

Indigenous tourism: the cultural politics of appropriation, re- identification and...

[Government](#), [Colonialism](#)



INDIGENOUS TOURISM: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF APPROPRIATION, RE-IDENTIFICATION AND RE-PRESENTATION Tourism is an industry: its structures exist solely because profit can be generated. However, it offers a paradox because by offering employment and income by capitalising upon and giving value to arts and crafts previously thought unimportant, it then threatens to gain ownership of those designs and the ways of thought of which they are an expression. Ryan, C 2005, Indigenous tourism: commodification and management of culture As a brand, tourism is positioning itself as a big part of the Australian economy. As a feature of the general tourism putsch, the selling of traditionally low-niche, specific, Indigenous cultural products and tourist destinations within the Indigenous estate has played its part, with ethno-and-eco tourists being invited to 'discover' Aboriginal cultures via a variety of leisure activities and tourism ventures: many owned and run by Aboriginal Australians. Indeed, Aboriginal-owned tourism ventures are a growing segment of the Australian Tourism Industry. To this end, tourism agencies and Indigenous Land Councils are embroiled in the process of what Heather Zeppel (1998) describes as "the (re)presentation of Indigenous cultural heritage". In this paper, I will examine the impact that mass tourism and cultural commodification has on Australian Indigenous cultural heritage and identity; expose some of the contradictory features between the marketing hyperbole and the realities of day-to-day life; and investigate the general effect of appropriation of cultural artifacts and intellectual property by the dominant culture, and the concomitant and ongoing undermining and diluting of Indigenous cultural authenticity. Tourism has an intimate relationship to post-colonialism in that it is embedded in those postcolonial

relationships. The centrality of identity and representation, contested discourses, and dubious ethics are at its heart (Hall & Tucker, 2004 p. 1). Indeed, Hall and Tucker (2004, p. 4) note that Mathews (1994) sees tourism as hegemonistic and describes it as potentially the 'new plantation economy', and that structurally it is part of an overseas economy dominated by global multinational corporations and 'held together by law and order and local elites'. Neo-Marxist approaches to tourism studies usher in ideas of alienation, industrialization, leisure, class and authenticity; more reactionary Foucauldian and poststructural discourses speak of the appropriation of other cultures via the gaze of tourists or speak of an ordering. The overt "otherising" of Aboriginal people as recognisable tourism targets was obvious enough in pageantry and mission visits, showcasing what colonialism had "conquered" and would now convert to civilization. In other words, this was a part of how Aboriginal people were being ordered by the developing Anglo-Australian nationalism (Galliford, 2009, p66). With Asia, and China specifically, as our fastest-growing and highest-value tourist market, a key feature of the lure, in tandem with the ultra-slick, high-niche integrated resorts, is in Zeppel's words, "the selling of the dreamtime" (1998). As long ago as 1994, Jacobs and Gale noted that "whereas other sectors of the Australian economy may have marginalized or been antagonistic to Aboriginal interests, the tourism industry increasingly centres on Aboriginal culture". Citing Summers (1991), they further suggest that: tourist promotion propaganda depicts [Australia] largely as a giant zoo and geological theme park ... [where] ... Aboriginal people are portrayed as artists ... performing corroborees for tourists" (Jacob & Gale, 1994 p. 2). While Aboriginal

communities “ often have little choice about accepting or rejecting tourism” (Jacobs & Gale, 1994 p. 5), well-intentioned, economic-efficacy and independence arguments have been used like mantras as the rationale for the setting up of Aboriginal-owned mercantile ventures and the ensuing chase for cash. Government policies and practices have promoted tourism as a mechanism to alleviate indigenous dependence on welfare (Altman, 1993) and although, income derived from tourism can contribute to indigenous economic independence and self-determination... ‘ outside interests’ benefit most from tourism ... as... non-indigenous interests ...often dictate services and infrastructure within the parameters of a global tourism industry (Hinch & Butler, 1996 p. 11) ... [and]... Aboriginal people themselves are rarely involved in tourism developmental issues and in most cases the income they derive is not substantial enough to sustain their economic independence (Dyer, Aberdeen and Schuler, 2002). Tourism becomes the mechanism for some Aboriginal peoples to gain economic and political power, and so, like mining revenues, can be used to bolster cultural integrity, self-advancement and self-esteem. But as Dyer, Aberdeen and Schuler, speaking of tourism and its impact on Djabugay people around Cairns soberly remind us, “ although they experienced various outcomes from participation in the tourist industry, the community did not appear to experience substantial economic or socio-cultural benefits. As such, the legacy of disadvantage from colonialism is not necessarily reversed by this engagement with tourism” (2002). While strategies to manage the impact of the growth of mass tourism on the fragile natural heritage sites themselves has been a focus of a variety of ecologically-sustainable development committees, both Indigenous and

other, or industry-funded academic Tourism research, less attention has been paid to the impact of tourism on cultural appropriation and commodification. Altman (1993, p. 7) suggests that from an Indigenous-Australian perspective “ cultural impacts can rarely be separated from economic, social and environmental impacts [and] there has been little qualitative evaluation of non-economic aspects ... [and] ... negative aspects associated with high visitation, might also affect traditional authority structures, gender relations and intergenerational relations”. Studies elsewhere also suggest that tourism has a ripple-down effect and may even destroy culture (Mercer, 1994) and increase interpersonal tension and sociocultural breakdown by impacting through denial of access to traditional land, an inappropriate portrayal by tourist operators, or a loss of privacy from exposure to tourists which can influence the way Aboriginal people recreate and socialize (Dyer et al, 2002). When exploring Indigenous attitudes and perceptions to tourism, Rose (1995, p. 74) reminds us that “ in Central Australia Aboriginal attitudes to tourism have not been generally considered and in fact remain largely unknown, unlike the reaction to tourism in most of the literature (a passive and somewhat uniform reaction from the host culture) ... [and] ... suspicion about tourism remains ... [such that] ... a few respondents suggested that tourists only wanted to come and make fun of Aboriginal people...to take photos and go away and talk about Aboriginal culture in the wrong way. " Even within the academic frame, despite the growing interest in tourism and indigenous peoples, the nexus between research and researcher has seen the academic gaze shift from the impact of tourists on Indigenous Australians in the Indigenous Estate to one

that examines the perceptions of tourists, as emphasis becomes primarily the importance of the experience as the essence of the “ product” (Ryan, 2005 p. 1). In doing so, meta-narratives shift to become mere specificities of product, tourist, location and particular worldview. And because universities exist to generate and disseminate information and knowledge for all who can benefit from the process, concerns are expressed about possible departures from objectivity and open peer assessment in systems where private industry sponsors research ... [and] ... the researcher trained in a European tradition who works in the field of indigenous tourism is reminded of the fact that many indigenous societies are exclusive and not inclusive. Knowledge is transmitted to those who are initiated ... The researcher is ever the outsider ... [and tends to] ... demarcate indigenous people as possessing difference that poses problems. (Ryan, 2005 p. 2-4). Now while it is obviously necessary to reconcile the protection of fragile sites against the demands of tourist populations, especially problems associated with rock-art management on Aboriginal lands including the prime tourist destinations like Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Kakadu, the reality is that they are managed by Federal agencies and this highlights just one tilted aspect, the ‘ heritage aspect’, of cultural politics. Site managers subjectively decide which items are of cultural value and are responsible for shaping what John Urry (1990) calls a particular ‘ tourist gaze’, and through subjective, and at times skewed listing and registration, give legal sanction to specific ‘ histories’ and protective ‘ heritages’ over others. Besides, Aboriginal cultural heritage, including sites of dispossession and colonization, are seen merely as part of the National heritage, folded like whipped eggs into a tourist-cake recipe. Developers

serve up the cake with 'heritage' icing to the tourist public and transform 'heritage' into economic commodities. And "while a chief facet of indigenous communities' resistance to exploitative tourism practices involves opposing the desecration of spiritual places" (Carrigan, A 2011), this resistance often clashes with the dominant culture's ideologies of development and touristed landscapes. While cosmogonous and cosmologically variant stories of the Dreamtime, often enacted through performance and art, act as counter stories to colonial histories and provide alternative challenging voices, all too often, non-Indigenous people, captive of the linear time model, conceive the dreaming stories as simple creation myths, fixed in the distant past rather than seeing them as the omnitemporal 'everywhen'. Tannoch-Bland (1998) succinctly reminds us that undesirable non-Indigenous privileges, which confer power, economic and political, without conferring moral strength, mean the dominant culture has tepid tolerance, and hence alternative voices sound quaint at best, and most often fall deaf on commercial ears. At the same time, Dyer et al (2002) scathingly note, that: Inauthentic representation of indigenous culture can also mean that tourists perceive Aboriginal people as exotic and inanimate curios rather than members of a dynamic and complex culture (Burchett, 1988 p. 20; Harron & Weiler, 1992 p. 87). It is evident that tourism success relies on trade-offs between authenticity (Altman, 1989; Altman & Finlayson, 1992 pp. 8—9) and interpretation and understanding of indigenous culture by non-indigenous personnel (Hollingshead, 1992). Given that tourists are exposed to indigenous cultures within the context of staged portrayals of traditional life styles (Hinch & Butler, 1996, p. 3) it is possible that there are no authentic

tourist experiences (Urry, 1990, p. 9). Rather, events are staged for tourists in ways that manipulate cultural traditions and customs (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Henry, 2000). There is also an argument that authentic culture cannot be purchased but found at the back of the stage. In marketing terms, one of the features of tourism promotion is the uniqueness of the super structural elements arising out of a particular capitalist economic base: among them various art forms that support the branding of a particular place. For Indigenous Australians, traditionally art is not simply an individual act as it is for the non-Indigenous, but an engagement in the continuation of ancestral tradition, as well as being an expression of the sacred in that it is an expression of a person's very essence. A major point of departure for Aboriginal artists is that the appropriateness or not of art style is really dependent on whether the artist has the right to use that particular art form, and " the authenticity as discussed in academic tourism literature is perceived as being subsumed [my italics] within a more important argument of " authorization" — who authorizes it and for what purpose? " (Ryan, C 2005, p. 5). But an equally important question may be, ' who manages the cultural product'? For the various government bodies, tourist promoters and art dealers however, the feature of demonstrated authentication merely adds to the bottom line, and cultural tourism becomes not only the enunciated mechanism for supposedly transforming the marginalized, it turns the tourist product into entertainment, and artist or performer into captive entertainers at the mercy of the entrepreneur, the patron and the marketplace: it throws into disarray the whole issue of lineage and ancestral transmission. Dyer et al (2002) posit that the trivialising of culture in this

manner may also “ result in the rejection of traditional culture itself by community members (Dickman, 1989 p. 181) ... and ... attempts to commercially mould a culture for tourist consumption may result in profit-driven changes to arts, crafts and traditions ” (Craig-Smith & French, 1994 p. 42). Sydney Morning Herald journalist Deb Jopson (Nov. 15, 2003) remarks that: White middle-class taste combined with the international investor interest has made Aboriginal art...the largest art movement Australia has ever had. But that has not rescued the people who make it from the ghetto. So why are the artists and their families still living in poverty? The great Papunya painter Johnny Warangkula’s family is living in a tin humpy, while far away in Sydney, his painting, for which they will not get a red cent, is sold at auction for \$346, 975? This is what [Richard] Bell calls his theorem: “ white people say what’s good. White people say what’s bad. White people buy it. White people sell it”. It is through art that the concerns of some of Australia’s poorest inhabitants and the world’s richest citizens meet. The children of the colonisers buy and display on their walls little representations of land lost by the children of the colonized. . While tourism in various forms may create dialogue and give access to questionable employment, in effect it ties the Indigenous participant to mainstream economic exigencies and in turn they acquire lifestyles at complete variance with their ancestors. Ryan, citing Butler’s destination life cycle model suggests that “ as places attract tourists, revenues and recapitalize, so they change” (Ryan, 2005 p. 71). Dyer et al citing, Mathieson and Wall (1982, p. 134) argue that in “ tourist-based cross-cultural exchanges, locals glean little about the visitor's culture and the visitor experiences little of the culture visited. Further, mutual respect and

understanding is difficult if the visited and visitors do not have 'common goals and equal status' (Crick, 1991, p. 10), if the time-scale of visits is brief, and if it involves large numbers of people associated with organised tours" (2002). And there are challenges of a psychological nature accompanying the absorption into mainstream culture for those whose identity is intimately tied to the land and linked seamlessly through generation after generation. Indeed, Watson (2002, p. 6) poetically reminds us that land and identity are irrevocably linked while Keen (2004) warns that violating the land or any connection to specific totem can have devastating outcomes. Napanangka, a Luritja woman who has started painting again after a cataract operation, lives with her daughter and grandchildren in a Papunya tin humpy. During the late 1980s, when her husband was losing his sight, she worked with him on his paintings. "I want the art gallery to give me a house. I got nothing", she said. "Live here. No house. We sit on nothing ... Poor bugger. We got family" (Jopson 2003). Of course many overseas investors and tourists are blissfully unaware that only twenty percent of Indigenous Australians live on the Indigenous estate, with the remainder living in urban regions. Many tourists and investors have only a romantic notion of what constitutes 'Aboriginal culture' and specifically where it comes from. Dubiously-intentioned, race and class-advantaged University academics and art gallery curators, espousing reactionary, naïvely 'class-neutral' Foucaudian discourses and spewing forth cultural studies poetics, rush to manage and oversee exhibitions by non-urban artists in regional centres. By ignoring and disenfranchising the urban voice, they give the lie to the homogeneity of coast-to-coast Aboriginal Dreaming: in doing so, they add to the

mystification process. As Chapman (2006) observes, It is easy to distance the 'otherness' of Aboriginal art, to perceive that it is from a totally separate world, definable 'real' Aboriginal art that is over there, somewhere else. This ethnographic mindset discounts the static nature of culture and hinders our access to and appreciation of the spectrum of Aboriginal art. If Aboriginal art is seen in one cultural realm and Western art in another space, where does urban Aboriginal art fit in? Urban artists encounter the belief that true Aboriginal art is only produced by people living in remote communities; in short it is up against all of the stereotypes attached to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal art. It is not surprising that urban artists are uncomfortable about the perceived estrangement of urban Aboriginal artists from their cultural heritage because they [merely] work in the city. . If Anderson (1983) is correct, and an imagined (national) identity is linked with a mode of communication, so market-encouraged Western desert dot paintings become representative of a kind of neutered, hybrid form of falsely-imagined local cultural identity. If indeed the dominant, imagined national identity, structured around a stratified white culture, constituted through unequal power relations is still inseparable from issues of race and class, and is still tied into fear and hatred, no wonder we have etched into our national consciousness via media discourses the focused dichotomy of the urban, politically-active Aboriginal artist producing 'banal' cultural artifacts juxtaposed against the politically-neutered Central-Desert-Dreamtime artisan producing awe-inspiring 'real and sacred artifacts'. Of course, the very same dichotomous cultural divisions are reflected in the class-stratified dominant culture which indemnifies and holds on high the similar, politically-neutered

middle-class culture of triviality, full of abstract or realistically-amorphous, non-challenging expressions, over the supposed banality of the politically-charged, realist expressions of the more tendentious. Hage's (1998) discourse of home allows not only for a spatial notion of nation and an objectivist classification of 'the other' but allows Indigenous Australians to be treated as an object to be managed and removed from the space of a nation: relegated either to a kind of covert, mandatory, suburban-ghetto 'detention centre' like the white working-class, or to the overt, peripheral, Pacific-solution-like cul de sac of the Indigenous Estate. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) purport that capitalism needs racism to support its class divisions, that class formation is predicated on race structuration, that art and tourism are weapons in a class war, and that race is a false ideological category. By giving emphasis to narrow, aesthetically-focused discourses of Indigenous culture not only do class-and-race-advantaged gallery-owning entrepreneurs, academics and corporate sponsors assist in turning a tourist dollar, but symbolic cultural boundaries get reinforced and buttressed by distorted representations which stigmatise the other and actually help to expel Indigenous Australians from the wider national estate. In turn these First Australians become available for tourist perusal and gaze, or are tied to the production wheel in the making of art product or performance for tourists, or are utilized as custodians of national tourist destinations. These options become the narrowly-assigned mechanisms through which select Aboriginal peoples are permitted to act. Galliford (2009 p. 47) notes that "the expectations of authenticity that cultural tourists exercise through their desired gaze of the other often contribute to, reinforce, and normalize

discourse's of primitivism". With the globalizing of the tourist gaze via increased mobility, and with whiteness serving as the generalization for the mainstream and associated with democracy itself (Gale, 2005, p. 8), social reality becomes shaped and structured via the creation mechanisms of curriculum, the media, and the economic system along dominant cultural lines, creating social advantage and disadvantage: conferring power and control to the dominant culture. White identity, historically constructed, is made corporeal through governmental power, and legislatively maintained and authenticated such that the centrality of whiteness results in the relegation of Indigenous culture to the periphery, with a subsequent narrowing of space afforded to Aboriginal Australians, and a silencing of voices via the socially-organised, systematized and appropriating gaze of the tourist.

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