readers may find this aspect of memoir writing to be unsatisfactory, feeling as though it is an unfinished autobiography and that they are missing the whole story. Jordan does not record everything that occurred within this one year, but she picks and chooses events to create the story of that year.

Jordan's experience is one of isolation as she finds herself distanced from her home town and a foreigner in a culture she doesn't understand. She emphasises this sense of isolation through the episodic nature of her retelling of events. The story unfolds through a series of isolated stories and as such, it doesn't flow smoothly and cohesively, but takes the reader in leaps and bounds. The effect builds a feeling of disconnectedness that highlights the fragmented nature of the community and the divide between blacks and whites. The result created, for the reader, is a perceived distance between Jordan and those around her.

Remembering is a subjective activity in as much as it is the individual person engaged in the act of remembering, it is their perception of things, seen through, experienced by and then remembered, from their own position in the world. Jordan acknowledges this in the 'Author's note' saying, "It is a subjective, personal account..." and further, "This is my story." She admits that she has not written about all that occurred. Rather, Jordan writes from her own interest and with the purpose of challenging the readers' views by writing of events that "...made me think and changed my opinions..." Jordan has selected events that show a particular view of Maningrida, one in which the reader is encouraged to question all things Balanda as things that potentially hinder Aboriginal self-determination.

Jordan records events in such way to challenge the dominant 'white', European, Balanda political views regarding Aboriginals that she says are "paternalistic". She goes further to reveal, "...the system we worked within prevented Aboriginal people from taking responsibility for themselves and their communities...the Balanda endeavor to protect the Aboriginal communities

wasn't working" and "The protection racket was not doing the communities any good." It is these Balanda ways of responding to Aboriginal communities that Jordan distances herself from throughout her time in Maningrida. Her purpose is to inform readers of the realities within the community and highlight where good intentioned government policies not only do not work, but are potentially harmful to those communities. Jordan selects scenes and events that enable her to prove that this is the case and that describe a personal journey of her own changing ideologies. It is this struggle that engages the reader.

Jordan M. E., *Balanda: My Year in Arnhem Land*, Allen & Unwin, New South Wales, 2005.