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Transforming Tourists and "Culturalising Commerce": Indigenous Tourism at Bawaka in Northern Australia

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Transforming Tourists and "Culturalising Commerce": Indigenous Tourism at Bawaka in Northern Australia

Abstract

There is currently an increasing interest in Indigenous tourism in Australia. Policies in Australia often use the rhetoric of sustainability, but position Indigenous tourism as a means for economic growth and development (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). This study shows that interpersonal relationships, cultural and social interactions, and learning are key to achieving the goals of Indigenous tourism providers or "hosts," and to the experiences of tourists. This article explores tourist experiences of activities run by the Indigenous-owned tour company Bawaka Cultural Enterprises (hereafter BCE) in North East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. BCE is an example of an Indigenous tourism business that aims to achieve social change by sharing of Indigenous ways of being, knowledges, and practices with non-Indigenous people during tours, whilst also ensuring that the business is sustainable and manageable for the family who runs it. In this sense, BCE's tourism activities can be understood as an attempt to "culturalise commerce," rather than commercialising culture (Bunten, 2010). In this article, we contribute to growing literature on transformative learning theory and tourism by considering tourists' narratives of their experiences with BCE. We focus on the way in which tourists are transformed by an increased connection to their hosts and their country. We argue that BCE's activities consciously introduce different ways of being to tourists and visitors. A growing awareness, understanding, and respect for these ways of being can inspire a sense of collective purpose and identity, and a deep emotional response to tours. Connection, however, is not always smooth and easy. Central to the process outlined in Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory are encounters and engagements with other people and different and unfamiliar contexts, which may lead to disorienting feelings and experiences. We argue that the practical aspects of being at Bawaka, combined with the new skills, task requirements, and political realities that commitment to new ways of being bring, can be disconcerting and disorienting for tourists. The availability of spaces and processes to reflect on these points of disorientation may determine whether these experiences challenge and/or contribute to personal transformation. These factors highlight areas for further exploration in developing a theory of transformative learning in the Indigenous context, and a need for policies to move beyond a narrow focus on economic aspects of tourism to consider the social and educational aims of both tourism ventures and tourists themselves.

Keywords

Indigenous tourism, transformative learning theory, Bawaka, North East Arnhem Land, Australia

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The Future—Protect our family, our land, our culture, our stories and our sacred places. Working together, raising the children together where the land can be part of their mind, spirit and soul. So one day, when we are gone, the responsibility passes onto our children. And respecting the land, the people and the Bawaka home. We could understand both worlds and learn from each other. In your world and our world, we share together in this place. (Bawaka Cultural Experiences [BCE] website [inactive]; see www.lirrwi.com.au for current information)

This is the vision behind Bawaka Cultural Experiences (hereafter BCE), an Indigenous family-run tour operation located in North East Arnhem land in Australia’s Northern Territory. BCE is an example of an Indigenous tourism business that aims to achieve social change by sharing Indigenous ways of being, knowledges, and practices with non-Indigenous people during tour experiences, whilst also ensuring that the business is sustainable and manageable for the family. For BCE, a conscious objective is to introduce different ways of being in the world to tourists and visitors. Central to this approach is the practice of introducing visitors to the concept of “Country.” Country is a term used in Aboriginal English to refer to Aboriginal homelands, a rich and intensely meaningful concept that encompasses the human and more-than-human, and tangible and intangible forces that shape, create, mutually care for, and *become together* in, with, and as place or space (for a detailed discussion of Country and “becoming together” see Bawaka Country including Wright et al., 2015).

Within Australia, there is an increasing interest in Indigenous tourism. Policies in Australia often use the rhetoric of sustainability, but position Indigenous tourism as a means for economic growth and development (Whitford, Bell, & Watkins, 2001; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). While the success of Indigenous tourism ventures can be stated in terms of visitor numbers, profit, and employment (Lirrwi Yolŋu Tourism Aboriginal Corporation, 2014), achievements related to using tourism as a social force are also important and yet harder to capture. Indeed, limited literature is available that explores the effectiveness of tourist “products” seeking to achieve social or cultural transformation goals and identify specific aspects of tour experiences that lead to positive behavior changes in tourists (Caruana, Glozer, Crane, & McCabe, 2014).

This article demonstrates how an Indigenous-run tourism venture that is based on Yolŋu¹ teaching methods and worldviews can successfully achieve its objectives and create a viable and culturally appropriate alternative tourism business. We do this by drawing on both tour operators’ as well as tourists’ perspectives. In doing so, we contribute to growing literature on transformative learning theory and tourism by considering tourists’ narratives of their experiences. We focus on the ways in which tourists are transformed by both increased connection to their hosts and their Country. We argue that BCE’s activities consciously introduce different ways of being in the world to tourists and visitors. A growing awareness, understanding, and respect for these ways of being can inspire a sense of collective purpose and identity, and a deep emotional response to tours. Connection, however, is not always smooth and easy. Central to the process outlined in Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory are encounters and engagements with other people and different and unfamiliar contexts, which may lead to disorienting feelings and experiences. We argue that the practical

¹ The Yolŋu people from north-eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia are the custodians of the land. Yolŋu means “person” in the Yolŋu languages.

aspects of being with Country, combined with the new skills, task requirements, and political realities that a commitment to new ways of being bring, can be disconcerting and disorienting. The availability of spaces and processes to reflect on these points of disorientation may determine whether these experiences challenge and/or contribute to personal transformation. We conclude with a discussion of the need for policies to move beyond a narrow focus on economic aspects of tourism to consider the social and educational aims of both tourism ventures as well as tourists themselves. In addition, we make recommendations that focus on how Indigenous tourism enterprises would benefit from using processes that assist tourists to deconstruct their experiences and thereby achieve more transformative outcomes.

Before we begin, however, we need to make clear who “we” are. The authors of this article are both Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu. We have worked together as part of an innovative 9 year Indigenous–academic research collaboration that has focused on communicating Indigenous Yolŋu knowledge to non-Indigenous people (Bawaka Country including Wright et al., 2015; Burarrwanga, Ganambarr et al., 2013; Burarrwanga, Maymuru et al., 2012; Lloyd, Wright, Suchet-Pearson, Burarrwanga, & Bawaka Country, 2012; Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Hodge, 2013; Wright et al., 2012). One aspect of this work has been looking at the role of the tourism business in achieving this objective (Wright, Suchet-Pearson, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Burarrwanga, 2009).

Tourism for Social Justice, Education, and Reconciliation

Tourism is widely understood as an industry, and its benefits are frequently stated in financial terms; yet, it is also a potential force that can be utilized for social justice and reconciliation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; Wright et al., 2009). Indeed, the notion that travel is personally transformative is widespread (Reisinger, 2013; Sampaio, 2014), and many authors argue that tourism may engender transformations that support social justice precisely because they are premised around “encounters across difference” (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Knollenberg, McGehee, Boley, & Clemmons, 2014; Reisinger, 2013; Walter, 2013). These “encounters”—and their emotional, affective, and sensory aspects—have the potential to unsettle established habits of thought and to open new ethical and moral relations between peoples and places (Caton, 2012; Gibson, 2008, 2009). Recent research documents a growing range of “alternative” tourism ventures, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, voluntourism, and pro-poor tourism, that seek to harness the potential of tourism for such purposes as addressing inequalities, facilitating understanding across differences, and motivating attitudinal or behavioural change (Barton & Leonard, 2010; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; McGehee, 2012; Reisinger, 2013). However, the impacts of tourism for social justice are not well understood. Authors have noted that tourism—regardless of its claims to social responsibility—can work to reinforce and reproduce inequalities between tourists and their “hosts” (Barton & Leonard, 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; Hueneke & Baker, 2009; McGehee, 2012; Sin, 2010). Further, little is known about tourist motivations for and understandings of their alternative tourism experiences (Caruana et al., 2014). This is significant as transformative tourism requires a willingness among tourists themselves to reflect, consider alternatives, and change (Barton & Leonard, 2010; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011).

In this article, we contribute to growing literature on transformative learning theory and tourism by considering tourists’ narratives of their experiences at BCE, with a particular focus on their learnings, understandings, and transformations. We argue that BCE’s activities deliberately move beyond providing a voyeuristic glimpse of Indigenous culture, consciously introduce different ways of being in the world to tourists, and build connections between hosts, visitors, and places. In the following

section, we discuss the ways in which Indigenous communities are engaging in tourism to pursue social justice, co-learning, and building connections. This provides an insight into the ways in which Indigenous tourism organisations are already challenging Australian policies' narrow focus on tourism for economic growth and development by instead focusing on both connections with Country as well as valuing Indigenous tourism models.

Indigenous Tourism Enterprises

The relationship between the tourism industry and Indigenous communities has historically been characterised by exploitative practices that have exoticised, objectified, and commoditised Indigenous culture and cultural artefacts (Bunten, 2008, 2010; Hollinshead, 1996). Indigenous ownership and control over tourism sites, narratives, products, and activities is thus a key issue both for Indigenous communities as well as for academic analyses of tourism and Indigenous peoples (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Colton, 2005; Parker, 1993; Pratt, Gibson, & Movono, 2013). Indeed, definitions of "Indigenous tourism" typically identify Indigenous control over tourism products that are based on their culture as a key criterion (Colton, 2005; Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, & Chute, 2010). Indigenous tourism ventures are often simplistically labelled as eco-tourism and cultural tourism (Clark, 2009; Fennell, 2008).

Critics have observed that the notion of "ecotourism" often presumes Indigenous ecological nobility and a shared understanding of "nature" between Indigenous hosts and tourists (Cater, 2006; Hinch, 1998). Further, cultural tourism may serve to reinforce both lingering Orientalist representations of indigeneity and a sense that Indigenous tourism must at once perform "otherness" and "difference" and conform to stereotypes (Bunten, 2010; Lynch et al., 2010). Recent growth in Indigenous-controlled tourism ventures reflects a diverse range of factors, including neoliberal policies, improved communication technologies, and Indigenous self-determination and activism (Bunten, 2010; Butler & Hinch, 2007; Wright et al., 2009). The promise and/or presumption that Indigenous tourism will create economic development for marginalised or remote communities is also influential, particularly in the context of Australian policy (Whitford et al., 2001), but scholars caution that tourism in isolation cannot resolve long-standing economic and social inequalities, and that collaboration between Indigenous organisations and other agencies remains important to creating viable and appropriate tourism ventures (Dyer, Aberdeen, & Schuler, 2003; Fuller, Buultjens, & Cummings, 2005; Notzke, 2004).

In seeking understandings of Indigenous tourism that move beyond tropes of ecological stewardship and profit-driven motivations, recent work highlights how Indigenous tourism ventures can be profoundly shaped by local cultural value systems, and typically pursue multiple goals, such as community development, cultural education, and cross-cultural understanding (Bunten, 2008; Clark, 2009; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Pratt et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2009). Colton (2005), for instance, suggested that the Woodland Cree First Nation pursue tourism as a strategy by which to regain autonomy over its lands and economic future. Likewise, Lynch and colleagues (2010) identified a focus on "social sustainability of a community" and "nation building" in Indigenous tourism, rather than simply jobs, income, and profits. Further, Clark (2009) argued that for Rripangu Yidaki, an Indigenous tourism business also in North East Arnhem Land, the concept of ecotourism is not easily reconciled with Indigenous ontologies and relationships with Country. Similar to BCE, the business is more usefully understood as one that is shaped by Aboriginal social frameworks that ensure knowledges and practices are shared with tourists in appropriate ways, and that the business is sustainable and manageable for the family. In this sense, Indigenous tourism

ventures can be understood as “culturalising commerce,” rather than commercialising culture (Bunten, 2010).

Notably, Indigenous tourism is a niche market (Ryan & Huyton, 2000, 2002). Previous research suggests that, among tourists who seek out Indigenous cultural tours, notions of personal interaction, “genuine” and “authentic” experiences, and informal learning about culture and history are often highly valued (McIntosh & Zahra, 2004; Zeppel, 2002). This suggests the potential of tourism to function as a vehicle for educating non-Indigenous visitors and improving cross-cultural relationships. As mentioned above, education is frequently identified as an important goal of Indigenous tourism ventures. Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, and Chute (2011), for example, argued, “providing an educational Aboriginal tourism experience is of utmost importance when attempting to dispel inaccurate images of Aboriginal culture and ultimately educate tourists on the reality of historic and contemporary Aboriginal life” (p. 978; see also Hollinshead, 2007). Hammersley, Bilous, James, Trau, and Suchet-Pearson (2014) identified that Indigenous tour operators in the north of Australia see raising awareness as a key part of their motivation to run a tourism business, pointing to their desire to change tourists’ attitudes and understandings of Indigenous culture and issues. Bunten (2010) further noted that tourism provides “inward” education to community members to ensure cultural perpetuation, and “outward” education to tourists to challenge stereotypes and historical inaccuracies.

Scherrer and Doohan (2013) argued that the act of tourists asking permission to access and use Country could create an inter-cultural environment with spaces for transformative learning, mutual respect, and negotiation between cultural groups. They claim that the very process of asking permission without qualification signifies a recognition of Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices, and serves to unbalance existing power relations that preference non-Indigenous worldviews and practices. Whilst a space for negotiation and learning may be created, however, the extent to which educational goals can be advanced through Indigenous tourism enterprises is relatively unknown, in part because there has been little research on tourist perceptions of their experiences at Indigenous tourism sites (Lynch et al., 2011). The next section draws on the concept of transformative learning theory to unpack current thinking about the steps involved in attitudinal and behavioural change.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory describes a process through which one’s worldviews are challenged, and then through deep, critical reflection, transformed (Addleman, Brazo, & Cevallos, 2011; Taylor, 2008). As proposed by Mezirow (1975, 1978), this shift in consciousness begins with a “disorientating dilemma”—a critical incident that in some way exceeds or disrupts one’s frames of reference—which is followed by reflection, discussion, exploration, and testing of new modes of understanding, and finally an enduring shift in one’s habits of thought and perspective (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Taylor, 2008). While Mezirow’s theory deals primarily with individual, cognitive transformation, recent work proffers variations and alternatives that consider such topics as the embodied nature of knowledge construction and learning (Freiler, 2008), the emotional and spiritual aspects of learning and transformation (Dirkx, 2008; Tisdell, 2008), and the social-emancipatory potential of transformative learning (Taylor, 2008).

The connection between physical and inner or personal journeys is widely recognised in, and used in marketing for, diverse tourism activities such as pilgrimage, volunteer tourism, and ecotourism

(Morgan, 2011; Sampaio, Simoni, & Isnart, 2014), and transformative learning theory is now increasingly used in tourism research to explore and better understand the links between tourism and personal transformation (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Reisinger, 2013). Importantly, tourism can be a potent prompt for the kind of “critical incidents” or “disorientating dilemmas” that are central to the process outlined in Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory because it often involves encounters and engagements with other people and with different and unfamiliar contexts (Morgan, 2011; Walter, 2013).

Recent work examining Indigenous tourism shows that disorientation does play a role in changing tourists’ attitudes. Wright and Hodge (2012) examined the potential for transformative learning with university students in the Northern Territory. Their study found that “attentiveness to discomfort and disorientation may lead to a radical openness as students learn and respond in new and unpredictable ways” (pp. 365-366). Bilous (2015), in her study of Indonesian language teachers’ experiences with BCE, concluded that the teachers wanted to make changes as a result of their time with BCE. She found that although people came back very committed to the idea of living differently in the world, they struggled with how to keep that transformation alive.

In the following sections, we turn to Bawaka Cultural Experiences (BCE) as an Indigenous tourism business, founded on principles of cultural and educational tourism, to explore the impacts of tourism activities on visitors and the extent to which these create lasting changes in their attitudes and behaviours. We argue that the practical aspects of being with Country, combined with the new skills, task requirements, and political realities that commitment to new ways of being bring, can be disconcerting and disorienting. We argue that BCE’s activities consciously introduce different ways of being in the world to tourists and visitors. A growing awareness, understanding, and respect for these ways of being can inspire a sense of collective purpose and identity in tourists, and prompt a deep emotional response to tours. Connection, however, is not always smooth and easy.

Bawaka Cultural Experiences: Experiencing Two Worlds

BCE’s vision is for its business to be a vehicle for the family’s social, cultural, political, and broader development aims. The business’ mission statement includes aims to:

1. Share the significant way of life of Yolŋu people with others and to teach them to respect the environment, culture, and sacred areas.
2. Provide an experience with the land and the people in order to promote cultural understanding to the wider world.
3. Provide opportunities for employment and training for Yolŋu 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)

Established in 2006 by Laklak Burarrwanga and her family, who are caretakers for Bawaka Country, BCE runs a range of tours both on Bawaka Country and around Yirrkala community (see Figure 1). BCE’s tours are largely targeted towards small groups of non-Indigenous tourists (typically between 8 and 20 participants per tour) and involve the sharing of culture, family life, and local history in a range of one, two, and four-day tours. Bawaka is remote; permits are required and travel to the

location is made by small plane and 4-wheel drive vehicle, or helicopter. Overnight tourists stay at Bawaka in basic, shared accommodation, sleeping on swags.²

In 2014 to 2015, Bawaka Country was 1 of 15 de-centralised homeland communities involved in tourism in East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Together, these communities attracted approximately 400 tourists including 38 group tours. Tourists were drawn from educational groups (universities and schools), corporate tourists participating in cultural awareness and corporate social responsibility programs, independent travellers looking for adventure and cultural awareness, and special interest groups interested in particular natural or cultural features of the area (Lirrwi Yolŋu Tourism Aboriginal Corporation, 2014).

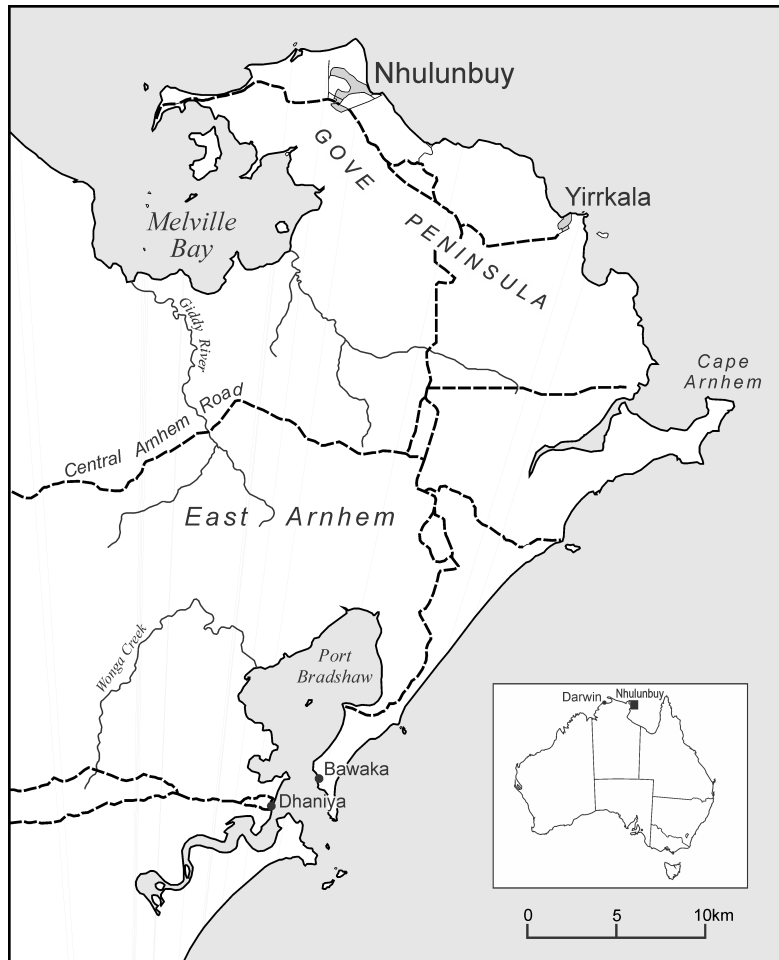


Figure 1. Map of North East Arnhem Land showing the location of Bawaka (map created by Olivier Rey-Lescure, 2012).

According to Laklak, BCE's business goals are a natural extension of the Yolŋu people's desire to teach and learn: "The business is about Bawaka people sharing knowledge with the world. It's how Bawaka people are, sharing knowledge with the world, learning from each other, Indigenous and non-Indigenous" (cited in Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013, p. 27).

For members of the Burarrwanga family, the land-seas-windscape of Bawaka has special significance; places are alive with story, law, power, and kinship relations that join not only people to each other

² A swag is a portable sleeping unit.

but also link people, ancestors, place, animals, rocks, plants, stories, and songs to multiple spiritual and symbolic realms (Burarrwanga et al., 2012; Magowan, 2001). In Bawaka, Country is alive and active; it can be talked to, it can be known, it can itself communicate, feel, and take either benign or non-benign action. Protected by the spirit woman Bayini, Country is a sapient presence. This concept is a foundation of Yolŋu worldviews, and is deeply embedded in tour experiences. Visitors are welcomed by Country, are taught to understand the history of connections between Country and community, and are introduced to the ongoing reciprocal rights and responsibilities held by those living on (or visiting) Country. Ongoing engagement with Country through the tours enables visitors to become known to it, and increasingly cognisant of the inter-connectedness between humans, animals, the landscape and seasons, and the responsibilities these relationships confer.

Greater understanding of this inter-connectedness is encouraged by BCE, which asks tourists to watch for and learn to identify signs that reveal changing seasons, the availability of food sources, and the activities necessary to ensure food supply, safety, and the continuity of the community. An example of knowledge embedded within changing seasons is described in Wright et al. (2009):

When Yolŋu people, as one agent in the cosmos, see gaypal (yellow wattle) in flower, they know that the fish are fat and it is time to hunt miyapunu (sea turtle) and minhala (freshwater longneck turtle) and time to collect miyapunu mapu (turtle egg).

The educational and communication-centered approaches used within the tours are an extension of Yolŋu practices and beliefs. Engaging and learning from Country is presented as a whole of body experience, rather than as an intellectual exercise. Tourists are encouraged to open their eyes, ears, and hearts and “*sit quietly with us and listen to the sound of nature—the land is talking to you*” (D. Burarrwanga, BCE website [inactive]).

Laklak explains how BCE’s approach to assisting tourists to understand and connect with Country—through embodied experiences—is an extension of the education methods that are commonly used with Yolŋu children as they grow up on Country:

It is easy to learn when you learn in place. When we teach children the Yolŋu way, we take them out and show them. We walk them through. They learn the seasons, the winds, they learn what to feel and how to do. For example, when it is the season Rrarrandharr,³ they see how dry everything is, they feel the hot sand and learn to feel the fruits ripening. This is how we teach and how we learn. This is how we will help you learn too (cited in Burarrwanga et al., 2012, p. xiii)

For many tourists, this approach to tourism is likely to represent an entirely different way of being, one that draws from the Yolŋu’s ontological connection between Country and community. The ongoing popularity of BCE tours indicates the tour experiences are attractive for non-Indigenous tourists. What we explore here is whether the educational goals of BCE to share and promote cultural understanding are being achieved, and, in particular, the extent to which they lead to changes in tourists’ attitudes and behaviours.

³ The Yolŋu people generally recognise six major seasons in the yearly cycle of natural events. August–September–October is known as Rrarrandharr. This is a hot, dry season, the time of year when your feet burn when you walk on the sand.

BCE Tourist Experiences

In this section, we explore the ways in which a Yolŋu ontology of connection to Country shapes and structures BCE tour experiences through the eyes of tourists, particularly their responses to these disorienting experiences, and broader transformative changes linked by interviewees to the tour experience. Tourists and industry professionals that have either attended or witnessed one or multiple BCE tours took part in our study exploring the impact of BCE's tourism activities, resulting in 12 interviews and three surveys. For the purposes of this article, we draw from two of these survey responses and nine of the in-depth interviews. Two of the interviews focused on BCE tours hosted through the Garma Festival; the remaining tours discussed were held on Bawaka Country itself.

The sample is not designed to be comprehensive or representative. The selection process itself has given preference to participants with positive and/or transformative experiences during their tour. The sample allows for an exploration of the conditions specific to BCE's tours, and highlights what *can* lead to transformational change, pointing to the potential for Indigenous-led tourism more broadly to generate these positive outcomes. Interviewees were initially approached on the basis of their ongoing connections to BCE after their tourist experiences, from contact sheets at BCE related events, and through word of mouth (i.e., established interviewees suggested other participants). Four interviewees continue to have an ongoing professional relationship with BCE through their work roles (including as government staff members and as members of the tourist industry) and two were involved in education or academic fields of work.

Interviews were conducted via phone and surveys were taken online. Both explored non-Indigenous tourists' prior knowledge of Indigenous culture and peoples, and perceived changes in their attitudes, understandings and behaviours as a result of the tour experience. By asking participants to reflect on aspects of the tour that they felt were meaningful, the research also attempted to uncover components of the tour experience that had catalysed personal transformations. Interviews were conducted with the participants who identified themselves as having gained something from the experience—even if many mentioned their inabilities apply these changes to their lives after the tour.

Connecting Through New Experiences of Country and Culture

Introducing different ways of being in the world to tourists and visitors by “just being with Country,” while building connections between hosts, visitors, and Country, are conscious objectives and outcomes of BCE. These goals are evidenced through the tour program, in which Country, community, and family priorities direct tour activities and focus. The emergence of “Nike,” Bawaka's resident crocodile, the play of children, or the marriage or death of a relative could shape the day's activities, as could the presence of certain family members, or the connection between the hosts and their guests. This fluidity or responsiveness to Country and community is critical to the tour experience, according to tourists interviewed. One explained, for example, how the tour “was just about being there and letting the stories happen as we walked around” (Interview 1).

Not only were the visitors immersed in the day-to-day activities, but the ways in which visitors were situated relative to their hosts and Country was an unexpected experience for many, challenging many assumptions of difference. Guides were described as treating guests with the openness and generosity of close family members rather than replicating the more commonly experienced dynamic of tour guide and participant. This open and caring relationship between tourists, guides, and Country was often established at the outset of the tours through ceremony. According to one

tourist, the smoking ceremony used to welcome guests to Country created a bond with their hosts and a sense of common purpose:

It's like, we're all here and we're all the same. That's a powerful thing. (Interview 11)

Instead of being treated as observers looking in from the outside at Yolŋu culture, BCE tourists were invited to establish a deeper connection to Country and community that emphasises mutual interest, common purpose, identity, and responsibility. When writing about women's weaving knowledge and Yolŋu stories, for example, Laklak explains:

Our stories are stories about connections between all women. It doesn't matter which colour, we are all the same. Some women, when they hear this, they cry. (Burarrwanga et al., 2013, p. 21)

Tourists described experiencing a sense of awe and honour at gaining access to privileged spaces, knowledges, and ceremonies on what were perceived to be very generous terms. Tourists were clearly overwhelmed by their treatment, and felt a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity to gain a rare insight into the lives and experiences of Indigenous families and communities living on Country.

I just felt like they just accepted . . . I guess they were so welcoming and so accepting, they were just wonderful. There's no other way to put it, they were just the most welcoming, accepting people of any of the people I've met. (Interview 12)

. . . it was such a privilege to sit and learn. (Survey respondent 1)

. . . it was the fact that we were on their land, hearing their stories, told their way in their time and having being invited to be part of that. You know, I really felt they were sharing something very important and special to them with us. (Interview 1)

The intensity of the emotional connection felt by tourists towards their guides and Country was documented in numerous tourist interviews. Experiences ranged from heartfelt and teary exchanges between tourists and guides, to tourists being awed and extremely moved by ceremony, to the following departure stories, in which the act of leaving the tour became a painful experience:

You feel really attached to people . . . I think the ceremony at the end, I guess what is hard about that is it's breaking an attachment . . . It doesn't have to be a breaking of an attachment but that's what it is, so it is like saying goodbye to people, like leaving on a train, or whatever. That experience is painful. (Interview 9)

Going back to work was pretty tough. I cried on the plane home. (Survey 2)

Disorientation in Connection

Despite the deep emotional connections formed between tourists, Country, and community described above, experiences of learning and connecting were not inherently smooth and easy. Instead, as Mezirow's theory suggests, some encounters and engagements were profoundly disorienting. For example, exploring Country in Bawaka prompted some tourists, when interviewed, to reconsider their perceptions and understandings of Australia. One respondent explained feeling "a strong sense of being a visitor in my own country" (Survey 1), and another affirmed:

I mean, when you go out there and you see what Australia really is like and what it's all about, it's just so different. (Interview 12)

In the following sections, we explore the discomfort faced by tourists, arising in part in response to the practical aspects of being with Country, combined with the new skills, task requirements, and political realities that commitment to new ways of being bring. These are broadly categorised into four areas: the practicalities of relinquishing control, new knowledge and skills, unfamiliar communication protocols, and political content.

Relinquishing Control

BCE's focus on creating tours that actively engage in and contribute to the lives of family members whilst reflecting Yolŋu's worldviews and educational and communication protocols reveals an alternative, specifically Indigenous model of tourism. According to one interviewee, this approach, an example of what Bunten (2010) might describe as "culturalising commerce," has significant power or impact on tourists:

That's one thing that they've managed to do fairly well, is keep it normal, and that's why every tour is different; it's not a performance—it's not, now we do this, now we do that. It's a little bit structured but it's also very loose, so it remains real. (Interview 11)

In order to engage in the tour experience, and fulfill a collective responsibility to community and Country, tourists were effectively required to "let go" of any attempt to control the program, as well as any expectations about what they would be doing. Activities often arose in response to factors outside tourists' (and guides') control, without a schedule or timetable. A number of activities took considerable time, involved repetitive actions, and emphasised collectivity and cooperation. Group outcomes were often valued over individual acquisition of skills, and participants were expected to take the tasks seriously and learn through observation: "you don't ask a lot of questions; you watch" (Interview 9).

This necessarily required a change of pace and attitude for many tourists, one that was not always welcome. According to one interviewee, this is a challenging component of the tourism approach used by BCE, as learning opportunities and experiences are subject to Country rather than schedule, and collective rather than individual experiences are emphasised:

We've heard some more feedback at other times as well, that you are stepping into someone's life, but you are also paying for an experience so you expect to receive that. (Interview 3)

What is clear from interviews is that the process of letting go was critical for some tourists when gaining an embodied understanding of Country and day-to-day life with the Burarrwanga family. Whilst challenging, the processes of letting go and being directed led to opportunities to better understand Yolŋu worldviews. The process of weaving, for example, was described as having an effect on tourists' moods, insofar as it calmed the weaver into a peaceful, almost meditative state through the loss of individual focus and concerns—in part due to joining a collective project, and in part from engaging in a process involving repetitious steps and a quiet focus. As described by one tourist:

I was immersed in an experience, and that's what I mean about I probably reflected less. So I was a person doing things, and that I think is quite a peaceful way to be. You just connected to people or things, or weaving. I suppose we might understand it as quite Zen or something. (Interview 9)

Tourists' personal boundaries were directly challenged by group expectations that they undertake a number of activities that they might normally avoid, such as dancing. Dancers were also admonished on occasion for adopting their own style of dancing; the expectation was for individuals to adhere to the style, pace, and structure of existing collective routines. While discomforting, these experiences helped tourists to understand the nature of interconnectedness and responsibility inherent within Yolŋu worldviews, whereby family members are beholden to each other and to Country in a complex weave of shared responsibility.

And I thought the dancing is great, especially the men, because my husband normally wouldn't choose to dance and he got up there and he had a good time. (Interview 12)

I do think there's something great about being castigated for our bad dancing. It stops it turning into some sort of . . . it's a discipline, you have to dance properly. You dance properly because it's a manifestation of Country. They don't just flap around. So in that sort of sense you do things properly. And I think that probably for a lot of people a bit shocking. (Interview 9)

Learning and Sharing New Knowledge and Skills

In a context where tourists have limited experience with Indigenous cultures and peoples, exposure to the guides' deep knowledge can make an enormous impression, as one tourist explained:

He was one of the most intelligent—and his mother too, Barbara—gentlemanly, well educated person; maybe not educated in our traditional sense of universities, but they were the most intelligent and, just amazing people that I'd come across. So it was really quite special. (Interview 12)

For others with some prior exposure to Indigenous peoples and knowledges, the depth of Yolŋu knowledge of Country can serve to be both intriguing and humbling. Through hands-on activities such as weaving and hunting, tourists became aware of the difficulty of Yolŋu skills. These activities served to strengthen tourists' respect for the skills of the host community, and some tourists also expressed a small sense of disquiet over the difficulty of mastering these skills:

. . . you feel a little bit of a klutz because you can't really do their little things straight off; you actually have to concentrate and think about it, so you have a better appreciation of, you know, what they're doing. (Interview 12)

A collective responsibility for valuing and sharing new knowledge acquired through tours is made clear for tourists from the outset. As Laklak described in her book, *Weaving Lives Together at Bawaka*:

When my grandmothers collected food, they saved it in a basket and shared it. Now we are putting our knowledge in the basket and we share it—mother to grandchild—and now you have to share it with your family (Burarrwanga et al., 2012, p. 7).

The expectation that tourists should share this knowledge can be new for tourists who may have previously seen responsibility for this as something lying with Indigenous communities:

I found the openness of the Yolŋu people to share their stories and to encourage people who heard the stories to go further and share them; I found that really interesting because I don't remember getting that feeling as I was growing up from Aboriginal groups here in South Australia . . . I've never had that sentiment that this is our story and this is everybody's story and you must go out and share it but that came across so strongly on the day. (Interview 1)

Unfamiliar Communication Protocols

Yolŋu ways of being were also clearly manifest in communication styles. Whilst the main tour guides, with experience of non-Indigenous communication protocols, were open and very friendly, within the group context and the broader family Indigenous community members were described as quiet, and often did not respond to direct questioning. Information was often not presented to tourists in a linear manner with reference to dates or other events of the time; an industry professional explained that stories can sometimes evolve between tours.

The communication style is non-direct. For example, one tourist with prior experience with Indigenous communities talked of embedded messages in stories told by hosts that may have been missed by other tourists due to their lack of familiarity with the communication style. Another spoke of the importance of having a tourist in their group with experience with Indigenous cultures, as well as the ability to ask questions and direct conversation to unpack meanings that would have been lost without his or her assistance. According to one industry professional:

All the information's there, but for me, and I know other people have commented on the same thing, you still can't quite get it because you don't know how to put all the different pieces together. (Interview 11)

According to some tourists, deeper meanings embedded in conversation might require multiple encounters to grasp, and more direct Western style communication techniques. However, for others, it was the experience of uncovering and exploring different verbal and non-verbal cues that, while confusing, resulted in achieving a deeper sense of meaning from communication:

We have a lot in common as women; and what's not in common is not an issue for the short period of time we are together; there's a number of different ways communication is occurring including non-verbal [sic]. So learning to read those signs is part of the experience. It's an informal process between the two cultural groupings and of course there is much laughter in the learning exchange. (Interview 10)

Political Content

For the Burrawangas, the act of undertaking tourism is a deliberate and political act. In particular, connection to Country is political in light of the Australian Government's Northern Territory Intervention policy, removal from Homelands, lands rights issues, control of language and bilingual education, access to health and education, and rights to Country within Indigenous Law and systems. However, political discussion about these issues was confronting and disquieting for some tourists. As described by one observer, the introduction of a political discussion—whereby tourists were asked how they had allowed the Northern Territory Intervention to take place—into one tour

clearly made some tourists uncomfortable. Tourists felt that politics had no place in the program, and in fact detracted from their connection to Country and the Burrawangas:

So it was quite clear that it was very uncomfortable, and then I spoke to a few people after to try to make sure I've actually got this right. And they were uncomfortable about it and would say things like, it's not about politics, it's about . . . oh, it's just that it became political and it shouldn't be about politics, it should be about connection to Country. (Interview 9)

Tourists in this context appeared to be searching for a spiritual connection with Country, without necessarily recognising their own roles in the ongoing oppression faced by Indigenous communities, and without recognising how for Yolngu people it would be inconceivable to “have an attachment to Country without politics being involved” (Interview 9).

This highlights a critical issue within Indigenous tourism: the disconnection between romanticised views of Indigenous cultures and the reality of life within Australia for Indigenous communities. Politics are often missing from the tourist agenda. What are the limits to educational tourism and transformative learning if tourists only want experiences on or with Country that are disconnected from controversial and political issues? These questions are explored in the conclusion and policy recommendations.

Enduring Shifts in One's Habits of Thought and Perspectives

Despite not engaging specific methods to promote reflection, discussion, and exploration, BCE tours were reported to have left a lasting impression on participants. For those with limited exposure to Indigenous peoples and cultures prior to attending a BCE tour, the potential for transformation appeared to be greatest. In the vignette below, a tourism sector worker explains her impressions of the impact of one-day tours on somewhat disinterested local mining workers:

. . . they were mainly men, there were some women on those early day tours—but you'd get at least two or three who would arrive and get in the four-wheel drive with their arms folded. They were going because it was something to do on the day off, not that they were interested in the least but it got them out of the camp for the day. And to see them over the day interact with Timmy, and particularly the women, that the barriers came down and by the end of the day these people would be hugging and kissing the family and going, “oh my God, I can't believe this, I'm so ashamed of myself. I'm ashamed of what I thought about you and your family; I'm ashamed as an Australian that I didn't know about this.” I think this is a really common thing; I felt the same myself when I first went over there—shame that you have this vision that what you see on TV and in the media all the time, drunken Indigenous people and family violence and all that kind of thing, but when you go to Bawaka, it's a side that not very many people get to see of how functional their lives actually are, and how caring they are. (Interview 11)

For others with prior experience with or exposure to Indigenous communities, the experience—although not an isolated learning opportunity or the stimulus for a new way of thinking and being—still reinforced their current understandings, and they contributed ideas:

There are many experiences in my life that have deepened my understanding of the Indigenous cultures. This was an important one but not the only one. (Interview 10)

The post-tour outcomes on the lives of tourists interviewed can be loosely grouped into three main categories. The first involves greater interest and intellectual engagement in Indigenous affairs. As a result of their tour experiences, these tourists reported a greater interest in news stories and literature involving Indigenous issues and communities; an enhanced understanding of how policy issues may affect Indigenous communities living in East Arnhem Land; and an increased willingness to share their perspectives and insights on Indigenous communities and worldview with others in social situations:

It [the tour] gave me a better . . . a different way of looking at it [Indigenous issues], or a more insightful way of looking at it. Which if I hadn't had that experience I would have been ignorant. (Interview 12)

The second category of perceived change was in relation to worldviews. Numerous tourists mentioned how their tour experience acted to reinforce and build on their existing commitment to social justice, Indigenous rights, and/or to their relationship with nature, as described in the quotations below:

Well I've always respected nature and everything else, but I really appreciated their take on everything. It probably deepened my own ideas I had already. (Interview 12)

The Bawaka tour reinvigorated the way I relate to the natural world and people. It did not change me, but reinforced the path that I was on. (Survey 1)

The third group of personal changes discussed by tourists involved taking direct action, utilising professional roles (such as those of teacher and academic and tourism sector worker) to pursue outcomes that fulfilled a desire to act on injustice, and to carry forward perceived collective responsibilities that were initially instilled within the tour setting. Some examples of change reported as a result of the tours include taking on new research projects that progress the aims of reconciliation, writing a book for educational purposes about the Bawaka experience, and taking a long term commitment to working in Indigenous tourism and economic development:

I think it made me quite materially think about what is my role in this, and one can be charged with this. People are right to charge people and other Australians. You can't just be an intellectual engagement. (Interview 9)

It was being put in the situation that I was, and once I became aware of it, you couldn't not do something about it. Most people, they just want a hand; they just want people to understand; they just want it to be fair; they just want the best for their children. (Interview 11)

This change in belief, attitude, or behaviour demonstrates the powerful impact BCE has on tour participants. For many who came to the tour with a social justice perspective, the tour built on and confirmed their perspectives, and may have acted a little like a tipping point in their journeys of change. However, upon leaving Bawaka, the lack of constant reminders and a community of practice made it difficult to sustain different perspectives and ways of thinking:

I guess that's an experience of how one might want to be in the world, and that you can bring a little bit of that home. But I'm not the Dalai Lama, so I'd have to practice that for some time. . . Slow it down would be one way [I want to change my behaviour]. Or just being

aware of getting stressed at the desk, so that you can consciously intervene. But I'm usually caught up in it before I can wind myself back down again. I guess in that sense being one of those experiences, and a very, very deeply embodied experience, which is different than someone telling you that you need to be mindful. What the hell is mindfulness? I don't know. You have to experience it. So I think I'd have to go there for quite some time. (Interview 9)

One interview with a person who had extended engagement with BCE shows more signs of achieving longer-term change:

I've learned to appreciate it more. I've actually slowed down, if you know what I mean—stopped and smelled the roses more. Timmy used to often say to me, why are you rushing? Why are you driving so fast? Why do we have to have this done today? [laughs]. And when you're out with them you're there but you're not seeing; and Barbara would often say that—you need to open your eyes and see. You're not really looking; be aware of everything around you. (Interview 11)

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

We were once Indigenous people but we have disassociated from our Indigenous roots about 4,000 or 5,000 years ago. Yet we still do have a deep knowing that once we have re-experienced the closeness to Country, the stories of the landscape with contemporary Indigenous people we have a sense of being at home within ourselves again. It's profound really, and you never forget it. It's just one of those things that happens. It is a gift. It's remarkable. (Interview 10)

A Yolŋu way of “doing tourism” is clearly a viable, culturally appropriate, empowering, intriguing, and successful form of educational tourism. The very act of Yolŋu-led educational processes is social, cultural, and political for the host family, with beneficial results regarding for self-esteem, “inward education,” and ongoing work and respect within the community. BCE's venture is an example of a tourism model that deliberately goes beyond economic understandings of tourism and interactions between hosts and visitors. This is at odds with mainstream conceptualisations of Indigenous tourism in Australian policy, which tend to position tourism as a “product” or “service,” and emphasise job creation and economic development. Therefore, policies that are cognizant of the diverse aims and conceptualisations of tourism are needed.

This article demonstrates that tourism can be a vehicle for encouraging new understandings and connections among tourists. Tourists clearly had profound and meaningful experiences on BCE tours and left with greater appreciation for Yolŋu skills and knowledges. While confronting and disconcerting for some, we argue that the experiences embedded within Yolŋu ontology that underpin tour experiences are the very foundation for tourists' potential learning outcomes. They can contribute to change and often have the most impact when they come as part of multiple engagements in which the experience with BCE is but one of many experiences that together seek to change tourists' beliefs, attitudes, or behaviours.

We also found that while the Indigenous tourism model used by BCE provides a range of disorienting dilemmas for tourists, the transformational impact of these experiences may be limited by the short duration of tours, lack of structured processes, the challenges of new learning experiences, and the lack of opportunities to implement changes upon returning home. Only a few tourists reported changed behavior over the medium term, although all felt profoundly affected at

the time of their experiences. Mezirow (1975) argued that for transformational learning to occur, a disorientating dilemma needs to be followed by reflection, discussion, and exploration and testing of new modes of understanding. Perhaps the lack of opportunity to unpack this discomfort (particularly in regards to political content) in a group-facilitated context meant that tourists were not able to critically reflect on their responses to the context and learn from them. Structured reflection and discussion processes are neither actively integrated into BCE tours nor facilitated by BCE guides. This is perhaps a missed opportunity to take these dilemmas and promote enduring shifts in thoughts and perspectives. A facilitated discussion could make an alternative analysis possible, and promote a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of politics and Country.

An increased focus on structured reflection and discussion, however, needs to be done with care, and should not entail changing the nature of the tours. Changing tour structures to remove or alter these experiences could unintentionally remove the very fabric of the tour that leads to positive change. Moreover, an attempt to fit Indigenous-led tourism into the Western tourism model may in fact unintentionally contribute to colonising practices and undermine the impact of the tour itself. The very nature of Indigenous businesses requires the use of locally constructed protocols to operate successfully; hence, the policy challenge around reflection-for-change is perhaps one for broader organisations and networks to consider, asking: How do state-based support agencies, corporate entities, and educational institutions encourage spaces and opportunities for post-tour reflection and connection to enhance the impact of such transformational experiences?

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