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“That means the fish are fat”: sharing experiences of animals through Indigenous-owned tourism

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*** Bawaka Cultural Experiences, Bawaka, North East Arnhem Land

Abstract

This article considers the ways members of Indigenous-owned and operated Bawaka Cultural Experiences (BCE) from northern Australia share diverse ways of knowing the world with tourists through a focus on the sapient beings categorised as animals in western cultures. The article is co-authored by two owners of BCE and three human geographers. Lak Lak and Djawa of BCE are situated as key agents who sculpt the experience for visitors and tourists and in the article discuss the various ways they actively challenge tourists through a range of experiences on country. Sarah, Sandie and Kate are multiply positioned as academics, collaborators and visitors. The article discusses the ways members of the Burarrwanga family invite tourists to learn about the interrelated importance of animals through a range of sensory experiences. The relationships shared by Lak Lak and Djawa with tourists are indicative of an ontology of connection that underpins Yolngu and many Indigenous ways of knowing the World. As tourists are invited into these worlds, they are given the opportunity to challenge their own relationships with animals and rethink an interlinked social–cultural– economic and ontological approach to self-determination in a postcolonial nation.

Keywords:

Indigenous tourism; Yolngu; Indigenous epistemologies; ontology of connection; animal geographies; northern Australia

Introduction

As visitors from ‘down south’ (south eastern Australia as opposed to northern Australia) Sarah, Sandie and Kate could not take their eyes off the luxurious curtains of yellow wattle flowers lining the sandy four wheel drive road to Bawaka, an Indigenous homeland¹, in the Northern Territory (see Map 1 and Plate 1). They wanted to stop and photograph the flowers, ask what they were called in the local language and what they may be used for. Lak Lak, Djawa and other members of the extended Burarrwanga family are frequently asked these questions by tourists coming to Bawaka and enjoy being able to share their knowledge with them. Lak Lak tells tourists that the yellow wattle tree is called *gaypal* in the local Yolngu *matha* (language). However, the sharing of knowledge does not end there. Lak Lak goes on to invite the tourists into the Yolngu world by explaining that when *gaypal* flowers, it is also sending out messages. These messages are available for all conscious agents in the cosmos to receive (including other plants and animals) (see Rose, 1996). When Yolngu people, as one agent in the cosmos, see *gaypal* in flower, they know that the fish are fat and it is time to hunt *miyapunu* (green turtle) and *minhala* (freshwater longneck turtle) and time to collect *miyapunu mapu* (turtle egg). The mud crabs have a lot of fat then too, a lot of meat in them.

This encounter illustrates how a tourist focus on one component of the landscape (flower) is quickly embedded in an intimately interconnected world of flower-tree-animal-season-person by Lak Lak and Djawa. Through their tourism business called Bawaka Cultural Experiences (BCE), Lak Lak, Djawa and other family members communicate to tourists their specific way of relating to animals. This is not simply a matter of teaching tourists about animals. To put it that way imposes passivity to animals and reinscribes animals as separate beings that exist in the background of a human-dominated world. Rather, tourists are invited by BCE to experience animals as related, sapient and connected with humans (and with rocks and trees and other things that are not seen as sapient within a western framework). As such, this paper argues that examining ‘animals’ in the context of

¹ The Homeland Movement, which began in the 1970s, was a response by many Indigenous Australians to centralized settlement on missions and communities. Family groups of varying size returned to their own land to re-establish permanent and semi-permanent settlements known as homelands or outstations (Williams, 1986).

Indigenous-owned tourism needs to be framed as an ontological argument about fundamental ways of being in the world. It is also an argument about rights and obligations in a 'post'colonial context as Lak Lak, Djawa and other members of BCE enable and make conscious decisions about what knowledges to share with tourists and how to represent both themselves and their country. In creating the circumstances in which they can share their knowledges and tell their stories, they are on a path towards determining their own selves and futures.

The Yolngu are the Indigenous people of over 8500 square kilometres of North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia (Williams, 1986). Since European colonisation of their country² in the early twentieth century, Yolngu have been at the forefront of political assertions of Indigenous autonomy and sovereignty including fundamental land, sea and resource ownership (Keen, 1994; Williams, 1986). These assertions include attempts to create regional unity through the Elcho Island adjustment movement of the late 1950s (McIntosh, 2004; Morphy, 1983); opposition to bauxite mining at Gove Peninsula in the 1960s and 1970s including the Yirrkala Bark Petition and the Gove land rights case³ (Morphy, 1983; Williams, 1983, 1986); and sea rights claims resulting in a recent ground-breaking victory in the Blue Mud Bay case (Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre, 2003; Morphy & Morphy, 2006). Morphy (1983) examines some of the mechanisms used by Yolngu in these struggles and identifies the use of cultural objects, such as sacred objects and paintings, with the express purpose of teaching Ngapaki (non-Aboriginal people) about Aboriginal culture and sharing with Ngapaki the value of Aboriginal culture. In this paper we show how the Yolngu people of Bawaka continue this as they teach tourists about their lives and culture, and share with tourists what is important and valuable to them. In particular we explore the ways that BCE share their relationships with animals through their tourism programs as an entry-point to broader discussions about interconnections (with and between people and country), teaching tourists limits (to knowledge and resource use) and caring for country. In doing this we move beyond current analyses of Indigenous tourism which tend to focus on economic

² As discussed in more detail below, country is an Aboriginal English term used to refer to specific areas of what would be called land or sea in Western frameworks but in Aboriginal ontologies encompasses a range of sapient, interrelated entities including ancestors-ancestral beings-land-water-animals-trees and so on. Country is animate and is fundamental to Aboriginal people's identity.

³ This ultimately contributed to the establishment of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976*. Under this Act visitors and tourists are required to get a permit to access Aboriginal land.

goals, needs and limitations (Altman, 1989; Altman & Finlayson, 2003; Zeppel, 2007). We argue that Indigenous participation in tourism needs to be understood in a complex, interrelational way. While economic aspects are important, these are valued as a form of self-determination – economic independence – that is entirely interwoven with social and cultural aspects. In the case of BCE, this includes attention to the way members of the Burarrwanga family use their engagements with tourists to assert their political and economic autonomy and ownership of country.

We use the term Yolngu and position authorship outside of the Yolngu perspective as this paper is mainly authored from the perspective of its three academic authors (Sarah, Sandie and Kate). Lak Lak and her son Djawa, directors of BCE, are co-authors due to the substantial role they played in sharing their knowledge, conceptualising the paper and working on two drafts. Kate, Sarah and Sandie were first introduced to Lak Lak and Djawa in January 2007 when the geographers were invited to Bawaka to see if their work on Indigenous tourism could be of use to the family. A close collaborative research relationship was the result of that and later visits, with BCE and the geographers forming a partnership through which a range of projects were identified that could mutually benefit all parties, including sharing Yolngu knowledge through the academic community⁴ (Wright et al., 2007; see also Carter, 2008 for a discussion of research partnerships in the context of environmental research and Louis, 2007 for a discussion of Indigenous methodologies). Much of the literature on Indigenous tourism notes the absence or lack of Aboriginal voices in academic work on tourism (Dyer et al., 2003; Zeppel, 2006). By co-authoring this article Djawa and Lak Lak are able to share their stories and start to address this gap.

In this paper we discuss the ways in which members of BCE approach their interactions with tourists, which knowledge they choose to share and how they frame this knowledge. While we draw on some tourist perspectives (obtained from evaluations of BCEs' Women's Tours) the aim is not to present an overview of visitor experiences or interpretations of their experiences at Bawaka but to engage with the rationale and decisions behind the way the members of the Burarrwanga family choose to present themselves. The material used in this paper was collected during 6 visits to Bawaka by Sarah, Kate and Sandie throughout 2007 and 2008. These visits

⁴ Indeed, for Lak Lak, as eldest sister, there is the additional cultural obligation to educate others.

consisted of stays of approximately one to two weeks at Bawaka and Yirrkala, an Aboriginal community two hours from Bawaka. The paper itself was refined and reviewed by Djawa and Lak Lak during two visits in 2008. Many of the stories were told and shown to Sarah, Kate and Sandie in 2007 and 2008 through the process of co-authoring a book on weaving and culture to be sold to tourists as well as academic audiences (Burarrwanga et al., 2008). Other material was gathered by observing several BCE day tours and specialized tours (one for Indonesian language teachers in 2007 and one for participants in the Garma Festival cultural tourism program in 2008). Finally, other material was gathered, observed and experienced by Kate, Sandie and Sarah through being visitors themselves to Bawaka on their various visits.

This paper, like the research itself and the tourism practiced by BCE, is an effort to challenge an assumed unproblematic separation between cultural worlds (Lloyd et al., 2007). As academics and Yolngu working together in writing and research, and as members of BCE working in tourism, we are participating in, and actively creating, intercultural zones. As stressed in a volume challenging traditional anthropological accounts of separate Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds (Hinkson & Smith, 2005, p. 161), the intercultural is a zone of 'interplay of differing expectations, understandings, and forms of practice, which give every interaction the potential to be a zone of reproduction and change'. Through our collaboration, we five authors continually co-construct ourselves, our relationships⁵ and the tourist experiences that are available at Bawaka. In doing so, the opportunities available to tourists at Bawaka engender a lived experience which may have political and moral repercussions as visitors can 'find themselves compelled by their interactions with one another (and with one another's actions) in ways that can both reinforce and profoundly change their understandings, reproducing a shared, yet complex, life-world' (Hinkson & Smith, 2005, p. 161).

The power of these interactions can be felt by tourists as they are invited to engage with the world on a different level. Through tourism, members of BCE communicate to tourists a different way of relating to animals and, on an ontological level, a different way of being. Thus, tourism at Bawaka enables a reconfiguration of

⁵ Doucet (2008) uses the metaphor of gossamer walls to problematise research relationships. She shows how the relationships researchers have with themselves, with their participants or collaborators, and with their audiences sometimes nearly touch, at other times are far apart, and always are ultimately unknowable.

the tourism experience itself. Rather than exclusively prioritising commercial enterprise, tourism at Bawaka is an invitation to re-imagine western ontologies and ways of knowing and being. Family members of BCE seek to transform and enthrall tourists with a differently experienced, differently known and differently lived world.

It is the theme of a differently lived world that we take up in the remainder of this paper. After contextualising our argument in the literature on Indigenous tourism, wildlife tourism and Yolngu ontologies, we explore in detail the experiences offered to tourists at Bawaka. We look first to the interrelated social, economic and cultural aims of the business. In order to understand how some of these aims are realised, we then focus on relationships with animals and discuss the ways that Yolngu ways of knowing and being are authorized, communicated and shared by members of the Burarrwanga family.

Insert Map 1: Location of Bawaka, North East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia

Insert Plate 1: *Gaypal*, the yellow wattle tree. (Photo: Kendall Shaw)

Indigenous tourism, animal tourism and Yolngu ontologies

Indigenous tourism

A substantial body of literature exists examining the relationship between Indigenous peoples and tourism, particularly key issues of ownership, control, identity and power (Altman & Finlayson, 2003; Buultjens & Fuller, 2007; Dyer et al., 2003; Notzke, 2006; Waite et al., 2007). A strong emphasis of much of this literature is the economic implications of tourism (Altman, 1989; Altman & Finlayson, 2003; Zeppel, 2007). Altman (1989) considers the economic place of Indigenous tourism in the Northern Territory. He notes that while tourism is increasingly promoted as a strategy to alleviate poverty and welfare dependency the economic outcomes are not always forthcoming. Buultjens and Fuller (2007) point out that, in addition to poor economic outcomes, a range of other problems such as a lack of cultural appreciation, risks of commodification, exploitation and environmental degradation of country have also been experienced by Indigenous operators engaging with tourism (see also Ryan & Huyton, 2000, 2002). Cross-cultural incommensurability is also presented as a barrier

to Indigenous success in tourism, leading some authors to argue that partnerships between Indigenous communities and mainstream tourism may be the most viable way to enhance Indigenous participation and success in tourism (Ryan & Huyton, 2000, 2002).

Studies which have explored the experience of Aboriginal communities or families' involvement in Indigenous tourism often refer to the loss of control and disruption to daily lifestyles (Buultjens & Fuller, 2007; Ryan & Huyton, 2000, 2002). Indigenous peoples have strived for many years to retain control of their culture and prevent the appropriation of their knowledge (Smallacombe et al., 2006). However, Indigenous cultural knowledge and heritage has often been distorted and appropriated for commercial interests by non-Indigenous people due to the lack of control that Indigenous people have had over their own heritage in the Australian political context (Tourism NSW, 2006). Zeppel (2007, p. 410) points out that, even though Indigenous groups own most of the land where the Northern Territory tourism icons are located, they are often overlooked in land-use planning and decision making processes. Indigenous control of knowledge is crucial to preventing cultural exploitation and cultural appropriation (Robertson-Friend, 2004).

Dyer et al. (2003) examine the Djabugay people's involvement in cultural tourism, and conclude that whilst some economic benefits arise from the Djabugay's participation in cultural tourism, Indigenous people often have their own agenda about what benefits they want to receive from their involvement. These are not solely economic in nature. The results of Dyer et al.'s (2003) research challenge popular perceptions that cultural tourism is the panacea for Indigenous disadvantage and dependency. Instead they find that cultural sustainability is often the desired outcome and this is dependent upon Aboriginal control:

... because of the range of complexities of tourism impacts, the gap between capitalist corporate culture and traditional Indigenous culture needs to be addressed openly and honestly. Reciprocity, timeliness and contingencies should be in place so that cultural and intellectual property remains in the hands of control of the rightful owners (Dyer et al., 2003, p. 94).

In addition to the Djabugay people's involvement in cultural tourism there are a number of examples of communities and individuals taking control of tourism through particular management mechanisms (Johnston, 2005). Dunbar-Hall (2001)

refers to ‘culture bearers’ and utilises the idea of boundaries and frontiers to identify sites at which tourists are restricted from or allowed entry to levels of insider experience and potential knowledge. At boundary sites tourists, although not discouraged from attending, are denied access to parts of events and their meanings. Sometimes this restriction is imposed by culture bearers, at others it results from a lack of knowledge or the means of obtaining it. At sites defined as frontiers, a simultaneity of culture bearer and tourist input to the meaning of events is found. The focus here is on culture bearers as a source of information and understanding, rather than on tourists ‘as the defining factor in meaning construction in performance events...’ (Dunbar-Hall, 2001, p. 175). Through BCE, the Burarrwanga family can be seen as ‘culture bearers’ as they sculpt the tourist experience to enable an intercultural dialogue.

We draw on the experience of BCE to illustrate the need to move beyond a focus on economic goals, needs and limitations in Indigenous tourism and engage with social, cultural, environmental and political processes and outcomes (Zeppel, 2006). Our research with BCE also challenges some of the assumptions made in the literature that questions the financial and cultural ability or capacity of Aboriginal communities to manage tourism ventures. Here opportunities for cultural maintenance and caring for country exist alongside economic benefits and the investment in communities that tourism provides.

Animal tourism, wildlife tourism and Indigenous peoples

The relationship between animals and tourism has also been explored at some length but rarely with a focus on Indigenous issues or perspectives in tourism. Instead, authors have analysed relationships between ecotourism and sustainability (Curtin, 2003; Sorice et al., 2006) and tourist experiences of wildlife (Curtin, 2005; Hill et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2005; Lemelin, 2006; Lemelin & Smale, 2006). Although most of this literature fails to problematise Eurocentric assumptions of a separation between human and animal, Curtin (2005) and Cater (2006) attempt to engage with the commodification of wildlife, the dangers of eco-colonialism through ecotourism and the separation of human from animal in western thought, while the work of Suchet (2002) and Langton (2003) critique many of the western assumptions and classifications underlying the concept of wildlife. Cloke and Perkins (2005) offer

important insights into animal agency in their examination of embodied beings, ecotourism and performance in New Zealand. The insights from such posthumanist work, especially in the area of animal geographies (Wolch & Emel, 1998), together with the postcolonial literature on Indigenous knowledges discussed below, form the key points of reference for this paper.

Work on Aboriginal relationships with Australian wildlife has received increasing interest including a focus on spiritual dimensions (Davies, 1999), the use of wildlife for food, sustenance and commercial uses (Adams, 1996; AWMS, 2004; Bomford & Caughley, 1996; Davies, 1999) and wildlife tourism (Mulion et al., 2001; Palmer, 2001; Wilson & Tisdell, 2001; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008b; Zeppel et al., 2003). Various reports focus on the use of wildlife in tourism through wildlife harvesting, farming ventures and safari hunting on Aboriginal lands (Bomford & Caughley, 1996; Davies, 1999; Palmer, 2001; Ramsay, 1994). Yet few have focused on Indigenous involvement in wildlife tourism or on Indigenous cultural interpretation of wildlife (Mulion et al., 2001; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008b; Zeppel et al., 2003).

Zeppel & Muloin (2008b) evaluate Aboriginal cultural interpretation at wildlife attractions and on wildlife tours in Australia. They point out that the wildlife interpretation provided by Indigenous guides was usually more ‘spiritual’ in nature with information gained from personal experiences, such as training from elders on how to hunt, and from stories passed down from family members or senior elders in the community. The importance of oral tradition and verbal communication of knowledge was stressed, as was the importance of respecting this cultural knowledge and not telling stories without appropriate permission. Indigenous staff respondents also stated that sharing knowledge of Australian wildlife could help tourists understand and appreciate Indigenous cultures as well as providing a cultural and employment opportunity for the community. Zeppel and Muloin (2008b) conclude that the potential for Aboriginal cultural interpretation in Australian wildlife tourism is limited because of the perceived difficulties of incorporating Indigenous cultural values in wildlife interpretation and a lack of Indigenous employment or cultural policies at wildlife attractions. Our research illustrates that Indigenous people can share their in-depth and specific knowledge of wildlife and animals in Indigenous-owned contexts beyond mainstream wildlife attractions.

Yolngu ontologies

While there continues to be considerable anthropological debate about issues of contestation and certainty in Yolngu land tenure systems (see Williams 1983, 1986; Keen, 1994), it is clear that Yolngu people live in a complex and dynamic world which is fundamentally based on, around and through a ‘dense web of connections’ (Keen, 1994, p. 131). These connections, ‘among places, ancestors, persons, and ceremonies’ (Keen, 1994, p. 103), between religion, politics, histories and economies (Williams, 1986) and between physical, emotional, experiential and social realms (Tamisari, 1998), can be glimpsed through powerful anthropological work discussing the ‘experiential character of Yolngu knowledge’ (Tamisari, 1998), dynamism and movement through sea cosmology (Magowan, 2001) and the ontological connections between people, land and salt and fresh water (Morphy & Morphy, 2006). Magowan (2001, p. 25) explains how ‘Yolngu cosmology relates human, animal, vegetable, mineral and atmospheric elements in a vast web of social interconnections as well individual and group significations’. Despite these generalisations about Yolngu ontology, authors have been at pains to stress the situated, dynamic nature of Yolngu knowledges. For example, Keen argues that there is no Yolngu truth *per se* and stresses that ‘in constructing ancestral events people of different groups with ‘the same’ *wangarr* [ancestral being] had their own rather ethnocentric and relative perspectives on them’ (1994, p. 290). Keen (1994) and Williams (1986) also devote a large proportion of their work to illustrate the way Yolngu culture embraces dynamism and change through on-going transformations: ‘[i]n the Yolngu case ... rules are based on the reality of change and the knowledge that change will have both social and ecological mainsprings’ (Williams, 1986, p. 231). This is an ‘ordered change’ that is simultaneously based on ‘long term continuity’ (Williams, 1986, p. 18). Keen (1994, p. 131) encompasses these key notions of change and context in his characterisation of Yolngu ontology as a:

... dense web of connections formed in myth and ceremony among places and groups. It is not possible to describe that web of connections objectively from a transcendental point of view, because each individual and group constituted it in their own way, agreeing on some things, differing about others, and reshaping it in order to make and create relations or to claim resources.

For the members of the Burarrwanga family, places are alive with story, Law, power and kinship relations that join not only people to each other but link people, ancestors, place, animals, rocks, plants, stories and song within meaning imbued,

sapient landscapes and seascapes (Burarrwanga et al., 2008; Magowan, 2001; Morphy, 1995). Such landscapes are full of significance. Within them, animals take their place as important actors with ancestral beings frequently transforming from animal form to human form and back again, carrying story and song, and creating and conveying Law (Morphy, 1995). Not only are humans divided into specific groupings with specific relationships to country and each other, but ‘the whole universe’ including animals, fish, birds and plants also belong to particular places and have their own spiritual identities with discrete sets of ancestral beings (Morphy & Morphy, 2006, p. 68).

Both animals and people exist as part of country. The notion of country in Aboriginal English has a specific significance that encompasses many diverse layers of meaning (Rose, 1996). Country carries a place-based understanding that incorporates people, animals, plants, water and land. Yet country does not just encompass these people and things, but also what connects them to each other and to multiple spiritual and symbolic realms. It implies Laws, custom, movement, song, knowledges, relationships, histories, presents, futures, and spirit beings. Country itself is a sapient presence that can be talked to, that can be known, that can itself communicate, feel and take either benign or non-benign action. As Debbie Rose (1996, p. 7) states, ‘country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart’s ease.’

It is not just humans that understand country in this way, but animals, spirit beings and country itself. Animals are co-creators of country. Like humans they too know it, feel it and sing it. Thus, within this diverse understanding, animals cannot be understood as separate objects within a hierarchy of power and ownership that sees them subservient to, or there for the enjoyment of, humans (Christie & Greatedorex, 2006; Garnggulkpuy et al., 2002; Michie et al., 1998). Rather animals are themselves important, powerful and able to create and communicate meaning. For example, ‘[a] person can ‘feel’ the country and its organisms, such as turtles, endowing an individual with knowledge and skill (*djamabtj*) at hunting and gathering ... The

country recognizes one from one's smell' (Keen, 2006, p. 291; see also Tamisari, 1998)⁶.

Of fundamental importance to this notion of sapient country is knowledge. Within a world where all (in a broadly understood sense) are connected through relationships to each other, connections become the source of knowledge about oneself, each other and the world (Christie & Greatedorex, 2006; Garnggulkpuy et al., 2002; Rose, 1996). Knowledge about country means knowing how and where one fits within the world, how one connects to others and to place (Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation, 2006; Hughes, 1996; Stanner, 1979). It follows that in teaching visitors about country and in sharing stories of animals, members of the Burarrwanga family are engaged in a very powerful and generous intercultural act. We now turn to an empirical discussion of some key aspects of interculturality involved in tourism at Bawaka. We begin with a discussion of the family business and its multi-faceted vision.

Bawaka Cultural Experiences as a path towards a multi-dimensional self-determination

Based on the vision of Lak Lak's husband, the planning for BCE began in earnest in 2005 through the efforts of key members of the Burarrwanga family together with support from a range of Northern Territory government agencies including Tourism NT (Northern Territory) and the Department of Business and Economic and Regional Development. BCE began running day tours and specialised private tours in March 2006 and a total of 759 tourists had visited Bawaka by December 2008. 64 day trips were run specifically for a short term contract workforce employed on an extension of the bauxite mine in nearby Nhulunbuy, and 44 private and business day tours were run for a range of tourists working in or visiting the local

⁶ Many Indigenous cultures have distinct, dynamic and diverse ways of understanding animals, human-animal relations and the place of both animals and humans in the world at large. Many Indigenous cultures emphasize connections and relationships between animal and human worlds within a placed-based yet broadly defined environment (M. Adams, 2008; Cajete, 2000; Ingold, 2000; Johnson & Murton, 2007; Marker, 2006; Nadasdy, 2007; Rose, 2005; Suchet, 2002; Watson & Huntington, 2008). Within this context, animals are important agents. Watson and Huntington, for example, discuss human-animal relationships around hunting as practiced by Koyukon Athabascans in North America. Here the moose hunt involves complex relationships between hunter and prey that accord significant agency and respect to the moose that will choose the time to give itself to the hunter (Watson & Huntington, 2008).

mining town of Nhulunbuy or the Aboriginal community of Yirrkala. BCE have also run 11 specialized tours for a diverse range of tour groups, including participants in the annual Garma Festival, Indonesian language teachers, international cruise liners and television documentary makers. In November 2006 the women of BCE established a specialized two day tour for women known as Gay'wu (Dillybag) Women's Program and have run three tours to date with a total of 24 women who come from throughout Australia.

The day tours at Bawaka are informal events in which activities and stories are told in response to circumstances. Djawa, Lak Lak and other family members may take the tourists fishing, make spears, teach children about the seasons, show tourists how to weave baskets and make seed necklaces, and/or talk about different ways of cooking food. The two day Gay'wu (Dillybag) Women's Program is more strongly structured although it also responds to seasonal and daily circumstances with a particular focus on women's stories, experiences and issues. Other tours are customised depending on the circumstances, for example, some are based at Shady Beach near Yirrkala whilst others focus on particular experiences at Bawaka itself.

BCE have an impressive portfolio of tours for an emerging enterprise in a remote location and the Burarrwanga family acknowledges that a sustainable economic base is critical to ensure their business remains viable. In fact, the family clearly aspires to move towards a self-determined future for themselves and for future generations through economic independence and BCE is seen as key to this (BCE, 2006). The Women's Programs vision states '(t)his business will build a positive future for our children and grandchildren by strengthening our culture and creating economic independence' (BCE, 2006, p. 14). The economic benefits are discussed as 'working towards independence' (BCE, 2006, p. 12) and 'creating new jobs for Yolngu people' (BCE, 2006, p. 12). However, these economic aspirations are intimately interwoven with social, political and cultural aspirations and should not be seen as mutually exclusive (see Williams, 1986). This is clearly articulated in the BCE business vision in which economic aspirations are entirely integrated with the family's social, cultural, political and broader development aims:

1. Share the significant way of life of Yolngu people with others and teach them to respect the environment, culture and sacred areas.

2. Provide an experience with the land and the people to promote cultural understanding to the wider world.
3. Provide opportunities for employment and training for Yolngu people at home and to teach them to take responsibility for their rights and their future, so we can grow together (BCE, 2006, p. 3).

The Burarrwanga family are clear on what benefits they want to receive from their involvement in tourism. Like other Indigenous tourism operators they are not solely economic in nature (see Dyer et al., 2003). One of the main aims of BCE is to share Yolngu life and promote cultural understanding. Djawa and Lak Lak relish the opportunity to interact with tourists. As Djawa explains: 'I feel like when we walk together a connection takes place – it's personal and cultural' (March, 2008). Tourism for the Burarrwanga family is about 'sharing our culture ... our place and our stories ... showing the positive side of Yolngu culture ... it helps to build friendships between Yolngu and non-Indigenous people locally, nationally and internationally ...' (BCE 2006, p.12). It is also about sharing knowledge and culture. The Women's Tours are seen as 'a gift of friendship, knowledge and strength to women visitors' (BCE 2006, p.14). However, this sharing is largely on BCE's terms and, as discussed later, tourists are always given information about key cultural protocols they are expected to follow.

BCE has received support from a variety of government agencies, local organisations and the academic community⁷. In particular, the Northern Territory Indigenous tourism strategy has sponsored a range of training and support mechanisms for financially viable Indigenous businesses (Zeppel, 2007). One key initiative is the development of a government sponsored tourism hub to support a range of Indigenous owned tourist operations in the North East Arnhem Land region. The hub began operations in 2008 and is staffed by a Tourism Hub Coordinator. While this support is greatly valued, BCE has tried to ensure that any support they draw is always overseen and is on their own terms. For example, to ensure that business demands did not impede on their cultural and family priorities, tours were suspended for three months in late 2008 due to cultural commitments and major

⁷ BCE's business plan and aims were developed through a Stepping Stones Program funded by Tourism NT and the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development. Further business, marketing and tour development support has come from other government organisations such as Indigenous Tourism Australia, Arts NT, local community organisations such as Yirrkala Dhanbul and the academic community – including the University of Newcastle and Macquarie University.

funerals. Family members have also expressed concern over 'burn out' and subsequent poor health (BCE, 2006) due to increasing numbers of tours coming through without adequate breaks and in 2008 adjusted commitments accordingly.

The Burarrwanga family have worked hard to create the circumstances in which they can determine the nature of their business – in this case a business which has intimately interlinked economic-social-cultural-political aspirations. Critically, they have enabled a situation in which they can also assert the importance and power of knowledge. Through BCE, the Burarrwanga family make decisions over what knowledge to share with tourists and sculpt the experiences which enable tourists to engage with country. It is they who can communicate with and understand country and who mediate in the intercultural touristic space with the active agency of country. The rest of this empirical discussion illustrates the ways tourists are invited into this interconnected world through a focus on animals. It is based around four themes: knowing and being known; teaching tourists limits; animals and caring for country, and, the seasonal messaging system.

Knowing and being known

It is important at Bawaka, as in many other systems within Indigenous Australia, to be known by country. The trees, the plants, the animals are, after all, kin. As Peter Sutton (1988, p. 13) explains, 'there is no alien world of mere things.' Yolngu communication with their country is the basis of their relationships. Lak Lak is careful to point this out to tourists, drawing their attention to the sounds of the bush, not as a pretty background noise or as an exercise in animal identification, but as communication situated within a web of relationships and responsibilities. Lak Lak told Kate and Sarah:

Listen to the bush turkey calling. They were singing out this morning to welcome you because you had been invited. Whenever there are tourists here who have been invited, the bush turkeys will sing. That's how we know you are welcome on this country (November 2007).

The question of invitation and welcome is fundamental to any visit to Bawaka. Arriving at Bawaka for the first time, tourists are told of the importance of being invited to country and assured, that because they are invited, they will be protected and welcomed by the land, animals and spirits that dwell there. This is important

because disrespect or ill-treatment of country can result in danger, illness or death (Keen, 2006; Morphy, 1995; Tamisari, 1998). Many visitors will be formally welcomed through a welcome to country ceremony, a practice that exists in many parts of Aboriginal Australia (Tamisari, 1998; Williams, 1986). At Bawaka, welcome to country is done with the smoke of the *Djilka* (also known as *Gawatjk*) in a smoking ceremony that a senior family member performs (see Plate 2).

Insert Plate 2: Welcome to country smoking ceremony performed at Bawaka by Djawa

(Photo: S. Suchet-Pearson)

Throughout a visit, tourists are invited to engage with the exchange between animals and people, and with the concept of being known, in diverse ways, particularly by observing what goes on around them and in participating in a range of activities. It is not just visitors that must be known, but Yolngu children who are gradually introduced to different aspects of country as they grow. There are various learning stages and both knowledge and respect must be built over time. For example, whilst gathering pandanus for use in basket weaving during one tour, Nanukala, Lak Lak's granddaughter, was bitten by some ants. Lak Lak helped her swiping them off but explained: 'It is okay. It is important for her to know the ants and for the ants to know her' (November 2007). An active engagement, even one involving pain, is important for relationships and understandings between agents in the cosmos, including people and animals, to be built.

Stories are also told about animals in a way that underscores their importance in the world view of Yolngu. Tourists may anticipate 'dreamtime' stories about animals from a distant, mythical past but what they find is a different kind of reality where these powerful lineages continue to exist in the present and future. 'Dreamtime and dreaming stories,' explains Djawa, 'is not the right term for us because it sounds like one day we woke up from dreaming. But these continue to be real and these stories continue here at Bawaka. It is significant Law' (March 2008). Communicating these stories as significant and ongoing Law is crucial in teaching tourists and visitors about the validity and importance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Nadasdy, 2007).

‘Stories’ and ‘dreaming’ are part of everyday life at Bawaka, and this reality is shared with tourists. While talking of saltwater crocodiles (*Baru*), and particularly of Nike, the crocodile that lives near and often visits Bawaka, and Micky, who lives across the water on the other side of Port Bradshaw, Djawa tells tourists that:

Crocs are sacred at Bawaka. The pattern of their skin is significant as it is from stories where crocs are thrown through the fire and the marks are where the fire burned. In January or February on Elcho Island⁸, someone shot a croc so there was a big fight with spears. They pulled the croc to shore and buried him. There are 800 to 1000 songs and stories about crocs. Different clans have got different stories⁹. If we see a dead croc, the women cry. All our mothers cry. Bawaka is a female country when it’s sunset they cry for joy and happiness (March 2008)¹⁰.

These ‘sacred’ relationships interconnect through ongoing relationships today:

When we feed the crocs we form a relationship with them. We help them grow up. Mum and Dad always say don’t kill any crocs. Micky, a five and a half meter croc who lives on the other side, he comes over to eat fish. He doesn’t do anything. Once there was a boy down here (18-19 years old) he was mentally disabled and was out in the water – drowning – Micky took him to shore and saved him. The Welcome to Country makes us safe. At around four to five in the afternoon the crocs come. We talk to them, they talk back. They make moves with their head, ‘ack ack ack haaaaa’ they talk, and we talk back too by hitting the ground. Dogs can talk to the crocodiles too, my dog Rabbit knows *Baru’s* language.

Tourists not only hear Djawa talk about the crocodile but may also see him talk to Nike if Nike visits Bawaka during the tourists’ stay. The animals are introduced as the living embodiment of creation ancestors. As the Law continues, the stories, songs and

⁸ Elcho Island is located off the coast of Arnhem Land to the north west of Bawaka.

⁹ See Magowan, (2001) and Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre (2003) for further discussion of the complex relationship with crocodiles.

¹⁰ Although the crocodile is sacred and should not be hurt at Bawaka, in other Yolngu places and at other times, crocodiles may be hunted and eaten. However, context is always crucial. Morphy (1995) describes an incident very near Bawaka where an Indigenous hunter who was about to shoot a crocodile was stopped when it was pointed out that the leader of a particular clan was ill and that if the crocodile was killed on this clan’s country at this time it could well weaken the leader’s spirit. During this incident the crocodile prudently remained on the ill leader’s country and hence was not shot. *Saltwater: Yirrkala bark paintings of sea country* by the Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre (2003) is a publication accompanying an exhibition of 80 bark paintings by 47 Yolngu artists of Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land which toured nationally. The exhibition was a response by the artists to the desecration of a crocodile’s nest by barramundi fishers on the shores of Blue Mud Bay in 1996. These paintings were recognized as evidence of native title and ownership of saltwater in the Blue Mud Bay Case.

communication continue. Appropriately, this is not a scheduled 'experience.' Neither stories about crocodiles nor the chance to see Djawa talking with Nike are programmed into a visit but are dependent on the agency of the animals themselves who may or may not choose to visit during a tour and who may or may not stay to communicate.

Animals, as well as plants, the land, the winds, the water, and the elements, are sentient, sapient and have agency. During a visit to Bawaka they are watching, listening, smelling and communicating. All animals have their own story about themselves and then a story about their relationship with other animals and humans. They have knowledge and wisdom as well as songs of their own. As Djawa explains:

In nature here we respect creatures that live in the sea, in the mangrove. There is nothing in the world that doesn't live. When we walk through this place, animals are also walking and their energy touches our energy. We can feel the energy like the way a woman feels a baby inside her. When we walk barefoot we feel the energy. Animals and birds feel it too. Animals feel our babies; when we have a baby the animals know (March 2008).

Animals, like people, have responsibilities in the system and certain (rights) to live their own songs and follow their Law, Law that was created by human and animal ancestral beings. The Law covers animals, plants, people and all things in country. Everything has ceremony, everything has song, everything has Law which connects everything together in a widely understood sense of kinship. Yolngu are respectful of the knowledges of animals. Lak Lak describes:

They got knowledge, all the animals, and they got their sign, they got their language. Like making the nest. Females, they birth and they know where to live. The animals are connected to the people. They are wives and husbands same as people. They have got special names and songlines. We can feel it when we eat. The animals are like tribal people. They have their own tribe. From birds to land to Yolngu people. We are all connected (July 2008).

Teaching tourists limits

The Yolngu system of knowledge does not invite a sense of conquering knowledge or obtaining or knowing all (Morphy, 1983). No person can know all that Bayini, the spirit woman of Bawaka, knows. How could they, when she named many

of the places? Nor can a person know what Nike the crocodile knows of country. An important part of knowledge is being aware of one's place, of learning and of sharing, but also recognising the limits to knowledge.

Debbie Bird Rose (1996, pp. 32-33) quotes the Ginytjirrang Mala (clan) who speak of the importance of differential access to different knowledge for Yolngu in a way that underscores the importance of different elements of country, in this case water:

In the Yolngu world view, water is the giver of sacred knowledge, all ceremonies and lands. Whether it's fresh or salt, travelling on or under the land, or in the sea, water is the source of all that is holy. The word gapu, meaning water, is for anyone to use, including women and children. But there is another deeper meaning for the word which is only for the elders to know, that is why talk about water must be 'at the feet of the old people'. There is 'surface' water and 'inside' water. The land carries it along an 'inside' path. And then it comes out as spring water in the sea. The salt water is on the surface and the fresh water is inside. And Yolngu stories are the same ~ there are stories which go outside and there are inside stories too.

For the Burarrwanga family, as well as for visitors, there is knowledge that is appropriate for some but not all. Some things may be known by elders but not young people, Yolngu but not visitors, or women but not men (or vice versa) (Keen, 1994). The very names and meanings of animals change with age, gender and ceremonial status (Davis et al., 1982; Morphy, 1983; Tamisari, 1998). While sharing knowledge of country is itself a generous act by the family, tourists are clearly told and shown that there are things they cannot know and things too sacred to be shared. Putting limits on knowledge and encouraging humility in how a visitor relates to place is in itself an important form of learning and an important part of the tourist experience¹¹.

The importance given to tourists understanding that there are limits on what and how knowledge may be shared, and limits on where visitors may go at Bawaka, is such that tourists are provided with a pamphlet, and in the case of the women's tour a booklet, that describes what the family is hoping to share and also points out that it is important that tourists do not wander around unaccompanied. It states, 'One of our family will be with you at all times – please do not wander from the group' (BCE,

¹¹ See Dunbar-Hall (2001) for a discussion of similar processes of putting limits on knowledge in interactions between Balinese and tourists.

n.d.). Bawaka is nourishing and welcoming to those who are invited but it can also be very dangerous to those in the wrong place or who do not do as asked (Keen, 1994; Morphy, 1995; Tamisari, 1998). This includes learning to pay attention to certain animals that can cause harm such as buffalo, snakes and crocodiles. These animals, however, are not introduced as *inherently* dangerous. Rather, these animals can be dangerous if due care and respect is not shown. As Djawa explains, the approach is one aimed not at killing or eliminating dangers but at calming the dangers. In particular, it is important that the visitor be known and show respect for the appropriate limits. Speaking once more of crocodiles he tells one group of visitors:

It's not true that crocs don't like humans. They are smart animals. If you tease them they'll make a picture of you and pass it to other crocs. They can send messages to say someone is good or bad (March 2008).

Limits also spring from the existence of sacred areas (Keen, 2006). While some of these areas may or may not (at different levels) be communicated to tourists, the awareness that some areas of Bawaka are particularly sacred to some animals and/or spirit beings is important information. These sites frequently coincide with a breeding or nesting place and thus play an important role in the life cycle of certain animals. Communicating areas as sacred and special encourages tourists to see animals, not in a paternalistic way as needing to be saved (ironically from fellow humans), but as beings worthy of respect with their own needs and histories.

Animals and caring for country

Spiritual affiliations accord both rights and responsibilities, including custodial responsibilities for keeping country healthy and its species abundant. Rights to hunt and gather resources, including animals, are seen as an integral part of 'caring for country' (Zeppel & Muloin, 2008a, p. 112). Often there is an integral interrelationship between subsistence, ceremonial and ritual use of animals by Indigenous peoples (Yibarbuk, 1998). In sharing this knowledge with tourists, the Burarrwanga family's relationship with animals also takes on an added commercial dimension as the collection and hunting of food plays an important part in the tourist experience. Tourists either sample bush tucker that has been gathered or hunted before the visit and/or themselves take part in these activities.

In sharing their way of life with visitors, the Burarrwanga family thus emphasises the importance of the acquisition of food. Lak Lak tries to encourage

tourists to see this activity as multilayered. An excursion to look for turkey eggs or to go fishing is not merely a trip gathering turkey eggs or fish, but is an opportunity to communicate with country, to share stories, and for tourists to begin to understand the connections and spirit of Bawaka. Lak Lak explains to one group, 'you can't just talk about bush foods without also talking about everything else, what the food is called, what its uses are – bush food, bush medicine, how it is cooked, its story, and what it tells us to do' (March 2008).

Country that is communicated with and used is a healthy place and ultimately, for Lak Lak and family, hunting and gathering food is central to keeping the Law alive. This is not about 'preserving' a species, but constitutes a dynamic engagement with country that understands that for the whole system to thrive (including humans, animals, plants, water, song, spirits, sky, soil) each of its components must be actively cared for. To nourish the land, to nourish animals and song, means actively engaging with, and using country and its elements. Caring for and using the land are in many ways indistinguishable. A cared for land, a healthy land, must be sung, and it must be 'cleansed' appropriately using fire management. This idea is expressed succinctly by Joe Yunupingu (1994) talking at a symposium on biodiversity and fire in North Australia:

Got to look for animal. Kill animal, few, not much. We look after the animals, eat them not to waste it, kill them, waste them. Not for fun, that business. That's the Law for the Yolngu people. That's their ceremony ground, ceremony area, traditional way... Only Yolngu people look after for they eat, that's all. Eat the animals, eat the fish or stingray, shark, whatever you caught. That what we look after, for Yolngu. That's Yolngu land.

This concept is an important one to communicate to tourists as it underpins many of the relations with animals at Bawaka. Animals, and the hunting of animals, are understood in a relational and holistic way. Djawa explains:

Animals are everywhere. Any fish we catch we leave some behind for birds, eagles. When we eat fish we eat it in the sea so anything left goes back to the sea. It's a shame to waste anything. It is part of managing the environment – anything we catch we give back. Sea eagles follow us around (March 2008).

Animals are not seen as separate beings needing to be conserved *per se* but are understood as part of a system that includes people as well as land, sea, song, story. The well-being of all beings, of wind, water, sky and of land, on country is related.

Caring for country means caring for the whole system and all elements within it. The bush turkeys, the *lalu* (parrot fish), *miyapunu* (turtle), Bayini the spirit woman of Bawaka, *gunga* (the pandanus plant), the water, wind and people are all interdependent. It is not enough to care for one element, one species, one area without understanding the need to balance the whole vivid, vibrant assemblage.

Djawa talks about the way that hunting is integrated with what it means to be and live on country and how in communicating this to tourists a personal as well as cultural connection is made:

This - the country - is like my library, my education. Where I grew up. Fishing is not a sport. These things I do everyday of my life. For people who come out, they have an 'experience' – for me, it's my every day. Working together with the tourists, we have a connection – teaching, learning – I come close to them, I'm there all the time (March 2008).

The Burarrwanga family appreciates that for many tourists hunting, gathering and eating bush foods can be a confronting experience. While the idea of 'bush tucker' is appealing for visitors undertaking a cultural experience, the reality can be quite different. As such, the Burarrwanga's often dilute the experiential aspect of killing animals for tourists who do not like to see animals getting killed. Djawa explains that, 'we tell stories about turtle to tourists as some don't like to see the turtle getting killed. We tell stories of what we do in different seasons if tourists don't want to see it' (March 2008). However, if the tourists indicate that they would like to engage with the process of hunting food, if the opportunity allows, they will be taken on a hunting trip to trawl nets or spear for fish, stingray and crabs. Gathering food can also be very hard work. Food may indeed 'grow on trees' but finding it and gathering it can be hot and arduous particularly when no single tree or location should be stripped of its crop. In the trial Women's Tour in November 2006 the long hours spent gathering turtle eggs in the sun were too much for some of the group who wanted to retire to the trees (BCE, 2006b). As one participant commented in the post-tour questionnaire, 'When the women insisted on digging for more turtle eggs when obviously everyone had had enough was a little disconcerting.' However, the turtle egg hunting and gathering of bush foods also featured heavily in the responses of the pilot Women's Tour guests as they described what they most enjoyed about the tours (BCE, 2006b) (see list one).

List One: Individual participant responses from the Women's Program trial tour

Which aspect/s of the Women's Program did you find the most interesting/enjoyable?

1. Group discussion under the tamarind tree day.
2. The environment/surroundings/vistas, dance, discussing Yolngu culture, massage and making friendships.
3. Hunting and gathering (digging for pippies and turtle eggs, collecting pandanus) etc.
4. Massage, morning crying, yidaki, turtle egg hunting.
5. Swimming, stories - especially the two sisters. Turtle egg hunting, body massage and wearing the skirts provided by the ladies.
6. Interactive activities: dancing, gathering foods, massage and story telling.
7. Dawn ceremony, massage and dancing.
8. The place is stunning and to immerse yourself in their culture in that environment was the most enjoyable.
9. The scenery, the stories, the tabu areas (no photos here, but it is ok there etc.) The pipis and turtle egg gathering - very interesting, the massage was fantastic. The early morning walk - croc markings on the sand - all added to the experience. (BCE, 2006b, p. 9)

Ironically, some of the comments on the tour also suggested the women would have liked to have eaten more bush food for their meals. For the Women's Program a cook is hired to prepare meals so that Lak Lak and the family do not need to be concerned with food preparation arrangements. While the quality of the food is appreciated, feedback from tourists on the pilot tour included the suggestion to 'include a variety of Yolngu cooking and food at each meal time.' The Burarrwanga continue to carefully think through the expectations around bush foods. They need to make sure they do not take too much from country to feed the generally small but steady flow of visitors. It would also take days to hunt and collect enough to feed a visiting group. It is clear that many tourists are yet to fully grasp the intimate connection realised by the concept of bush food. They have yet to understand that,

unlike western ontologies which separate the managers of the environment from the users of the environment, in the Yolngu world view one cannot separate caring for country and ensuring a healthy interconnected world from the active use and enjoyment (and very hard work) of killing and collecting food (Muller, in press).

Seasonal messaging system

Animals also take their place as important agents in the interlinked system of place-based knowledge known as the seasonal messaging system (Rose, 1996; Tamisari, 1998). The seasonal messaging system communicates when, throughout the year, certain events will happen. For instance, tourists spending time at Bawaka are told stories about the Yolngu seasons and how they relate to not only weather conditions but also the status of a range of food sources. Different times of the year are appropriate for hunting different animals while fruits, eggs, roots crops and other plant and animal products are subject to seasonal variation. As described in the introduction, when you see *gaypal* in flower you know that it is time to go fishing, crabbing and hunting turtle. Other examples are related to nesting times or important events in the life cycles of animals. Of the crocodile, Djawa explains:

When there is lightening, it makes the female croc lay eggs, it pushes them to lay eggs. In March, they finish their nesting time. They lay 10-20 eggs, they hatch and the little ones come out. When they are babies their arms are out straight in front and then it indicated that it is time for them to go out to sea. When their arms are bent, they come in again. It makes me cry (March 2008).

This knowledge relies upon understanding connections between people, plants and animals. It recognises the will of plants and animals and their ability to communicate. The information involved in these messages is accurate and place specific. Talking to tourists about seasonal messaging means helping them understand some of the many connections and responsibilities involved with living right on the land at Bawaka. So Lak Lak explains, 'I know when it is hot that there will be good fruits to eat. The thirst I feel in my body is linked right with the trees that give the fruit. I know and the tree knows.' She does not need to look to know the fruits are available. Rather her body, communicating directly with the fruits and the seasons, will tell her.

Conclusions: knowledges and self-determination

On the drive down to Bawaka, tourists are given a commentary on key places and events in the lives of the Burarrwanga family and in the social-cultural-spiritual-environmental landscape of Bawaka. If there are children on the tour, Djawa often introduces the children, and by extension the adults, to the animals of Bawaka and the noises they make through the song 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm'. Asking the children to nominate animals, they usually start off with animals that you might see on a quintessential Western farm such as cow, sheep and chicken. As the four wheel drive bounces over the sand dunes on the two hour long trip, Djawa begins to allude to crocodiles, buffalo, snakes and kangaroos; the animals of Bawaka that are neither owned nor farmed in an Old Macdonald sense but are part of a mutually dependent system. This aims to unsettle the tourist who is confronted with a different way of imaging animals and human relations with them.

In this paper, we have considered the way that tourism is used by the Burarrwanga family to challenge the way tourists relate to the world and hence make important political statements. Specifically, we have looked at the ways the family invite tourists to reconsider their relationships with animals through an engagement with an ontology of connection. Understanding people as intimately connected to the environment, to animals and other people, has the potential to be a profound cultural communication with important political consequences. At Bawaka, tourists are given the opportunity to appreciate that in a Yolngu world view, animals and people must take responsibility for their relationships with each other, for their relationships with other species, and for caring for, including actively using, country. Tourists can learn that landscapes, indeed sea-scapes and animal-scapes, are all alive with meaning. Through a range of experiences, most responding to the active agency of sapient beings including animals, tourists can start 'to trace a kinship among the living things of the world' (Rose, 1996, p. 29).

Yolngu have long used a range of mediums and contexts (paintings, sacred objects, songs, dance, law courts, museums, parliaments) to share knowledge and values with Ngapaki. The telling of Yolngu stories, in Yolngu terms, has been an important strategy in asserting their political and moral rights in a way that has, at least partially, reflected the complexity and dynamism of the Yolngu universe. The Yirrkala Church Panels created in 1963 and now housed at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre in Yirrkala, are a vital way of asserting the importance and validity of the

Yolngu spiritual world and custodianship of their country, while the Yirrkala Bark Petition, a document framed with Yolngu symbolic art sent to parliament in 1965, was a crucial step in setting modern day Land Rights in motion (Morphy, 1983; Wells & Wells, 1971). Using tourism, members of the Burarrwanga family are telling other stories of Yolngu life. These stories have many dimensions including inviting tourists to re-evaluate their place in the world as connected, teaching tourists the importance of limits to knowledge, putting forward a positive statement about Aboriginal people that counters many stereotypes present in the media, and encouraging tourists to understand business and money-making as socially and culturally contingent.

This sharing of knowledge is not just a generous act, but is indicative of an intercultural space whereby knowledge itself has important dimensions with respect to self-determination. Through tourism, the Burarrwanga family represent themselves and their country in active, positive and integrated ways. In sculpting the experiences, information and understanding between tourists and animals/country, the family create a dialogue that, while never completely under their control, does allow them to tell a story of, and so help recreate, their own selves and futures.

However, BCE can only make their claims to ontological self-determination because of the desire and design of BCE itself. In contrast to much of the tourism literature which refers to the loss of control and disruption to daily lifestyles characteristic of many tourism ventures involving Indigenous people (Buultjens & Fuller, 2007; Ryan & Huyton, 2000, 2002), the Burarrwanga family are largely able to ensure BCE remains on their terms – including day to day decision making and longer term planning as well as in its legal and moral basis. In embodying the interconnected nature of their economic, cultural, social and political aspirations, Lak Lak, Djawa and the extended Burarrwanga family support Williams' (1986, p. 18) argument that '... for Yolngu, "religious", "historic", and "economic" are not mutually exclusive categories; they are complimentary and reinforcing modes of perceiving and using land and natural resources'. In owning their business and making their own decisions about when to run tours and who to invite as tourists, in mediating the tourist encounter with country, BCE make a critical statement about economic-cultural-political-social self-determination¹².

¹² It is important to remember that the Burarrwanga family has not been dispossessed of its land. Many Aboriginal people do not have legal recognition or ownership of their land and need to ask

Here economic aspects take their place alongside knowledge claims and ontological framings as part of a broader assertion of independence and self-determination. While much literature on tourism focuses on economic aspects such as financial viability and commercialisation, we show that, for BCE, economic aspects are most important for their role in creating and asserting independence. This is something put forward in the business aims and discussed directly with tourists and visitors as they are introduced to the family. Economic aspects are thus part of the intercultural space nourished by BCE. They are not disconnected from issues of culture and knowledge and cannot be understood in isolation.

The intercultural space enabled by BCE is a lived world of experiential knowledge (Tamisari, 1998) with multiple layers whereby on-going connections are made between members of BCE, a range of tourists and country itself¹³. The multiple nature of the connections mean that the space is mediated, not just by the Burarrwanga family, but also by animals as active agents, tourists, academics and by country itself. In any given situation, people-people and people-country interactions vary depending on context and agency. What is consistent is the opportunity for dialogue, reproduction and transformation (see Hinkson & Smith, 2005; Merlan, 2005; Tamisari, 1998). Indeed, while the intercultural space centres around Bawaka, its reach extends well beyond the physical confines of the homeland. The research collaboration between Lak Lak, Djawa, Kate, Sandie and Sarah that underpins this article is one manifestation of this space that stretches across Australia from Sydney and Newcastle in the south to Arnhem Land in the north. This article, as a co-authored piece, is also a contribution to intercultural space. In (re)producing this space, we continue to address the near absence in literature on Indigenous tourism of Indigenous voices (exceptions include Bissett et al., 1998; Miller, 1996; Sutton, 1999).

The opportunities for dialogue, reproduction and transformation at Bawaka are rich and profound. In this paper, we have drawn out some of the diverse aspects of the Bawaka experience, many of which challenge conceptions and approaches prevalent in both the literature on Indigenous tourism and animal tourism. Beyond an exclusive economic focus and beyond Eurocentric ideas of nature, tourists are given the opportunity to rethink issues of ownership and authorisation in the tourist experience,

permission to access cultural sites on national parks and on privately owned land (e.g. Bissett et al. 1998).

¹³

Including connections between the authors of this paper.

to challenge their relationships with animals and ultimately, to re-imagine their understandings of themselves and their place in the world. In particular, they are given the opportunity to recognise the hard work the Burarrwanga family have put in to use tourism as a vehicle to support the self-determination of their interrelated economic-cultural-political-social futures.

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