

Research Article

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Renewing the Yolŋu 'Bothways' philosophy: Warramiri transculturation education at Gäwa

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Abstract

'Bothways' was an expression first utilised by Yolŋu educators in the late 1980s to convey the profound intercultural epistemological foundations of Yolŋu society that should also apply to modern *Balanda* (white) schooling systems. Despite the pressures from national, standardised curriculum and assessment regimes, 'Bothways' has not been abandoned by remote Yolŋu communities in the 21st century. In this paper we briefly revisit the first iterations of the 'Bothways' philosophy to demonstrate its symmetry with the Yolŋu transculturation heritage (of the Warramiri in particular), developed through many centuries of contact with sea-faring visitors. Lastly, we present data from community research at Gäwa, a Warramiri homeland on Elcho Island, which demonstrates that through a series of 'multiple balances', negotiation around issues of bilingual pedagogy, cultural knowledge transmission, parental engagement and student–teacher dynamic continues to renew the 'Bothways' approach.

Introduction

The Yolŋu 'Bothways' paradigm concerning the interplay between traditional languages, cultural knowledge and 'mainstream' curriculum has made a radical and profound contribution to Australian educational philosophy. Ever since 'Bothways' was elucidated in a string of memorable manifestations and metaphors in the late 1980s, Yolŋu educators have consistently maintained that education must proceed through genuine integration, as 'knowledge negotiations are always in a sense intercultural, because they always depend on doing difference together: different land/people configurations, different language habitats, different authorities coming together' (Christie, 2007, p. 70). In the era of nationalisation, and in the wake of NAPLAN (introduced in 2008), the Australian Curriculum (first versions in 2012) and the Wilson report (Wilson, 2014) into Indigenous education in Northern Territory, the philosophy has been largely sidelined, the prevailing milieu consisting of 'deficit, failure and intractable problems, with a definition of educational success measured by comparison of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scores on standardised literacy and numeracy tests' (Disbray, 2016, p. 237). However, for Warramiri Yolŋu, 'Bothways' is still actively pursued, the specific educational focus resting upon a deeper *transculturation* (Ortiz, 1940) foundation, evolving from a long history of contact with various waves of visitors from other cultures (McIntosh, 1997). At Gäwa, a Warramiri homeland community on the northern tip of Elcho Island, the epistemological emphasis of negotiated knowledge work enacted through a dynamic of 'multiple balances' continues to renew the 'Bothways' philosophy.

'Bothways' revisited

In North-East Arnhem Land communities in the late 1980s, long-term Yolŋu educators, often framing their theories from community Elders' input, developed the first 'Bothways' iterations. In part this was due to the relatively 'Language-friendly' Methodist mission policies which were 'much less repressive as far as indigenous traditional life is concerned than that operating elsewhere' (Berndt, 1962, p. 14), and partly due to the evolution of bilingual education after its introduction in 1972. Whilst being progressive, *bilingual* systems were not adequate, for 'every Yolŋu fits into a big network of many clans and languages, and Yolŋu children need to know their own clan languages for them to develop a true Yolŋu identity' (Christie, 1994, p. 120). 'Bothways' was also clearly inspired by the 'Aboriginalisation Program' adopted by the Department of Education (Marika, 1999), Wearne's early thesis demonstrating the incipient philosophy emerging just prior to the famous Yirrkala 'Action Group' (Yunupingu, 1989; Marika-Munungiritj, 1990; Marika-Munungiritj *et al.*, 1990). His monograph focussed on *Balanda* educators realising 'that Aboriginal decision making should sit alongside ours if schooling for Aboriginal people is to be bicultural, thus recognizing both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural norms' (Wearne, 1986, p. 92). However, the thesis also demonstrated

that even with a commitment to such a philosophy, for *Balanda*, the ‘tide of history and our ethnocentric and assimilatory disposition... (and) significant structural and cognitive barriers (exist) which mean we inhibit democratisation and devolution of control’ (Wearne, 1986, p. 37). A recent reflection on this time period is also provided by Stockley *et al.* (2016). Indeed, it was only when many of these Yirrkala Yolŋu educators continued their tertiary studies at (the then) Batchelor College that the ‘Bothways’ philosophy truly emerged, and began to shape the andragogy of the college (White, 2015) and become readily accessible to a broader audience. From inception, and over an inspired 5 year burst, the Batchelor College journal *Ngoonjook* published a string of stunning articles, outlining ‘Bothways’ through the sharing of traditional kinship/clan dynamics and metaphors.

Following this sharing in chronological order, Lanhupuy first argued that ‘only when the cultural orientation of the school becomes Yolngu, will schools become integral to the movement of Aborigines towards self-determination... (and) in this sense, a bicultural or ‘both ways’ education for aboriginal children will emerge’ (Lanhupuy, 1988, p. 2–3). Wununmurra explained that ‘the two way idea of negotiating meanings is not new to Yolŋu culture... there is negotiation of meanings between the two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja, which can be applied to negotiation between Yolŋu and *Balanda* cultures to find the common ground that makes up the two way curriculum’ (Wununmurra, 1989, p. 13). Marika, Nurruwutthun and White also referred to this traditional epistemological balancing through the *yothu-yindi* (mother-child) dynamic; ‘there is always a connection between a yolngu yothu and its yindi, there is always a connection between a yothu piece of land and its mother land’ (Marika *et al.*, 1989, p. 19). Yunupinju noted that it is ultimately a question of control: ‘what we want is BOTH WAYS education—*Balanda* and Yolŋu ways—but we want the Yolŋu to have control over both sides of the curriculum’ (Yunupinju, 1989, p. 4). He also raised issues of encouraging traditional skills to be specifically taught in schools whereas restricted sacred/secret knowledge was to be taught outside school, ‘BUT, the way the school is run can *encourage* these things’ (Yunupinju, 1989, p. 5). Marika-Munungirij compared the overall ‘Bothways’ philosophy to the traditional ceremonial concept of *garma*, a ceremonial term; ‘an open word used by both Yirritja and Dhuwa clans describing where a Yolngu learning environment begins... negotiation between the two moieties’ (Marika-Munungirij, 1990, p. 43). She also introduced the concepts of *milŋurr* and *gaŋma*, utilising existing epistemologies from the two moieties as they related to the meeting of fresh and salt water and the *balalili* (Give and take; reciprocity) talking of the interactions of the tide and the spring... which we can apply to theorising the teacher/learner dynamic’ (Marika-Munungirij, 1990, p. 49). This reciprocity also specifically involved the Elders: ‘we have to fulfil obligations to the *Ngalapal* who instruct us and the children. *Bala-lili* means “giving” and then “getting something back”. The obligations that we are under require us to do the things that they expect us to do’ (Marika-Munungirij, 1990, p. 51). Later she outlined the pre-eminence of the land in the learning process through the concept of *djalkiri* (footprint) which

‘symbolises the foundation, where the human being actually comes into contact with the land... the hidden meaning is our core, or foundation. *Djalkiri* shows us that the curriculum must be integrated... how we learn to value the land for the abstract, deep and common knowledge that is derived from the land, giving us meaning and identity’ (Marika-Munungirij, 1991a, pp. 18, 22).

She further fleshed out *galtha* workshops for curriculum development: ‘a term used for gathering together ideas as a starting point for sorting out important issues and problems’ (Marika-Munungirij, 1991b, p. 33). A group of Elcho Island Yolŋu educators explicitly discussed ‘Bothways’, noting that multilingual schooling was necessary: ‘writing and reading will be in both ways ... reading and writing in their own language so children will learn three languages—English, Djambarrpuyngu and their own tribal languages’ (Bepuka *et al.*, 1993, p. 69). And Yunupinju brought national attention to the topic with his Boyer Lecture on ‘a curriculum of multiple balances’ (Yunupinju, 1994, p. 9) especially through outlining the process around preparation of *ŋathu*, the sacred cycad bread.

Over the subsequent decades, ‘Bothways’ evolved to embody more generalised ‘principles’, often linked to the overall philosophy of Batchelor Institute; a student centred, shared learning journey that strengthens Indigenous identity (Ober and Bat, 2007). Briefly revisiting the early images and iterations is not to argue for their dominance over these subsequent interpretations, however, it is important to reassert that, for Yolŋu, ‘Bothways’ was always an application to education of an intercultural ontological/epistemological perspective that already existed within moiety, clan and kinship relationships. Thus, for *Balanda* educators and schooling systems, embracing ‘Bothways’ is a self-fulfilling ‘Bothways’ commitment; the ‘embodied, interpretive working through of history, place and connectedness into the future is exactly what Yolngu elders insisted education has always been like for the young, and should continue to be like’ (Christie, 2007, p. 74). As of 2007, Christie also ruefully noted that ‘the story of how and why that all came unstuck is yet to be told’ (Christie, 2007, p. 60), to say nothing of the impact of NAPLAN and the Australian Curriculum over the subsequent decade. Nevertheless, despite the apparent demise of the philosophy in practice, in smaller homeland communities particularly (Greatorex, 2016), it can still flourish. Indeed, community research from Gäwa, a Warramiri ancestral estate at the northern tip of Elcho Island, demonstrates a clear ‘Bothways’ renewal.

Warramiri transculturation

Warramiri heritage

Before turning to the current research, it is important to contextualise community aspirations at Gäwa via an analysis of the Warramiri transculturation heritage. The Warramiri are one of the Yolŋu *yirritja* moiety ‘clans’, and are the people of the coral reef and the deep sea (Burrumarra, 1977) with significant ancestral territories stretching up through the island chain known in English as the Wessel Islands. In anthropological circles there are long-held and significant debates as to how to classify Yolŋu ‘tribes’ or ‘clans’, particularly in reference to Yolŋu social category terms *bäpurru* and *mala* (Keen, 1995, 2000). We continue to use ‘clan’ as this term has become accepted by Yolŋu themselves when discussing Yolŋu society in English. Warramiri is also the name of the language of the clan, and there are a number of dialects within this *Djanju* language (Aboriginal Research and Development Services, 2015). Warramiri was not used as one of the Mission ‘bilingual’ languages either for education or Bible translation purposes, and none of the key Mission sites were founded on Warramiri land. However, Warramiri knowledge practices have significantly impacted Yolŋu-*Balanda* interactions, largely due to the charismatic, enigmatic and quite extraordinary leadership of David Burrumarra ‘whose life and

work have had a marked impact on the history of Arnhem Land' (Williams, 1994, p. 121). In what was an incredibly full life Burrumarra lived through and contributed deeply to a time of unprecedented change. Spanning a traditional sea-faring, island childhood, to a working life including pearling and trepang industries with Japanese and *Balanda*, Mission go-between and key anthropologist informant; Burrumarra was the first Mission school teacher at Elcho Mission and the first Village Council Secretary (1940s), was instrumental in establishing bilingual education and the first settled 'homelands' (1950s), became involved in the first land rights cases and Aboriginal voting rights movements (1960s) and was referred to as the 'father of Aboriginal sea rights' (McIntosh, 2015, p. 224). He claimed explicitly: 'my role has been to mediate between the people of Arnhem Land and the newcomers, including missionary teachers, anthropologists and other scholars... my life's ambition is to see that knowledge of my own Warramiri and related cultures is preserved as far as possible' (Barnier, 1978, p. 205). Fascinatingly, long before the terminology had been coined, Burrumarra pursued a consistent 'Bothways' philosophy throughout his life to achieve these stated aims, based on his distinct Warramiri cosmology.

A number of consistent images emerge from his interactions with *Balanda*. Vander-Wal named his memoir after the phrase 'hand in hand' due to a brief conversation with Burrumarra in 1972; 'let us take over gradually...for the time being we must go *hand in hand*' (Vander-Wal, 1999, p. 30). This somewhat generic metaphor of 'partnership' is best understood in terms of Clarke's memory of the same time period (consultation with Yolŋu in preparation for the influential Methodist mission 'Free to Decide' policy change of 1974): 'the image Burrumarra conveyed was accompanied by the movement of his hands as if climbing a ladder hand by hand... his metaphor envisaged "Yolngu ga *Balanda*", climbing together, first one in the lead with their hand extended to help—then the other in the lead' (Clarke, 2010, p. 201). In a 1979 press release he bemoaned the lack of consultation from *Balanda* authorities: 'the status of the Aboriginal people has gone down. Certainly the money is still forthcoming, but it is giving without listening. There is no sense of partnership, no real respect for the Aboriginal law and feelings' (McIntosh, 1994, p. 115). Burrumarra often utilised equality motifs of eyes and faces. In 1980, regarding land rights and Yolŋu connections, he wrote: 'Why is it that Aboriginal always have to bow down and accept with their eyes shut what the white man tells them is good for them, even now when we are supposed to be equal?...Governments and Yolŋu people must look at each other face to face' (Yule, 1980, p. 16). And in a 1989 press release, Burrumarra claimed: 'But the war between "black" and "white" is nearly over. We are just about in a position to use both of our eyes to look at each other. In the past, it has always been with one eye—looking at each other with much suspicion. Why can't we live together on equal terms?' (McIntosh, 1997, p. 15). The 'Bothways' implication was explicitly elaborated:

'As Yolngu we can and will have to learn a lot from the *Balanda*, but then as Yolngu we can also share with the *Balanda* our knowledge and traditions. We should try to educate each other, so that both races can learn from the other. We do not subscribe to the one way street ideas, we both offer each other knowledge and values. We have to educate each other' (Top End News, 5 June, 1981, quoted in McIntosh, 1997).

Overall, this foundation of the Warramiri heritage (as expressed by Burrumarra) can be summarised as an expectation

that leadership roles/perspectives will oscillate between *Balanda* and Yolŋu and that the 'other' itself will be transformed through contact with Yolŋu. That is, *Balanda* are not so much learning *about* Yolŋu, but learning and growing *through* knowledge contact with Yolŋu; a genuinely reciprocal education process. Such an approach is reminiscent of Christie's reflections on decades of translation work; that 'it is only a good translation if it changes the way the English language works ... (a) primary goal is to change the way the *Balanda* students understand themselves, rather than to help them understand or make them feel comfortable in the Yolŋu world' (Christie, 2010, p. 74). However, far more significant than the phrases Burrumarra employed were his genuinely revolutionary actions over many decades through directly initiating profound religious/political movements. Firstly, he was the key inspiration behind the famous 'Adjustment Movement' of 1957 whereby Warramiri, Wangurri and Gälpu clan Elders created and displayed sacred/secret *rannga* emblems on wooden poles at Galiwin'ku. Numerous anthropologists have analysed 'The Memorial' from a range of critical perspectives (Berndt, 1962; Bos, 1988; Rudder, 1993; Keen 1994; McIntosh, 1997 and 2004; Morphy, 2005), and whilst it was a multi-faceted and nuanced plan, it is abundantly clear that it was an attempt to adapt traditional Yolŋu culture (through the very act of revealing sacred/secret knowledge, as well as combining these sacred images with Christian symbols), but simultaneously, it revealed an expectation that by offering up such precious possessions, Yolŋu would be appropriately compensated; when 'the Europeans fulfilled their part of the bargain' (Berndt, 1962, p. 84), transferring authority and practical benefits to Yolŋu. Burrumarra was the clear agitator and 'secretary' of the movement, but Badanga as official spokesman summarised: 'I believe in both ways—our own and the Christian. If we had taken both ways and thought of them separately we would have become confused. We believe in the old law and we want to keep it: and we believe in the Bible too. So we have selected the good laws from both and put them together' (Berndt, 1962, p. 59). Burrumarra reflected on the events over 30 years later; 'We knew things would not be the same again...this did not mean we forget the past or that the *Balanda* can do what they like. This is the Yolngu saying to the *Balanda*, this is the level that we can come together' (McIntosh, 1994, pp. 103, 109). In a similar vein, Burrumarra facilitated the publication of a collection of significant Warramiri artworks with accompanying exegetical notes (Cawte, 1993). The crucial aspect was that the designs and accompanying ceremony-song-stories were further revelations of secret/sacred 'inside' information, restricted (up until then) from Warramiri women and children, many other Yolŋu clans and certainly from *Balanda* outsiders. But Burrumarra argued that the book was 'a mirror for all people, no matter who, no matter whether white or black. Whoever looks in this mirror and stands by me will see himself and myself together, and I call him Brother... Why have we revealed our secrets?...We want to make this an *entry* for Aboriginal people to European culture, and an *entry* for European people to Aboriginal culture' (Cawte, 1993, p. 1). Lastly, probably the most significant of all (but least well known) of Burrumarra's radical platforms was his Warramiri Flag and treaty proposal where he designed a new Australian flag as a prototype for future (national) Indigenous flags. The flag symbolism was key to the reciprocal progress envisaged; the Warramiri 'outsider' song-cycle of *Bayini/Birrinydji* 'allows different peoples from different lands to be seen as sharing a common origin and purpose, and the flag is symbolic of this', whereas

whilst ‘the Union Jack allowed outsiders to take over and ignore Aborigines... (the Flag Treaty could be) a means whereby ‘whites’ can be led by the hand into a deeper understanding of the Aboriginal way of life’ (McIntosh, 1997, p. 212). Indeed, the proposal was expressed as a culmination of the integration process begun in the 1950s; ‘we should have done this in 1957 during the Adjustment Movement. It was never really finished. Now it’s time to finish what we started. In 1957 we brought out the honourable *maḍayin* of the Yolngu people. Now it is time to bring out the honourable *maḍayin* of the *Balanda*, the *bandirra* (flag)’ (McIntosh, 1994, p. 115). It was significant because it not only continued the tradition of sacred/secret revelation via the enigmatic *Bayini/Birrinydji* law, but *through* this revelation also explained why such a process had been pursued by Warramiri all along. His subsequent collaboration with McIntosh (1997, 1999, 2015) enabled a deep and detailed analysis of the Warramiri heritage, with a particular focus on the narratives and ceremonial references to various ‘waves’ of contact with sea-faring visitors and the associated responsibility of the Warramiri (as the *yirritja* clan of the deep sea) to broker these new relationships. There are significant debates as to whether the *Bayini/Birrinydji* narratives are a legacy of the sustained contact with *Mangatharra* (‘Macassan’) traders from Sulawesi or form their own historical record of contact with older ‘golden-coloured’ sea-faring visitors such as Bajau, southern islanders off Sulawesi or even the Portuguese. Macknight’s (1976) classic study of the voyages and impact of the Sulawesi traders known as ‘Macassans’ touched briefly on the *Bayini* narratives. His latest opinion is to ‘continue to see them as a re-working of Aboriginal observations on visits to Makassar and, in particular, a shift in the spatial association of the information from Sulawesi or some trepanning context to particular sites in Arnhem Land’ (Macknight, 2008, p. 123). However, Burrumarra was adamant that they reflect a distinct, much older period of contact (McIntosh, 1995). Either way, there is a clear pattern of Warramiri intercultural borrowing and assimilating of ‘outsider’ technologies, beliefs and linguistic variations. These include significant incorporation of flags, axes, masts, anchors and other items/words into Warramiri *Bayini/Birrinydji* song-cycles (McIntosh, 1997). Early anthropologists, the Berndts, declared back in the 1950s that Yolngu had long been ‘absorbing into their own culture certain new elements, rejecting others that could not readily be adapted to the existing pattern’ (Berndt and Berndt, 1954, p. 188). In summary, Burrumarra’s vision was complex but consistent: to simultaneously re-assert a traditional Warramiri cosmology/ontology, whilst utilising this position to embrace a ‘new’ equality with *Balanda*:

‘This is part of the lesson of the Treaty. We are different today than before. We live by a new law. Our histories have merged. The law of the past was Bayini for Bayini and Yolngu for Yolngu. But we can share the future if there is equality... can we be equal in your eyes? Birrinydji in the past dictated that we must honour him and follow his law. In the new world we seek equality of a different sort than before. Equality in the new world where we live together not apart’ (McIntosh, 1997, p. 20).

McIntosh records that Burrumarra himself viewed ‘his greatest contribution as being in the field of education...in particular his enthusiastic support for the introduction of bilingual education at Shepherdson College that may be of most lasting value’ (McIntosh, 1994, p. 123) and in recent years, Guthadjaka (author 2) has added a number of Warramiri metaphors to the public

domain to reaffirm this specifically Warramiri perspective on ‘Bothways’ education. Speaking of the emerging philosophy and pedagogy at Gäwa, she introduced *lonydju’yirr* (side by side); ‘the crayfish represents Warramiri people, the line-walking journey of the crayfish represents the way Warramiri people move forward together... at Gäwa we have discovered that two-way learning creates an environment where the *lonydju’yirr* principle works well. The children are making real progress with their traditional literacy skills and their English literacy skills at the same time...even the teachers and *Balanda* children are making great progress’ (Guthadjaka, 2010). She also outlined *rrambaŋi marŋgithirr* (learning together); ‘*rrambaŋi marŋgithirr* ‘Bothways’ is Teacher teaching students and students teaching teacher (*bala-räli*). The learning is then holistic across two cultures’ (Guthadjaka, 2012). Likewise, *gumurrkunhamirr* (relating face-to-face):

‘we need to be wise like the stingray.... we need to come together with open heart towards each other, so we can have good dialogue and negotiate the way forward (*gumurrkunhamirr*), move from murky water to clear water’ (Guthadjaka, 2014).

Transculturation education

In one sense, it is unnecessary to link Warramiri philosophising with broader academic categories or theories; ‘Bothways’, by definition, represents the legitimacy and power of different theories and epistemologies working together, whilst retaining their distinctiveness. However, ‘Bothways’ also represents the position that in the *process* of negotiating knowledge practices, new ideas and indeed, worlds are born; ‘in this Yolngu metaphysics, the knowable world comes out of the action, not the other way around’ (Christie, 2013a, 2013b, p. 52). Furthermore, as noted, ‘Bothways’ has come under increasing pressure in the age of educational standardisation in Australia; recourse to international theory is, therefore, not pursued to legitimise the approach, but to assist in garnering critical attention, establishing further research possibilities and facilitating ‘Bothways’ survival. Thus, in the spirit of ‘Bothways’ negotiation, we offer a brief overview of *transculturation* as a sociological paradigm which resonates with the Warramiri heritage.

As a specific term, *transculturation* (as an alternative to *acculturation*) was coined by Ortiz in his study of the history of tobacco and sugar in Cuba. Instead of one culture transitioning to another, a more complex ‘loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be called a partial deculturation, and... the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena which could be called *neoculturation*’ (Ortiz, 1940, p. 32) should be analysed. There are some misgivings in utilising the term; the *trans* (across) prefix is broad and gives no real hint to the intended meaning, the term itself has not been greatly utilised in the social sciences and Ortiz’s own initial theorising is somewhat inconsistent (Millington, 2005). Nevertheless, it is clear from his application of the term that Ortiz was ‘interested in the effects of encounter on both cultures’ (Millington, 2005, p. 212), and that *transculturation* can be defined as ‘an active, self-conscious cultural combination that is a tool for aesthetic or critical production’ (Moreiras, 2001, p. 185). McMahon explicitly links the process with ‘mutual borrowing’, which recognises that the ‘Indigenous’ culture alters the ‘foreign’ just as the ‘foreign’ alters the ‘Indigenous’ (McMahon, 2004, p. 3), and Rogers notes the ‘ongoing, circular appropriations of elements of multiple cultures, including

elements that are themselves transcultural' (Rogers, 2006, p. 491). Renowned anthropologist Malinowski perhaps best summarised the concept in the introduction to Ortiz's work itself:

"Transculturation is a process in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a system of give and take. It is a process in which both parts of the equation are modified, a process from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex... an exchange between two cultures, both of them active, both contributing their share, and both co-operating to bring about a new reality' (Malinowski, in Ortiz 1940, p. viii–ix).

Regarding education specifically, transculturation has mostly been applied to the higher education sector, particularly in relation to Native American Indians where Huffman has steadily propounded the premise that 'transcultured individuals do not academically succeed in spite of being American Indian, it is because they are American Indian' (Huffman, 2010, p. 116). Ultimately, he acknowledges that he has modified Ortiz's original definition; 'transculturation does not accept the notion that cultural exchanges necessarily lead to cultural hybridization with some degree of cultural loss' (Huffman, 2010, p. 119). However, for present purposes, we maintain the usage of the term in its original sense, as it synergises powerfully with the outlined Warramiri heritage. Indeed, the transculturation paradigm of partial deculturation, emergent neoculturation, with an expectation that the 'other' would undergo a similar process as both parties actively contribute to the creation of the new reality, resonates powerfully with the Yolŋu 'Bothways' educational philosophy and the specific Warramiri perspective. Malinowski's 'give and take' is a virtual synonym of the classic *bala/lili*, Burrumarra's *hand in hand* and Guthadjaka's *rrambaŋi marnghithirr* dynamic. The 'exchange between cultures, both of them active, both contributing' provides a fitting summary for *gaŋma*, Burrumarra's *entry and merging*, and Guthadjaka's *lonydju'yirr*. And 'cooperating to bring about a new reality' certainly captures the essence of the metaphysics of the *galthalgarma* negotiation, Burrumarra's life-long vision to integrate Christianity and Yolŋu cosmology and Guthadjaka's own holistic *gumurrkunhamirr* spiritual combinations (Guthadjaka, 2014). Thus, overall we categorise the aspiration at Gäwa as Warramiri 'Bothways' transculturation education.

Positionality and methodology

Gäwa is a homeland community of approximately 30–50 residents. Most of these are school aged children, living within various kinship networks, often under their grandparents' guidance. There is a fully accredited school (Gäwa Christian School) with a pre-school, 'junior' and 'senior' class. There are two *Balanda* classroom teachers and a principal with another 4–5 staff (both *Balanda* and Yolŋu) for administration, transport, maintenance, food preparation and classroom support. The Gäwa narrative from the mid-1980s is an inspiring story of vision and resilience; cutting roads, sleeping on the beach, digging bores and ultimately forming partnerships to build permanent housing and a well-resourced school (Bruce and Huddleston, 2006; Harris and Gartland, 2011). It is also a robust story of post-colonial resistance to the centralisation of Indigenous communities and homogenisation of Indigenous languages and culture; a true tale of self-determination (Gäwa Christian School, 2013). Ben (author 1) lived and worked at Gäwa as the first 'senior' class teacher, often team-teaching with Guthadjaka, Warramiri Elder and

qualified teacher who had worked for many decades in bilingual education and in pioneering the Gäwa community (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Nungalinya, 2017). From 2011 to 2016, they worked together in designing and creating the 'Warramiri website' (van Gelderen and Guthadjaka, 2017) and the community research outlined below both fed into the website design/curriculum development and functioned as primary data in policy development for the school. Thus, the overall positionality was an insider/outsider dynamic: Ben had been a teacher and knew the local, remote context, but was no longer employed by the governing Northern Territory Christian Schools organisation and he had been adopted into the Warramiri kinship system, but as a Djambarrpuyŋu 'child' to the Warramiri clan. Thus, culturally, he was in an appropriate position to learn of the Warramiri vision, but to also present practical questions to teachers. Guthadjaka is the universally acknowledged Warramiri educational expert, but directing Ben to undertake interviews allowed her to add her own thoughts whilst also giving space for others to offer their unique perspectives, especially her son-in-law who is Ceremonial Custodian for the Warramiri but with whom she cannot directly converse.

In essence, the research analysed whether the 'Bothways' transculturation vision was shared by all members of Gäwa community and how might it function, practically, in the school and community. The methodological approach undertaken was a qualitative, semi-structured interview process. As just under a decade of formal partnership between Gäwa community and Northern Territory Christian Schools existed, it was also decided that an appropriate approach was to frame open-ended questions around the history and vision of the school, the curriculum and pedagogy patterns, as a form of informal review. Key starter questions included:

- Why is there a school at Gäwa—what was/is the community vision?
- What should Warramiri children be taught as they grow up?
- How should Yolŋu language/culture be taught in the school and/or the community?
- If there were no restrictions, what would school be like if you were the boss?
- What are the successes and challenges for the school?

Research was also committed to applying a critical Indigenous methodology, mandating the genesis, accountability and evaluation of any research be undertaken by the local Indigenous participants (Denzin *et al.*, 2008). Thus, as self-realisation, the research process was itself envisaged as a 'Bothways' process, pre-determined by Yolŋu priorities. In this regard we relied on established practices of community consultation and participation as had been verbally transmitted to us by Gäwa Elders, insisting that all community members (including *Balanda*) should be included in formal interviews, as moving forward *together* was the primary goal. We also relied on methodological principles developed by Christie and others through collaborative research projects with Yolŋu over many decades at Charles Darwin University (CDU). Significant multi-year research projects such as 'Indigenous Knowledge Traditions, and Digital technology' (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/ik/ikhome.html>), 'Teaching from Country' (<http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/inc/tfc/index.html>) and 'ICT and Capacity Building in Remote Communities' (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/inc/>) all directly involved Yolŋu co-researchers and Guthadjaka herself. In summary form, we

were committed to abiding by the maxim that all action (including research) must assist preservation of established kinship and social interactions; 'the academic tradition comes with its sealed package of epistemic criteria based upon reason. But Yolŋu often judge truthfulness in research through other criteria to do with...agreement in good faith' (Christie, 2009, p. 32). Furthermore, the research needed to contribute to the actual resolution of the issues at hand; it should be generative; 'Ground-up research develops and deploys theory in the service of action on local problems. The researcher is an engaged observer, and works to generate change practices through the research position' (Christie, 2013a, p. 3). Indeed, as Yolŋu reject any notion of 'judging observer', and the connected foundation of epistemic equality, community research requires the entire community to have input ('Yolŋu are experienced in building agreement while taking difference seriously', Christie, 2009, p. 31), whilst agreeing that not everyone knows (or can know) everything equally. Thus, the key research task was to ensure the 'right people talking to the right people in the right place at the right time in the right order' (Christie, 2013b, p. 49). None of these principles easily synergise with western-academic traditions, and therefore Christie concludes by appropriating the term *transdisciplinary*, with Yolŋu and *Balanda* researchers 'negotiating rules of engagement, evidence and validation' (Christie, 2006, p. 81). Akin to the *ganma* metaphor of (at times) difficult interaction/negotiation, the resulting research 'methodological and epistemological messiness... is something to be accepted and examined; it is productive' (Christie, 2006, p. 82).

In practical terms, in the very small homeland context at Gäwa, working in 'good *faith*' (in both senses of the term) was crucial and was handled by very carefully positioning differences as valued and alternative options, not conflicts. The medium of potential structures/uses of the Warramiri website greatly facilitated this process. Of course, the website was also the major generative outcome itself (van Gelderen and Guthadjaka, 2017), alongside formal policy recommendations to both the school and the Northern Territory Christian Schools system office, as well as long-term commitments from CDU to undertake further professional development and research opportunities for Gäwa. In honouring the right 'people-place-order' epistemology, we intentionally took several years to complete the research, and the interviews were conducted mostly in Yolŋu languages which took considerable further time to transcribe and translate accurately. In presenting the data, an appropriate hierarchy is also maintained: Gäwa Elders' (W, G,) statements are foregrounded, with other Elders from Warramiri and other closely connected clans (Gä, Bu, Ba, C, Wu) also highlighted, interacting with *Balanda* responses (K, S, M, Ma). Overall, we believe we did embody the key lesson, to 'work slowly and allow new ideas and practices to emerge here and how, and grow slowly through mutual respect and a history of shared experience' (Christie, 2009, p. 32).

Gäwa: multiple balances

Appropriating Yunupinŋu's 'Bothways' expression of 'multiple balances', primary interview data with discussion is now presented as a series of *bala-räli* (backwards and forwards) pairings:

School-community

G: *Balanda*, as they come in, their thinking is to build something here, in the Yolŋu community. But they don't ask first 'What do you need?' It's

just like they are bringing new ideas, from the 'mainstream'. And they end up failing, feeling bad, packing up their things and leaving. And they leave because they had come with their own thinking...And here, when Balanda come into the school with a new law, they need to talk backwards and forwards, bring 'both ways' communication first. And then we can move together.

Wu: *If they (Balanda) come in and learn, that's good. They shouldn't come in and take over. If you build the foundation on rock...I built my school like this and when Balanda came, they have to work with us and learn.*

Elders desire for *Balanda* to work with Yolŋu, but for the foundation to come from Warramiri identity and priorities. The 'Bothways' concept here is explicitly referenced and described as a process of communication, of continual negotiation which allows mutual progress (*rrambanji marrtji*) and for *Balanda* to learn. Many of the *Balanda* responses indicated a strong willingness to enter such negotiation and demonstrated how it is an evolving process based on building relationships:

Ma: *You have to say, 'what do they want?'... before you can make any decisions about whatever you wanted to do.*

M: *'Yo, come and join in...' You know, we're working together.*

S: *We know where we want to go; we all need to work together at it.*

Such statements seem to marry very well with the priorities of Yolŋu retaining sway about communal decisions and for there to be back and forth communication. There were some hints that this communication is not always easy however, not so much from a language barrier point of view, but a perception that the school and community function as separate domains.

M: *'Feel like the classroom is yours!' We're not just stuck over there and it's us and them.*

Ma: *One of my biggest challenges. I think, finding out, where, what are we aiming for? You know, and having a goal. And I've asked community that and find it hard to get a response at times.*

S: *C and G had a different idea when they started the school and different people bring in different things... it wasn't even the words that were said but the context in which they were said which caused some disharmony.*

Thus, issues arose relating to attempting to persuade Yolŋu to enter the actual classroom, to worrying that the class activities are not reflecting what the community actually desires, to concern that the original vision may be lost over time, or simply struggling with inevitable cross-cultural communication issues. However, all these issues (role-differentiation, vision setting/retaining, communication breakdown) are common in any cross-cultural situation and are certainly apparent in any school context in dealing with directions, parental engagement and inadvertent miscommunication. Thus, though the responses indicate a continual (S): *need for change and growth and getting the balance better*, this can be seen as quite a positive emphasis (redolent of *ganma* and *gumurrkunhamirr* images) to prevent stagnancy and dissatisfaction.

In truth, a range of specific issues were raised in the interviews from training of Assistant Teachers, to pathways to boarding school, timing of school holidays, special interest subjects, use of digital technology and potential ranger/reef programmes. Space does not allow further consideration of them here, but a

key recommendation to Northern Territory Christian Schools concerned the creation of a first school 'council' so that such specific areas could be analysed for the school and community moving forward together. Importantly, the 2018 Gäwa Christian School Annual Action Plan key priority in governance and leadership is to 'continue conversations with community leaders and members as to the feasibility and purposes of an 'action group' and/or School Council' (Gäwa Christian School, personal correspondence, March, 2018).

Teacher-teacher

Key questions concerning the role of 'language and culture'; of how traditional Warramiri knowledge should interact with the *Balanda* framework called 'school' was envisaged to focus primarily on curriculum and pedagogy. However, participants (including teachers) focussed more on the *Balanda* and Yolŋu adult working together in each class. Thus, though issues of curriculum, language medium and pedagogy were raised, we have chosen to utilise the figurative 'Teacher-Teacher' to encapsulate this dynamic. Yolŋu Elders were adamant:

W: Yolŋu Matha and English, it's good to have both together...and when they finish the school day, they should continue to learn Yolŋu law and connections.

*G: My thinking is for both—I started bilingual education here and they learnt Yolŋu Matha teaching and the children learnt well. And I want that to happen, for there to be teamwork, to plan together the *Balanda* teacher and the Yolŋu teacher. The *Balanda* will help the Yolŋu Assistant planning, not the teacher working by himself. That's what bilingual is—both roads, both ways.*

*Gä: We need to teach our culture, boys hunting with spears, girls going for shellfish first and then into the bush for yams and other food there...It's good to have both; *Balanda* teaching English, Yolŋu teachers teaching Yolŋu Matha. Work together. Later *Balanda* can speak Yolŋu Matha and Yolŋu speaking English, that's good.*

Bu: Yes, cultural aspects; dancing and painting and totems...where they come from. Learn all that in school. Later, when they grow up, the children know and they have to teach their own children the same way.

Ba: Writing at school, reading and writing Yolŋu Matha. Most kids can talk Yolŋu Matha, but it is important to have Yolŋu Matha learning; reading and writing.

Undoubtedly, 'language and culture' is desired to be part of the everyday curriculum at school. Although all Yolŋu made comments about how such learning should take place primarily through ceremonies, funerals and everyday life activities—that these are still the *main* areas where intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and practice should function—they were also explicit that Yolŋu Matha and learning songs, art, dances, stories and totemic connections should be part of 'school' too. As G makes clear, lessons should be actually planned and sequenced like other lessons through a 'team teaching' approach (a literal 'Bothways') for this is to be realised. But what does this look like in practice, in terms of timetables and lessons? How transculturated can the curriculum become without compromising the funding commitment to teach the breadth of the Australian Curriculum? Is a once per week session of breaking into boys and girls adequate? Or one 'language and culture' lesson per day? Is a 50/50 medium of

instruction split feasible? From the *Balanda* perspective, it is these practical questions and/or restrictions that were most problematic. Both classroom teachers provided an example of their approach and where they saw this 'Bothways' curriculum and pedagogy coming together successfully:

M: What I'd really like to see for them personally is that they become confident in the language and literature of both worlds. And that's what I've endeavoured to do... to sequentially teach them the skills in English and at the same time, in Yolŋu Matha as well... I think it's doable. I've tried to do it and I can see that the kids are progressing...And I need to, 'cause I'm here as well.

And then the cultural thing is not an add-on... our curriculum's being drawn together and negotiated with the community 'cause that's the way it should be done too, as the seasons being the all over-arching theme... we look at what's flowering, the animals, the plants, the birds, the cultural activities, you know, the dances and things connected with those things. And that's integrated into our History and Social Studies and Science.

Ma: I think it should be in the school. I don't do it justice. But I think, now having more Yolŋu aides in the class, lends itself to getting them to take more ownership. But yeah, I do, I think it's valuable to have both, to mix both. You're trying, you know, having the Australian Curriculum, trying to mesh it all together, but the best term I had was focusing on the Macassans and the history focus and I felt that it actually came together... We had heaps of community input, people everywhere... a good mesh, not perfect, but good community involvement, working together... the kids were excited and assessing them I did orally and I said; 'Speak in you know, whatever, English, Yolŋu whatever you feel comfortable' And they did, they did both. To record that was good, to find what they'd learnt and knew already. It was good.

These excerpts are important and revealing. They are important because the *Balanda* teachers *felt* successful in balancing the community's focus on 'language and culture' with the mainstream Australian Curriculum. In particular, (M) developed a scope and sequence for phonemic and phonetic awareness/skills within a seasonal focus and (Ma) worked up an integrated unit based on 'Macassan' contact. They felt like it '*was doable*'; formal summative assessments were possible and progress was recordable. And they are revealing excerpts because a certain humility is also evident; (Ma) acknowledging that even with this success '*I don't do it justice*' and (M) positioning herself as learner of Yolŋu language and culture '*cause I'm here as well*'. Such expressions are the kind of reciprocal education commitments that the Yolŋu Elders are seeking from *Balanda* who come to work with them in raising the younger generation. They are fine examples of the (G) '*teamwork, to plan together the *Balanda* teacher and the Yolŋu teacher*' of having (W) '*Yolŋu Matha and English, it's good to have both together*' with a clear focus on (Bu) '*cultural aspects; dancing and painting and totems*', but also to reflect that it is (B) '*important to have Yolŋu Matha learning; reading and writing*'.

However, there are hints even within these excerpts of a certain unease about whether the teachers are capable of doing what the community desires in terms of 'Bothways' teaching and learning. These concerns are most clearly seen in extracts from (K) as Principal, considered the conduit between the school and the community by all parties:

K: It appears to me that the community want us to partner with them... so, they're asking us to teach aspects of culture or have asked us to teach aspects of that. They're happy to be a part of that to some extent but seem to want

us to... they're looking for us to drive that. And bring them along with it to some degree... But at the same time, we're not the authority; we don't hold the knowledge. It's ridiculous for us to become 'the way' of teaching language or culture because we're not, we don't hold the authority to do that... And so that puts a significant reliance upon the community to partner with us. So, they want to see that happening, we really need them to work with us for that to happen. Otherwise it becomes very difficult.

So, the kinship day where we sat down and tried to understand—and it was more for us actually and they were very gracious and accommodating with that, and excited that we were excited to know and all those sorts of things. But that was, it was a day and somehow we need to grow that into much bigger things than that.

These extracts are drawn from a number of the set questions, but they hang together as evidence of the school leadership wishing to take on board the desire for cultural content to be part of everyday practice, but largely feeling inadequate to do so. There is an appreciation that the community is 'looking for us to drive that' but an unease that 'we're not the authority' in the sense of *Balanda* teaching Warramiri language and culture. There was also a distinct acknowledgement that even the most successful 'cultural' kinship day was really for *Balanda* benefit, it was a 'Bothways' time surely, but not part of a systematic programme for the students' own cultural knowledge progress. The final research report provided to Northern Territory Christian Schools raised this ambiguity around defining 'Bothways' for the local context. In 2018, a key, whole-of-school strategy from the Annual Action Plan is to 'develop a clear, local articulation of what "both ways learning" means in philosophy and practice for our school' (Gäwa Christian School, personal communication, March, 2018, p. 2). We view this as a vital, generative step for the ongoing renewal of 'Bothways' education at Gäwa.

Student–parent

Although not clear without further context, *Balanda* expressions above 'we really need them to work with us', 'we need to grow into much bigger things than that' should be understood as calling out for more actual *people* in the classroom, not a figurative complaint about the existing Gäwa community. That is, there is literally a paucity of adult Yolŋu at Gäwa much of the time, with the Elders (as grandparents), often looking after households of 5–12 children. Interestingly, an inter-generational aim was an aspect of the very first iteration of 'Bothways' with one role of the bicultural school to help maintain the crucial connection between students and the Elders (McConvell, 1981). Early Yolŋu iterations also explicitly acknowledged this issue (Lanhupuy, 1988, Marika-Mununggiritj *et al.*, 1990). However, at Gäwa, it is the intermediate *parental* generation that is more disconnected. This practical reality alluded to by *Balanda*, was explicitly raised by Yolŋu respondents, particularly when addressing what was challenging:

W: The school is good, but the parents need to help us. It would be great if the whole families stayed here (Gäwa), not moving up and down all the time (to Galiwin'ku). The children can then stay at Gäwa and not be part of the bad things happening at Galiwin'ku.

Ba: We should have more Yolŋu parents coming up. More interest. Seeing what their kids are doing. We should be proud of our kids, not just 'sending' them...they are doing great work.

Gä: And now, many of the kids are at Gäwa, but the families are still here (Galiwin'ku). If all the parents went and lived there, the education would be really good.

Bu: One other thing, families should go and move and live at Gäwa. So they can live there and recognize/know each other, not all mixed up (with other clans at Galiwin'ku).

Ga: We started the school, working, working...because we didn't want to get mixed up here at Galiwin'ku school. We wanted our family, all of them, to be living at Gäwa. Good things might happen.

Thus, there is a clear desire from the Warramiri Elders and associated kin for the younger, parental generation to be more heavily involved at Gäwa. This is certainly from both a practical desire for assistance raising the children, but also from a social perspective of maintaining specific Warramiri kinship ties, on Warramiri land. Although somewhat beyond the scope of this educational research, following the generative methodology and Christie's associated advice to act through 'double participation... as both an activist committed to justice for Aboriginal people and an academic committed to understanding and enhancing the practices of government and the academy' (Christie, 2014, p. 68), in 2018, we proceeded with further community consultation and education around establishing a local corporation to facilitate better work/training micro-business opportunities and housing options. For the parental generation, these issues have emerged as crucial blockers to permanently residing at Gäwa, and thus, realising this aspect of the 'Bothways' philosophy.

Teacher–student

A last, vital pairing concerns the dynamic between the *Balanda* teachers and students themselves. As noted, Guthadjaka has highlighted this area explicitly through her 'Learning Together' (*rrambanji marngithirr*) explanations and it was a crucial aspect of early 'Bothways' iterations (Wununmurra, 1989, p. 15; Marika-Mununggiritj, 1990, p. 47). There is a powerful symmetry with Freirean pedagogies evident, and a deep resonance with many of Burrumarra's recorded emphases, especially concerning the issue of the hand-over of control and genuine trust required by the 'oppressors' (cf. Wearne, 1986). The explicit rejection of the 'banking' concept of education also greatly matches expressed Yolŋu theories of education (Yolŋu Aboriginal Consultants Initiative, 2008; Christie, 2011). Indeed, as 'the *raison d'être* of liberation education... lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction' (Freire, 1970, p. 53), it is more than a tokenistic gesture for *Balanda* to position themselves as *learners*, to grapple with Yolŋu Matha language learning and to begin to study the deep Warramiri cosmological and ontological foundations. It is evidence that the teacher–learner dynamic is reciprocal. Some responses addressed this issue, not just in terms of it being good for students to see themselves as teachers for their self-esteem, but how the whole relationship to learning changes:

C: They have linguistic skills that they bring into the classroom and what is needed is teachers, fortunately we have such teachers, teachers who are willing to learn as well as teach and you can have two-way learning going. A child who is functioning as a teacher and valued as a teacher, responds tremendously, they're so enthusiastic about sharing what they know...they just get so motivated when someone values what they know and they're able to contribute.

M: They know so much—and to try and channel that, I guess that's what we've tried to do. You know, even with the boys and girls program, try and give some leadership and guidance and different skills. Stuff that they already know and maybe think of—that's been especially with the older boys, and girls.

The willingness of *Balanda* to learn Yolŋu Matha (and Warramiri in particular) and formalising this process through sessions run by bilingual community members and students is a potential 'Bothways' concept to explore. The specific issue of Warramiri versus Djambarrpuyŋu language (the Yolŋu *lingua franca* of Elcho Island) as used and learned in school is another pairing that was raised as a significant issue. The complexities of this situation necessitate a separate discussion (van Gelderen and Guthadjaka, [post-print](#)). There is certainly historical precedent of mandatory Language classes from the mission and bilingual eras (Wearing, 2007; Hall, 2016) and sporadic attempts at similar practice in the more recent past at Gäwa. This area, in particular, is a very visible and clear transculturation embodiment.

Conclusion

Despite the pressures of standardised curriculum and assessment regimes, the profound 'Bothways' philosophy of education has not been abandoned by remote Northern Territory Yolŋu communities. Indeed, since the late 1980s, there has been remarkable consistency applying pre-existing kinship, moiety and land based epistemological foundations to modern schooling. Specific clan and language variations and metaphors only further add to the renewal of the 'Bothways' movement. In smaller contexts such as the Warramiri homeland at Gäwa, 'Bothways' education also draws on a deeper cross-cultural dynamic of transculturation whereby reciprocal learning and adaptation to new circumstances continues through on-going negotiation and balancing. From research at Gäwa, complicated issues of Warramiri language revival, parental engagement, genuine team-teaching pedagogies, student-teacher reciprocation and holistic education priorities emerged, vis-à-vis the 21st century Australian Curriculum context. There are no easy answers to many of these interrelated themes, but a renewed commitment from the school to elucidate and continually negotiate a 'Bothways' philosophy of education with associated policy foundations, is certainly a positive initiative. Indeed, although 'Bothways' has been theorised for over 25 years, the practical reality of negotiating a way forward together has always been paramount. As with the Warramiri crayfish walking side-by-side (*lonydju'yirr*) across the deep sea floor, the 'Bothways' 'central question was always: are we heading in the right direction?' (White, 2015, p. 13).

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