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Stories of crossings and connections from Bawaka, North East Arnhem Land, Australia.

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Abstract

This paper engages with Indigenous peoples' conceptualisations of borders which unsettle dominant Eurocentric constructs of the border as terrestrial, linear, bound and defined through western legal frameworks. It does this by drawing on one aspect of the many story-telling experiences offered by members of the Indigenous-owned Yolngu tourism business Bawaka Cultural Experiences in northern Australia. We argue that stories told to visitors about multiple and diverse connections between Yolngu and Makassan people from Sulawesi, Indonesia, are intentional constructions which challenge dominant conceptions of Australia as an isolated island-nation. The stories redefine the border as a dynamic and active space and as a site of complex encounters. The border itself is continuously recreated through stories in ways that emphasise the continuity and richness of land and sea scapes and are based on non-linear conceptions of time. The stories invite non-Indigenous people to engage with different kinds of realities that exist in the north and to re-imagine Australia's north as a place of crossings and connections.

Key Words (up to 6):

Story-telling, national identity, Makassan-Yolngu relations, Indigenous knowledges, borders and boundaries, Northern Australia

Introduction

Every year people from Makassar in Indonesia used to wish for the north east wind, called *Bärra'*. *Bärra'* was the wind that would take them south to Arnhem Land in northern Australia for trade and social exchange. That is the way that the story of Bayini, a protective spirit-being of Bawaka, is introduced to listeners. Bayini is a Makassan woman who came across the Arafura Sea from Makassar and now lives in the land and sea scapes of Bawaka, an Indigenous homeland in northern Australia. She protects and watches over country¹, over the people, animals, plants, song, wind, and ceremony, and as Lak Lak

Burarrwanga says, ‘If you have been invited to our country, she’ll protect and watch over you too.’

The story about Bayini is one that is told by members of the Burarrwanga family to each other and to their children. It is told through dance, painting and song, and through the very features of the land and sea scape at Bawaka. It is also increasingly told to visitors through the family owned Indigenous tourism business, Bawaka Cultural Experiences. Bayini is a story of crossing and connection. Her story speaks of an Australia long embedded in its region and of the possibility of different kinds of Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships. Her story also reveals much about the ways that borders are defined and reproduced in Indigenous Australia.

In this paper we draw on Indigenous conceptualisations of borders and boundaries to offer a different way of talking about relationships between and across borders. We focus on the role of story telling in reproducing borders, in performing land/sea scapes and in constructing diverse identities. As narratives of ‘lived experience,’ stories are central to this paper as a research methodology. We draw on story-telling both as a way of building collaborative research partnerships that work to acknowledge the complexities of Indigenous experiences, and to recognise the powerful ways stories (re)produce sentient, meaning-filled land/sea scapes.

We start by looking at the way borders have been approached in the literature, focusing in particular on Indigenous conceptualisations of borders and the way these diverge from many dominant Western conceptualisations. We then review Yolngu/Makassan relationships across Australia’s northern borders before focussing on storytelling as a method for reconceptualising the border. Here, stories told by the Burarrwanga family, Yolngu traditional owners of Bawaka, about Yolngu/Makassan relations tell of ongoing and dynamic relationships across and between borders. We find

that, far from lines of division, borders are conceived of as sites of complex encounters. Borders are continuously recreated through non-linear stories in ways that emphasise the continuity and richness of land and sea scapes.

Indigenous conceptualisations of borders

The last few decades has seen the emergence of diverse and vibrant work in borders and boundary studies within geography (Ackleson 2005; Kuehls 1996; Lloyd, Suchet-Pearson and Wright 2007; Morley and Robbins 1995; Newman and Paasi 1998; Newman 2006; Paasi 2003, 2004; Palmer 2004; Shapiro and Alker 1996; Sparke 2006; Sundberg and Kaserman 2007). The literature has been driven by inquiries into the nature of borders and the role they play in including/excluding certain entities, creating certain kinds of relationships. Rather than conceptualising the border as a barrier, or ‘physical and highly visible lines of separation’ (Newman 2006: 144) there has been a shift to understand that ‘it is the bordering process, rather than the border *per se*, which affects our lives on a daily basis, from the global to the national and, most significantly, at the local and micro scales of sociospatial activity’ (Newman 2006: 144).

Borders and borderlands, then, are increasingly recognised as dynamic social, political and discursive constructs central to the creation of national imaginations and identities. A range of authors challenge us to expand our understanding of borders away from narrow, territorial definitions to recognise that borders exist ‘in numerous social practices and discourses in the fields of economy, administration, legislation and culture’ (Ackleson 2005; Newman 2006; Paasi 2003: 470; see also Paasi 2004; Palmer 2004; Struver 2004). Newman (2006: 150) examines borderlands as transitional spaces: ‘borders can become transformed into the frontiers (in the most positive sense of the term) where people or groups who have traditionally kept themselves distant from each other, make the

first attempts at contact and interaction, creating a mixture of cultures and hybridity of identities'. In these studies borders can be understood as relational spaces, sites though which people come together; zones of interaction (Howitt 2001) and situated engagement (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2003; Suchet 2002). However, these transition zones can equally be places in which the contact between different groups strengthens the notion of border as barrier in spite of the contact that takes place in these new spaces (Newman 2006:151). In this way, borders and borderlands define ourselves and others. They both separate *and* bring together (Paasi 2003).

A view of borders as relational spaces fits well with the increasing focus on the 'lived' experiences of borders and boundaries. Brunet-Jailly (2005:638) discuss the crucial role of borderland communities as 'organised polities within the larger institutional architecture of their state of belonging' and have underlined the importance of local culture. Newman (2006: 154) calls for border theorists to collect narratives of lived borderland experiences and to put them together in such a way that the different functions of the border - be they visible in the landscape or not - are understood at the level of daily life practices: 'If we really want to know what borders mean to people, then we need to listen to their personal and group narratives' (for in-depth, ethnographic examples of lives lived in borderlands see Paasi (1996), Vila (2000)).

A focus on issues of identity and power, on lived experience and borders as relational spaces, lends itself to studies from a multicultural perspective. This meets the call by Newman and Paasi (1998) to engage with alternative ways of conceptualising borders to avoid assuming that western ways of knowing and experiencing borders are universal. However, as with the dominance of Anglo-American theory in the social sciences (Connell 2007), work on borders remains dominated by studies from the 'north' with a tendency to focus on land-land borders. Lloyd, Suchet-Pearson and Wright (2007) argue for the need to

move beyond understandings of borders that silence non-western understandings and experiences of self, other and space (see also Paasi 2003; Ramutsindela 2007; Staudt 2002).

Within Indigenous Australia, borders are an important part of social, spiritual and cultural life, and have central importance in the way Indigenous people know, manage and live on country. For Yolngu, for example, borders are not conceptualised as markers of exclusivity *per se* nor of proprietary interests in land, but are more importantly about the right, even the obligation, to grant appropriate permissions for entry and use to others (Williams 1986). Borders outline points of connection, they communicate and designate responsibility for care over country, and they situate Yolngu within a web of relationships with other people, animals, spirit beings, song, water, air, and things (Rose 1996; Wright et al. in press).

Borders, within the world view of many Yolngu, are emphatically more-than-human. Muller et al. (2009) focus on quotidian practices of border making and the role of Yolngu rangers in assisting with the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy. Here the border is reproduced as a dynamic and active space in which multiple agencies including Yolngu rangers, non-Indigenous residents, Yolngu ceremony, animals, insects and winds negotiate, contest and co-construct multiple borders. Water, spirit beings, song and animals all have a part to play in creating and maintaining borders. Rose (1996) discusses this notion of multiplicity and co-existence in her work on Aboriginal Australians' concepts of landscape. Here the living world is divided up into portions each of which is a unit or living system. 'Each whole country is surrounded by other unique and inviolable whole countries, and the relationships between the countries ensure that no country is isolated, that together they make up some larger wholes - clusters of alliance networks, Dreaming

tracks and ceremonies, trade networks, tracks of winds and movements of animals' (Rose 1996: 12-13).

Importantly, many Indigenous cultures, including Yolngu, dissolve any strict division between land-land and land-sea (Howitt 2001; Jackson 1995; Matsuda 2007; Morphy and Morphy 2006; Muller 2008; Mulrennan and Scott 2000; Rose 1996). Mulrennan and Scott (2000: 683) discuss how Indigenous cultures 'commonly conjoin land and sea as continuous, integrated 'scapes', in conceptions of tenure, resource management and as bearers of social identity'. Morphy and Morphy (2006) discuss powerful symbols of connection created by the flows of fresh, brackish and salt water across, through and between land/sea/water scapes. In the context of the Pacific, Matsuda (2007: 241-2) makes a similar point arguing that the 'islands can be conceived of not as bounded, limited, or isolated territories but as places constituted by islander communities and situated in geographies of land and sea, defined by spoken, danced, carving and moving yet deeply localised navigational expressions. Such Pacific possibilities look to islands as more than places of *terra nullius*, empty landfalls in the sea'.

A failure to recognise Indigenous constructions of land and sea space as continua has silenced and marginalised Indigenous peoples' attempts to assert their rights in a range of sentient scapes. This has been a major impediment to the continuity of Indigenous ownership and efforts to assert sovereignty and self-determination, though it is also something that Indigenous groups continue to contest. In legal realms, the recent Australian High Court's recognition of Indigenous ownership of the intertidal zone in the Blue Mud Bay case is indicative of ongoing efforts to gain recognition of Indigenous sea relationships in Western law (Morphy and Morphy 2006). Muller (2008) discusses the way Yolngu continue to assert their rights and interests in sea country in order to gain

recognition of this cultural landscape with customary law defining ownership and management rights and responsibilities.

Howitt (2001) builds on the permeable and complex idea of the land/sea boundary to argue for an understanding of borders as liminal (intertidal) places. 'In ecological terms,' as Howitt (2001: 240) points out 'the edges of ecosystems are often characterised by enormous diversity and complexity... Edges are not lines of separation but zones of interaction'. For Williams (1986), what anthropologists and others have seen as 'flexibility' or an absence of regulated norms of land use (a misconception that in a large part provided ideological basis for *terra nullius*, the notion of an empty Australia ripe for European colonisation (Sharp 2007)), is actually indicative of a sophisticated and subtle set of boundary concepts that underpin a complex place-based system of land/sea use and care.

Indigenous conceptualisations of borders as zones of interaction contrast with many Anglo-Australian conceptions of an Australia socially, culturally and economically isolated from its region. Australia's borders have frequently been politically constructed and manipulated to secure an essentialised Australian identity and exclude 'the Other.' Such an approach builds on a heritage established by the 'White Australia Policy' (Immigration Restriction Act 1901) which saw the newly established Australian Federal parliament attempt to legislate a white (non-Asian) national identity for Australia, and finds a recent incarnation in former Prime Minister John Howard's 'competitive and combative' approach to relations with Australia's near neighbours (Balint 2005; Gibson 2007; Green 2004; Lake 2006; Lloyd, Suchet-Pearson and Wright 2007).

Australia's north has long been the vanguard of its perceived isolation. Close proximity to an unknowable 'Other' across the northern seas - at once too close and impossibly distant - has created a complex border zone. Yet a range of dynamic and diverse connections throughout this region, such as trade and exchange between Aboriginal

groups in northern Australia and Makassan traders, as well as Indigenous conceptualisations of borders as complex sites of relationality and encounter, belie this sense of disconnection and untranslatability.

Yolngu – Makassan relationships

Trade and exchange between Aboriginal groups in northern Australia and various ethnic sailing groups involved in the trepang industry from what is now Eastern Indonesia, collectively referred to as Makassans, took place for centuries before Europeans reached northern Australia (Baker 1999). The Makassans took advantage of favorable monsoonal winds blowing them toward *Marege* (the Top End coastline and islands) to sail from the port of Makassar in the Celebes (now Ujung Pandang) (Ganter 2006). While in Australian waters, they obtained a variety of goods including trepang (*beche de mer* or sea slug), tortoiseshell, pearl-shell, pearls, sandalwood, tin, manganese, dried shark tails and buffalo horns (Macknight 1976 in Baker 1999). The Makassans and Aboriginal people engaged in diverse processes of trade and exchange. Dugout canoes, which allowed safer and more efficient hunting of dugong and turtle (Baker 1999), songs, rice, calico, metal, knives, alcohol and tobacco, were all traded through these interactions (McIntosh 1996).

The trepang trade was the most profitable of these exchanges, and the prized commodity was harvested and prepared for trade with China, where it was used as a food delicacy and medicine (Palmer 2007). This trade became what MacKnight (1976) refers to as Australia's first export industry, locking the northern shores of Australia into a trading triangle, with Makassar as the trading center and Southern China as the destination of Australian trepang. As Ganter (2006:27) points out Australia's northern shores were interlaced with a wide range of trading relationships, such that 'tracing the emergence of the Macassan trepang trade with *Marege* takes us on a tour of Asian, European, Arabic and

Indigenous maritime histories converging in a part of the world that is marginal to all of them’.

These relationships were also characterised by conflict and crisis both between Yolngu and Makassans and within Yolngu society itself. As such it had a lasting impact on Yolngu social and ritual life (see McIntosh 1996, 2006; Palmer 2007). According to some Yolngu oral histories, disagreement over the distribution of material goods, frequent breaches of trust and Makassan modes of behavior considered by Yolngu to be dishonorable, led to many conflicts. Stories tell of the sexual exploitation and abduction of Yolngu women by Makassan trepangers as a common source of conflict and bloodshed (McIntosh 2004, 2006; Palmer 2007).

This era of vibrant and turbulent trade ended when a customs tax imposed by the South Australian Government in 1884 led to a complete cessation of these visits by 1908 (Ganter 2006; Macknight 1976: 100-26; Palmer 2007). Jensen (2005: 27) discusses the halting of trade relations as the way the newly formed nation-state sought to justify its own presence through an aggressive assertion of territorial control. This was particularly visible at those border zones whose existence challenged both the way the nation was constructed and its horizontal expansion as a centralised, imposing power. For Yolngu, whose communities were engaged in the centuries-long annual cycle of visits from the Makassans, it began an era of isolation and separation not only from international commodity exchanges but also from enduring friendship and kin relations (Ganter 2006; Stephenson 2007; Whykes 1999).

The history of the Makassan visits is of continued importance to Indigenous Australians along the Top End’s coast (Ganter 2006) and the ongoing connections are manifest in many ways. Expressions of this connection are found in language, as Yolngu Matha is suffused with Makassar words; dance, for example the final scene of the

Makassan fire-dance has similarities with Yolngu ritual dances; and art, through for example the numerous rock art galleries in Arnhem Land that depict Makassan prahus and trepang smoke houses and the presence of Yolngu art styles in Sulawesi (Clarke 2000; Morphy 1990; Mulvaney 1989; Rolls 1992). The influence of Makassan-Yolngu exchanges on both cultures continues to be profound and diverse.

The experiences of connection also live on through story and song in Yolngu communities such as at Bawaka. Here, stories told to tourists intentionally communicate a different kind of experience of Australianness far from the anxious, isolated country generated by many mainstream accounts. To examine Asian-Aboriginal contact as one of many ‘zones of interaction’ (Howitt 2001) and as an example of the dynamic crossings and connections between and within Australia’s northern borders, we turn to stories told by family members of Bawaka Cultural Experiences.

Telling Stories: Bawaka Cultural Experiences

Bawaka homeland is located in northern Australia within a large area of Aboriginal land called Arnhem Land (see Map 1). Lak Lak Burarrwanga, her daughter Djawundil and granddaughter Nanukala live at Bawaka with other family members visiting and living at Bawaka for varying periods of time. Bawaka Cultural Experiences, the family run tourism business, was established in February 2005 with support from Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Association (the local community council organisation), the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development (DBERD), Tourism NT and Alcan Gove. The business commenced operations in March 2006 and currently provides day trips from Nhulunbuy to Bawaka, specialist day tours in Yirrkala and a two day Dillybag (Gay’wu) Women’s Tour.

[INSERT MAP 1] Map1: Location of Bawaka, North East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia

The hopes and aims of the cultural tours are to:

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 (Bawaka Cultural Experiences 2006).

Both Bawaka Cultural Experiences and the more specialised Dillybag (Gay'wu) Women's Tour are framed through stories. Telling stories - stories about their history, and stories about their relationship to country and culture - is fundamental to the success of the family's business and their relationships with tourists. In this article we draw on storytelling on two levels. We look to stories as they communicate diverse histories and identities, and as they (re)produce and perform borders. We also look to them as the basis for our methodological approach. The research and writing process for this article has been a collaborative endeavour involving Lak Lak, a Yolngu elder from Bawaka and Sarah, Kate and Sandie, three non-Indigenous university lecturers. In support of our collaborative approach, our methods are necessarily diverse involving autobiography, participant observation (as tour operator and as tourist), self-reflection, focus group discussions and interviews. Rather than a process of 'data collection' or extraction from Yolngu by the academics we see this as a cross-cultural collaboration and exchange in which all parties

contribute diversely at all stages of the research and writing process (Burarrwanga et al. 2008; Burarrwanga submitted; Wright, Suchet-Pearson and Lloyd 2007). Sarah, Kate and Sandie first visited Bawaka in January 2007 and have since made over 6 trips to Bawaka and Yirrkala with Lak Lak also travelling down to Sydney and Newcastle to share her stories. The telling, listening to, and recording, of stories has been fundamental. Sarah, Kate and Sandie have observed a range of story-encounters between Lak Lak, other members of Bawaka Cultural Experiences and visitors. Their knowledge of these stories has been deepened through the re-telling and writing of some of these stories into a co-authored book about weaving (Burarrwanga et al. 2008), through co-authoring this paper and through ongoing discussions focussing on Yolngu/Makassan relationships.

As an intercultural team, our emphasis on storytelling parallels a growing focus on storytelling as methodology as an important component of research collaborations with Indigenous people (Cameron 2009; Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2006; Rose 2000; Smith 1999). The focus on dialogue and sharing within 'storytelling as method', rather than on more linear notions of data collection, can allow for more active and creative interactions, and for complex and dynamic ontologies to be presented. We use this method to attempt to avoid an oversimplification of the multiplicity and dynamism of complex stories as they challenge the power of a single colonising or homogenising narrative.

Telling stories at Bawaka

Through Bawaka Cultural Experiences, tourists and visitors are told a diverse variety of stories. Each time a story is told, it will necessarily be a little different, contain different emphases and sometimes different information. The stories are themselves living. Here we share three different stories, all associated in some way with the themes of crossing and connection. We begin with a story that was told to a group of Indonesian language teachers

from around Australia. In it, Lak Lak speaks of a first meeting between Makassan traders and the family. The second story is the story of Bayini, the spirit woman, a story often told by the Burarrwanga family to frame the Women's Tours. Finally, we turn to a story told by Lak Lak to tourists about her visit to Sulawesi in 1986 in which she met up with her great-great grandmother.

I. Meeting Makassans

A long time ago...my grandfather's father and another leader of the tribe were sitting down telling stories. They were sitting facing the seas and they saw something coming towards them. It was a Makassan prahu, but they had never seen a boat like that before and they were very frightened ... The men came running out with their spears to fight the Makassans. Then the leader of the Makassans signaled with his hands to stop the Aboriginals from spearing them. Then everybody stopped. All the Aboriginal people were staring at the strangers and telling each other that they had never seen white people like these Makassans before. Afterwards there was a meeting of the tribe to discuss giving permission for the Makassans to enter their camps. Then they called out to the Makassans to stay and sleep with them and the other tribes. They made friends with each other like brothers and considered each other relations. The Makassans gave sugar, blankets, axes, clothes and other things. They also taught the Aboriginals how to smoke and how to make smoking pipes. These Makassans stayed with them for a month until they knew each other well. Then it was time to talk together about trepang (Lak Lak Burarrwanga.)

II. The story of Bayini

Every year the people from Makassar wished for the north east wind, called Bärä'. That's how our grandfather used to tell the story. The wind, it comes at about the same time each year – in November or December around the beginning of the wet season. Long time ago, when the north east wind blew, the Mangatharra (Makassans) would travel from their place up north in Indonesia to Arnhem Land. They planted tamarind trees and traded with Aboriginal people.

So the Makassans, they went to Bawaka. One time, they anchored in the mouth of the bay and there was a lady on the boat called Bayini. She was a beautiful lady and a princess but she was a slave on the boat. She had to work – cooking, making clothes for the boss, the leader of the Makassans. She was chained up but then, Bayini, she took the sword from the captain. She saw the land. She had pride because she was a princess and she got the sword. They threw her to the sea and she swam all the way to the other side – to Bayini Beach. She's got a footprint in the rock there. You can see it. Bayini slept on the rock, drying herself. Then when she woke up she named places like Bungulu which we also call Bayini Beach. She has long hair to her thigh, and wears gold rings and necklaces. She walked straight to Bawaka. There's the area with the tamarind tree. That's where she cooked rice. She had a shelter there too and a husband maybe. After she died she remained, protecting Bawaka. When you're out at the point you can see a sandbar that ends in a rock under the water and that's an anchor from the boat she came on. There's a chain that runs all the way to the edge of our land. You can see the rock she slept on too. Her spirit is still living and protecting the land here and on the other side. Still some

people see her. We dance pretending to be Bayini with the knife and she's got millions of eyes. So we have to be careful for the land and for the nature because still we believe the stories. Those stories and Bayini, it goes on and on for future generations. Sometimes we use a wish – Bayini guya – asking her to give us fish. And the new generation – our boys – now they write songs and stories about Bayini. We still believe that she's there (Lak Lak Burarrwanga.)

III. My memories of our Makassan family

While the Makassans were at Arnhem Bay during trepang time they took a lady called Garngarr. They took her to Sulawesi. She grew up there, had children there. Then afterwards when I was grown up, I heard that story, the story about how an Aboriginal lady was taken by a Makassan during trepang time. The years went past and I decided to go to Batchelor²... I started thinking of that lady. I was thinking of the story and decided to study the story of Sulawesi. So six of us went to Sulawesi to trace that connection. We stayed in Bali one night. The next day, they heard on the radio that we were going and everyone was at the airport. All the sons, daughters and great-grandsons and daughters and great, great grandchildren met us at Makassar airport. All the family was waiting for us. We were shaking hands and crying. First we went to see the church to see where she used to sweep floors, mopping and working and the wood was ironwood from NE Arnhem Land. Then we moved to her village. When she heard the story that the people from NE Arnhem Land – they call it Marege people – she was crying. When we got there she jumped from the chair and walked towards us saying this is the family from Arnhem Land. She was still thinking of when she left many years before. So we grieved. She was crying for me and we were crying for her (Lak Lak Burarrwanga.)

Crossings and connections

There are several themes that emerge through these stories. In the following section, we draw out four of these: the role of border as encounter; the importance of stories in creating the border; the complex nature of the land/sea relationship; and, the non-linearity of time.

Borders as encounter

Clearly an important theme that weaves its way through these stories is that of border as encounter. It is at the border that relationships are forged. Crossings are conducted in a two-way, multilayered exchange within which permissions are sought and granted. As Rose (1996) explains, relationships between countries are sustained by a system of reciprocity and respect, a concept anthropologist Myers (1982) referred to as 'always ask'. Knowledge is local, and strangers know little or nothing; it is in their interest to ask.

Ownership of country and knowledge is manifested through rights to be asked and there is a highly developed protocol for encountering places and people where or among whom one is counted a stranger or a newcomer (Rose 1996). Boundaries are permeable, flexible and rarely monolithic. The situatedness of country depends upon boundaries, and 'Aboriginal boundaries, while they promote and rely on difference, mark difference primarily in order to overcome it' (Rose 1996: 45). Nancy Williams's work with Yolngu has led her to the insightful expression: 'a boundary is to cross'. She explains:

For Yolngu, as for other people, boundaries on land mark discontinuities: changes in ownership. But for Yolngu, boundaries do not exist primarily for the purpose of excluding non-owners. Rather, Yolngu use boundaries to express various categories of interest, both of owners and of users. To request permission ... is to acknowledge the right of the owners to accede or to deny permission ... [However,] a heavy onus lies on owners to grant permission ... to own is to have the obligation to share (1986: 231).

The encounters related in the stories, however, should not be over-romanticised. Indeed, these encounters are rich with a depth of emotion, tension and the potential for conflict. In the case of Bayini, tensions between the princess, destined to become the spirit woman of Bawaka, and the Makassan leader are manifest. In the final story, the reunion of kin is accompanied with tears. In the first story, there is the threat of war; one that is averted through negotiation. When permission is sought from the Makassan traders of the Yolngu traditional owners, it is granted. Here the terms of a productive encounter are elucidated – including the need for patience and respect. As a result of following appropriate terms of engagement, economic, social and cultural links are forged with the Makassan traders. As the story continues:

Eventually the Makassans were ready to leave and they had to make a big ceremony. The Makassan and Aboriginal people lined up and danced to say goodbye to each other. Some Aboriginals went with them. Some stayed there and married Makassan women and then came back. Some Makassans married Aboriginal women and took them back to Indonesia.

The sacred geography of Yolngu territory emerges through relationships, through borders and crossings that are traced by people, spirit beings, animals, water and the diverse actors that make up country. Bayini, for example, names areas within and around Bawaka. She continues to live and protect the country. Her very actions designate the borders of Bawaka; where the Yirritja country of Bawaka meets the Dhuwa of its neighbours.

Yirritja and Dhuwa are the two mutually dependent moieties that together define the Yolngu universe. All people, places and things have their identity and place as either Dhuwa or Yirritja. As kinship relations that extend to all things, Dhuwa and Yirritja define (or divide) and they bring together (Dhimurru n.d.; Hughes 1996; Williams 1986). The evening star, fresh water crocodiles, the stingray, Bawaka and Bayini herself are all Yirritja. The morning star, salt water crocodiles, gunga (the pandanus tree) and the countries adjoining Bawaka are Dhuwa (Dhimurru n.d.). This is not a division *per se*, it is about defining relationships. The child of a Dhuwa mother is Yirritja. This means if a person's moiety is different from that of the land of their birth, both their mother and, if they are a woman, their child will be of the same moiety as the country. Those not of the country are both mother and child to it – obliged to care for it as parent. For example, Lak Lak's children are members of the Gumatj clan and because of the Yothu Yindi (Mother-Child) relationship, Lak Lak is also a 'child' of her children, i.e. she is caretaker for Gumatj country. As Banbapuy Ganambarr explains:

Our kinship system maps out our relationships. It tells a story of how our moiety systems work. There are two moieties in our system, Dhuwa and Yirritja. The Yolngu system is all tied up or connected like the mat that is woven and the values and beliefs that we have. We belong to the land, our mother earth. We are one. The language identifies us, who we are and where we come from. The mat has many stories, feelings and values that ties the Yolngu woman. It is like the mother and child relationship or the Yothu and Yindi connection that is passed down through

generations. It is a story and knowledge that should be told and given and maintained (Burarrwanga et al. 2008: 34).

Created through stories

The power of stories themselves comes through in each of the accounts above. In the case of the first two, the story itself is a story about someone telling a story. ‘That’s how my grandfather used to tell it,’ begins Lak Lak with introducing the story of Bayini. Similarly she says, the leaders of the tribe ‘were sitting around telling stories’ when the Makassans were first seen. Here, stories layer upon each other (indeed we add another with this article telling the story of these stories). To tell a story is to powerfully perform the reality of interactions and of social, cultural and spiritual life. It is also to (re)create reality including re-invoking borders and the land/sea scape itself. Williams (1986: 81) looks to the on-going reinterpretation of mythical stories (and their ‘implied changelessness’) to show how Yolngu boundaries, whilst known and recognised, are also constantly under negotiation. Hence, the stories themselves are a process of constructing identity and of (re)constructing the borders and relationships described. In a sense, the stories *are* the border. The topography of Bawaka is a manifestation of the actions, the narrative, of Bayini as well as other ancestral beings, and the reiteration of ceremony and song.

As well as telling of, and recreating, the borders and law of Bawaka, the telling of stories at Bawaka Cultural Experiences also affects the listeners. Through the telling of stories, family members invite listeners to understand themselves and their place in new ways, to learn about relationships that respect difference and are about negotiation. The family consciously articulate and share stories of indigeneity that reveal Indigenous people as active in their own history and connected, in multiple ways, to the region. While tourism is looked to as an economic strategy², its

importance also lies in its ability to allow different stories to be told. That is to say, the stories told to visitors through these cultural experiences are intentional constructions of diverse histories, presents and futures (Hall 2007). The co-authorship of this paper is an effort to continue the process of re-telling stories to diverse audiences (see Wright, Suchet-Pearson and Lloyd 2007 and Burarrwanga et al. 2008).

Land sea relationships

The stories also powerfully evoke a sense of a sea connected to the land in important ways. Indeed, distinctions between land and sea are blurred as Bayini (re)creates both land and sea scapes. As she sits drying on the rock, the water coming off her body creates profound synergies between land and sea. It is Bayini who is able to provide fish for hunters who ask it of her – Bayini guya, they say, Bayini, fish. The water itself is alive with stories, people, song, ceremony, spirits, kin-animals and of connection. Fundamental to the story, such that it is featured in the logo of the business and adorns the guest house at Bawaka, is the anchor; the anchor and the chain that bound Bayini as she left the boat. The anchor grounds Bayini and the listener at Bawaka, to the land and the sea. The anchor marks the boundary of Bawaka, of Bayini's country, of Yirritja country and the Dhuwa country that adjoins it. The anchor exists in a meaning filled and sentient land/sea scape. The land/sea scape lives. Its existence, now fixed, literally, in stone, was born of movement, of crossing and connection. The border itself is a reminder to *all* of their place in the story and of their relationships with each other, relationships with other people, with plants and animals, with the land and sea. The border exists to experience, cross and come together.

Non linear time

To understand the importance of these stories in not just evoking, but in actually creating and recreating borders, as well as the land/sea scape itself, requires appreciating the complex approach to time and space that underpins the accounts. Far from telling a story of the distant past, these are stories of a complex past/present/future that exists in every moment. Storytelling or narratives are a non-linear phenomenon, and can be seen as 'networks of patterned relationships connected and configured over time and space' (Somers 1999: 128). Morphy (1995) argues that Yolngu stories (and languages) in fact prioritise geography over history with the situated nature of events more critical than their chronology. Tamisari (1998) challenges this reversed time-space dualism by focusing on how Yolngu identity is predicated on a relationship to place which is embodied and experienced through 'being-in-the-world'. Regardless of how these relationships are characterised, story-telling at Bawaka enables an active re-telling and '... a continual interaction between the ancestral past and the present which at times threaten to collapse the distinction between the two dimensions in individual consciousness'. As Morphy goes on to argue, '(t)he ancestral past, though changed and reproduced through present human action, is absorbed as a precedent for future action' (1995: 205). Not only does this enable transformation and innovation but it encourages a performance of non-linear causality (Williams, 1986: 28.)

As such, the story of Bayini is about connections to Makassar, yet it also frames the identity of Bawaka and those who live there. In documenting this story we were aware that the storyline is always changing, as Ganter (2006) notes there are various interpretations of the Bayini (Baijini) stories (see Berndt and Berndt 1954; Macknight 1969, 1976; McIntosh 1999, 2006; Mulvaney 1989). For the family at Bawaka, the most important story is the connection with their family and country, both in Arnhem Land and in Makassar. In Yolngu cultures *not* to tell stories, *not* to perform ceremonies

or *not* to actively care for country (for example through cleansing with fire), is to change it in a fundamental way.

Thus Bayini's story is not a story of the static past, it is a story of an embodied place, the place of Bawaka. Bayini's millions of eyes ensure that she is still at Bawaka – spurring all on to care for country and to live right on the land. Her presence is alive in the story, in the sentient land/sea scape and in song (both 'traditional' songs and in the new generation's rock songs). It is possible to hear her laughing when out gathering food behind Bayini Beach and everyone should thank her for her care when they leave Bawaka. And in telling this story, and in encouraging others to do so, to pass on their learning, the women of Bawaka are keeping her alive in other ways. Through Bayini, they perform and so create a different kind of nation, a different kind of history and a different kind of present.

Conclusion

The northern border region has long been imagined and realised as a site of anxiety, existing as an unknown and empty space, a void, on the other side of which sits an unknowable Other. Indeed, Ganter's (2006) study on Asian-Aboriginal contact in North Australia asserts that Asian-Aboriginal contact is not at the margin of anything but at the very core of the anxious nation. In this article, we have looked to Indigenous conceptualisations of borders, and specifically to the role of stories told by members of Bawaka Cultural Experiences about their multiple and diverse connections across the Arafura Sea to Makassar, to engage with the different kinds of realities that exist in the north. These stories of connection with Makassar are a far cry from *terra nullius* and from the idea of an isolated (and empty) island continent. They tell us that Australia is not and

has never been isolated. The sea has never been empty either of people or of stories, of trade or of connection.

Working with stories told by members of Bawaka Cultural Experiences, and heard by a range of visitors, builds upon an emerging area in the literature on the ways narratives of lived borderland (and sea) experiences can be used to articulate diverse ideas of identity and perform complex notions of time and space (Newman 2006; Schnell 2003). These stories can also be a form of ‘speaking back’ to conceptions that silence and exclude (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006). Bawaka Cultural Experiences thus look to tourism as a way of teaching non-Indigenous people about Australia, and of reimagining the borders and the north as a place of crossing and connection.

In this sense, we can understand interactions between Bawaka Cultural Experiences and the visitors as constituting diverse understandings of Australianness. While policy debates around excision, instability and terror rage, stories such as those heard at Bawaka create an Australia that is not in an antagonistic relationship with the region. They talk about different kinds of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups that are built on respect and recognition. These are stories which conceptualise borders in different ways, as zones of interaction and coexistence. In doing so, such stories create a different present and hold the promise of a different kind of future.

Endnotes

[1] The notion of country in Aboriginal English has a specific significance that encompasses many diverse layers of meaning including laws, custom, movement, song, knowledges, relationships, histories, presents, futures, and spirit beings (Rose 1996).

[2] Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is located 100 km south of Darwin in the Northern Territory.

[3] While this paper documents a largely positive experience with tourism, many studies that have explored the experience of Aboriginal communities or families' involvement in Indigenous tourism find issues of a loss of control, poor economic outcomes, lack of cultural appreciation, and environmental degradation of country (see Altman 1989; Buultjens and Fuller 2007; Ryan & Huyton 2000, 2002). Certainly, this is a complex process within which questions of self-determination are key (see Wright et al. in press).

CAPTION FOR MAP:

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

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