

## OTHERING, POWER RELATIONS, AND INDIGENOUS TOURISM: EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN TERRITORY

### ABSTRACT

*Indigenous tourism is characterized by the involvement of Indigenous peoples in tourism activities, either through ownership or the centrality of their cultures in a tourist attraction or destination. While Indigenous-themed and Indigenous-operated destinations exist around the world and vary wildly in their construction, none are immune to the ideologies and discourses that govern the tourism industry. The tourists that visit these destinations, too, are influenced by the narratives and texts that mediate their experiences as consumers. In this essay I use the influence of institutional ethnography to discuss personal experiences travelling in Australia's Northern Territory, placing this discussion within the broader context of indigenous tourism. Beginning with a brief summary of the anthropological theories of tourism, I move on to describe actual experiences in Kakadu National Park, Alice Springs, and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. I demonstrate how texts and institutionalized discourse organize the tourist experience through the application of Edward Said's concept of "Othering" developed in his work, Orientalism (1979).*

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### INTRODUCTION

"Tourism is another form of colonization" (Bender 2001:14). Tourists can be considered leisured travellers visiting places that are different from their everyday experience. As one of the largest industries in the world, the mass diffusion of people across borders and their fleeting interactions with other people and landscapes affect everyone across the globe. While some may consider "tourism as colonization" a statement too political to describe an activity with (usually) harmless intentions, it is true that travel and tourism, in practice and in theory, are bound up in an institutionalized web of power relationships.

In this sense it is inherently political.

This is clear in the case of indigenous tourism, in which people who are marginalized and culturally separate from the wider population are the main attraction. In this situation it is not difficult to extrapolate uncomfortable collective memories of colonial practices and discourse, especially in the Western world. In this essay I use the influence of institutional ethnography to discuss personal experiences travelling in Australia's Northern Territory, and I place this discussion within the broader context of indigenous tourism. Beginning with a brief summary of tourism as an industry, I move on to describe actual experien-

ces in Kakadu National Park, Alice Springs, and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. I demonstrate how texts and institutionalized discourse organize the tourist experience through the application of Edward Said's concept of "Othering" developed in his work, *Orientalism* (1979).

## TOURISM

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. Historically, tourism has been linked to the earliest instances of colonial exploration. As noted by Bruner, "colonialism, ethnography, and tourism occur at different historical periods, but arise from the same social formation" (Sylvain 2005:356). It is little surprise, then, that the discourses and assumptions that informed colonial and anthropological enterprises continue to inform contemporary ideologies of tourism, as illustrated by tourism's tendency towards "Othering" and the centrality of visual experience.

Taken from Edward Said's notion of *Orientalism* (1979), Othering can be defined as the process of creating and maintaining a dichotomy between ones-self, as marked by a particular (Western) identity, and the Other(s). Said writes,

For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived. Orientals lived in their world, "we" lived in ours. The vision and material reality propped each other up, kept each other

going (1979:43-44).

Such a dichotomy between "us" and "them" made up much of the theoretical foundations from which early anthropological study was based (for instance the categorization of the "primitive" versus the "civilized"), informed colonialist policy, and was naturalized in Social Darwinian theory during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The discipline of anthropology worked to normalize such perceptions and understandings of the world's people. As many have argued, anthropology and the visual representations of people, through drawing and later through photography, developed simultaneously and effectively informed each other in practice and theory (Maxwell 1999; Pinney 1992; Steiner 1987; Strain 2003).

The tourist, too, played an instrumental role in the development of anthropology and visual media, and all worked from within the same epistemology. For example, Strain summarizes:

[The] simultaneous processes of maturation [of cinema, tourism, and anthropology] were accompanied by various intersections among the cultural practices: tourists provided information for early armchair anthropologists; anthropologists used film as a data-collection tool; popular films were financed by tourist bureaus and tourist footage was integrated into popular films; anthropological texts charted out new tourist areas; and anthropologists and tourists were protagonists in popular films (2003:19).

Inherent in these practices were the documentation of disappearing "prim-

itive” people and their exoticization and commodification through media such as photography, film, and exhibition. Built-in to modern-day tourism is the search for the exotic, the unfamiliar, the authentic “Other” (MacCannell 1976), that comes from these traditions that have shaped tourism discourse.

Today, where tourism is commonplace, destinations compete to highlight their distinctive qualities while vying for tourist dollars. This has included the diversification of niche markets that specialize in particular types of tourist experiences and are made to appeal to particular traveller tastes. One such niche market is indigenous tourism, defined by Butler and Hinch as “tourism activities in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction” (2007:5). *Indigenous* was first a political and legal term that came into its contemporary use after the 1982 United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (Niezen 2003). The label of “indigenous” has provided disenfranchised groups around the world with access to international recognition, resources, the discourse of human rights, and for many, empowerment. Indigenous participation in tourism is too, part of a constellation of issues including rights and recognition, economic development, cultural conservation and political mobilization. Many national governments as well as international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund promote participation in tourism as a means of sustainable and

economic development, and an avenue towards debt reduction (Sylvain 2005:364).

Indigenous tourism is often cited as a possible solution to many of the problems faced by indigenous people, providing a means of economic development and self-sufficiency in addition to a revival in positive cultural identity, community cohesion, and the conservation of cultural traditions, artifacts, and in some cases traditional land (Butler and Hinch 2007:3; Parsons 2002:25; Smith 2003:117). Tourism can also have a negative impact on indigenous populations; for example Smith notes that,

The inevitable consequence of increased tourism is often the gradual erosion of the social fabric, acculturation, and irreversible destruction of natural habitats. This form of tourism can easily become a kind of cultural voyeurism in which the local indigenous population is reduced to little more than a human zoo (2003:117).

There are many issues within indigenous tourism and these are relative to each situation. Alongside the potential exploitation of indigenous groups are issues of control over land, resources, and representation (Notzke 2006:6). These are issues of power.

## AUSTRALIAN TOURISM

Tourism is an industry guided by consumer capitalism and Western institutions and market logic. This means that those involved in indigenous tourism must market themselves according to these structures,

and shape their services in accordance with tourist demand. Countries all over the world often utilize indigenous imagery in tourist marketing campaigns (Notzke 2006:9). However, international campaigns and advertisements tend to reproduce stereotypical images of indigenous peoples (Sylvain 2005) and can have the effect of homogenizing heterogeneous cultural groups under one representative identity (Beck and Somerville 2002:9; Parsons 2002:25). Though there are motions towards change (for example see Beck and Somerville 2002), this is generally the situation in Australian Tourism. This is reinforced by stereotypical images of Australia, Aborigines, and more often Aboriginal arts and crafts such as the didgeridoo, dot painting, and rock art. These are found not only in tourism-related media, but have become historically and socially engrained through years of use in shaping Australia's unique national identity.

Indigenous tourism in Australia, or Aboriginal tourism as it is referred to by the Australian Department of Tourism, is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as tourism that includes "insights about the cultural knowledge, lifestyle and beliefs of Australia's Indigenous people" (ABS 2004:589). The Australian Tourism Commission also notes that an Aboriginal tourism enterprise is one that is owned and/or operated by Aboriginal people or in partnership with non-Aboriginal people (ABS 2004:589). This means that Aboriginal participation in Australian tourism does not necessarily equate to business own-

ership and majority control. For instance, only 15.6% of Aboriginal tour operations in New South Wales in 2001 were Aboriginal-owned (ABS 2004:589).

In Australia's Northern Territory the primary and arguably *only* attractions (apart from wildlife) are those that are intimately tied to Aboriginal heritage, and so, by definition, are Aboriginal tourism sites. These include some of Australia's most iconic locations, such as Kakadu National Park, Watarrka National Park (King's Canyon), Nitmiluk National Park (Katherine Gorge), Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (The Olgas). In these locations, as well as elsewhere in Australia, the indigenous link to these areas is defined in terms of the Aboriginal relationship with the land – the concept that the two are mutually inclusive is repeated in tourism advertisements, guide books, pamphlets and brochures, and is reiterated in situ. The presentation of Aboriginal Australia in tourism, from trip planning to actual location, is exoticized, sometimes in the physical appearance and performance of Aborigines (for example in Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park in Cairns, Riverlife Mirrabooka in Brisbane, or Tiwi Tours on Bathurst Island off of the coast of Darwin) and sometimes through the reiteration of difference in cultural and environmental perspective and experience.

## INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Tourism as an industry is in many respects an interface upon which many

different institutions are coordinated. For example, the popular media, government laws and regulations, transportation and infrastructure are coordinated with destination businesses, accommodation, travel agents and guides, public works and basic services. While one could examine the intricacies of just one of these institutions, the experience of the individual tourist takes them through the processes and movements of a plethora of coordinated organizations. Taking inspiration from institutional ethnography, it is possible to situate the tourist's experience as one that is coordinated by institutional discourse and their related texts, from start to finish. The web of interrelations between social, political, and economic structures and issues becomes visible by re-visioning experience through such a methodology.

Taken from sociology, "Institutional ethnography is an analytic approach that begins where we are – as actual people with bodies located in time and space. It offers a theorized approach to reflecting critically on what one knows from that embodied place in the world" (Campbell and Gregor 2008:9). The actual experiences of individuals working within institutional structures are the foundations from which to explore ruling relations from the bottom-up by investigating the social organization of knowledge and the mediation of texts. The definition of texts in institutional ethnography is broader and more active than conventional definitions.

[Texts] refer to words, images, or sounds

that are set into a material form of some kind from which they can be read, seen, heard, watched, and so on... Their material forms are such that anyone else anywhere else can read, see, hear, and so on the same words, images, or sounds as any other person engaged with the same text (Smith 2006:66).

The purpose of texts, then, is to create a standardized engagement between a text (which can be anything from a book, a form, a brochure to a speech, an announcement, a video, a photograph, and so forth) and the individuals who "activate" it. Activation, in this sense, denotes an active engagement with text – the text itself designed for specific types of activation. For example, one does not read a novel the same way one reads a dictionary; one does not look at a wedding photograph in the same way one looks at mug shot (McCoy 1995:184). Activation – viewing, reading, listening, watching – is firmly implanted in institutionalized discourses that naturalize how one engages with different text (McCoy 1995:184). Thus, ruling relations coordinate the activities of individuals on a large scale, indifferent to changes in location or relations between individuals, and are reliant upon texts and collective ways of thinking, embedded in discourses of knowledge production (DeVault and McCoy 2006:17).

In recounting my experiences and those of my friends while travelling on a group tour in Australia's Northern Territory, the ruling relations embedded in the organization of our trip, mediated by texts from start to finish, becomes apparent when app-

roached from the perspective of institutional ethnography. Even before reaching the starting point of our guided tour, Darwin, texts played a primary role in both the decision to travel to Australia and in getting there. Williams writes, “We spend time in advance of a tourism trip attempting to visualize the experience by examining guidebooks and brochures, or in anticipatory day dreams” (Beck and Somerville 2002:4). I had decided to travel to Australia based on a long-held fascination with this country, solely founded in indirect expectations of what could be experienced there informed by text – from articles, television programs, popular media, knowledge gained through my education, and so forth. In planning my actual trip, I wanted to see as much of Australia as I could in a month’s time and did not want to have to worry about making travel and accommodation arrangements while there. So, I decided to travel with an international tour company on a twenty-four day excursion that would take me from Northern Territory to Queensland and finally Sydney, New South Wales. The travel company can be considered part of an institution itself, all of its services coordinated through agreements with other transport, accommodation, and tourism services. These are in turn connected to food services and energy and resource providers, all of which are run according to national operational guidelines and federal and local government policy. The web of connections is certainly much more complex in reality than outlined here.

This trip was coordinated and organized according to one main text that guided our articulation with the sites that we visited – the itinerary. The itinerary outlined a set of particular travel experiences, was predetermined and fixed, was the basis for the trip well before its actual execution and shaped our movements in situ. The itinerary can be considered “a form of control which channels tourist experiences into pre-determined forms. The spaces of tourism are constructed, more or less consciously, to fulfil – or attempt to fulfil – such expectations” (Meethan 2006:5). It is a text that creates travel expectations, is guaranteed upon payment, and is embedded in the discourses of capitalism and tourism. These predefine places worthy of visit and the appropriate cost of experiencing them. Within the itinerary and travel texts are, similar to what Meethan notes, “dominant metaphors, discourses and gazes, [and] the narratives of place created and sold by tourism professionals” which are the scaffolding from which the tourist confirms or modifies their experiences – the tourists “‘work at’ creating their own personal narratives of place” while travelling (2006:9). However, to turn the itinerary to actual embodied, physical experience would necessitate the activation of a number of other texts involved in travel. For instance, my passport, my authorized textual identity, is a document that, as McCoy (1995:185) describes, controls my movement and allocates entitlement, and is part of a wider range of processes of authenticity and national and international surveillance. Boarding passes, baggage

tags, and a tourist visa reiterated my identity and proved payment, granting me permission to travel. My experience throughout the airport and the process of arriving at my departure gate was guided by discourse on proper airport behaviour and the rules and regulations set in place by airport security at one level, and national security and protection at another.

## TOURISM AND ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

Before arrival we were all aware of the Aboriginal presence in Australia, and we all had preconceived notions of what experiences with Aboriginal Australians might entail. These notions were informed by advertising and other forms of popular media. For instance, one travel companion stated that,

It was kind of surprising for me to realize that they still exist! I've always thought of them as some historical fact that's long gone and only appears in books. Aboriginal people are totally different and they're not like anyone else I know. It would be politically incorrect to call them creatures, but actually, my [idea of them] was like some sort of fantastic creature that you don't actually get to be in contact with – that you can only read about or see in movies. When I actually saw them I realized that not only [did] they exist, but they actually conduct a totally regular life alongside [other people]. It was really a wake-up call.

Such an honest admission demonstrates how engrained concepts of “Othering” are in everyday ways of knowing and conceptualizing the world. Ghosts of the “primitive”, the

“savage,” the ahistorical people of mankind’s past are rekindled, “us” and “them” have not left popular thought. Even for white Australians there are stereotypical conceptualizations of Aborigines. For instance, Poroch writes “Governments, concerned experts, and the media discover these deviants [indigenous Australians] and label them as social problems” (2006:4). Furthermore, “There has always been a tendency for mainstream Australia to consider that Indigenous Australians get more than they deserve from the government, and that all races should be treated the same” (Poroch 2006:7). She continues, “The media set and define the standards by which the public evaluates government and attributes responsibility for societal problems” (Poroch 2006:8). Media plays a large role in creating and perpetuating stereotypes, and this is commonly translated into individual opinion. When asked her opinion of Aborigines before travelling to Northern Territory, my Australian travel partner, Christina, promptly responded “Dole-bludgers!” – people who are unemployed and live off of government welfare. She also mentioned the problems with alcohol, drug, and child abuse as common issues within Aboriginal communities that are often reported in newspapers. Without a doubt, these help shape a negative public opinion of Aboriginal populations in Australia (for example, recent Northern Territory interventions: Narushima, Sydney Morning Herald 2009; Reconciliation 2008). My own preconceptions about Australian Aborigines were primarily focused on artwork and a

very minimal introduction to Tiwi traditional social structure, coming out of a background in introductory social anthropology. However, upon arrival I was surprised at how central Aboriginal Tourism was to tourism in the Northern Territory.

As one can see, from working within the confines of the travel and tourism industry out into popular realms of knowledge production, ideas-in-the-mind and actions-on-the-ground are organized by popular discourse through a vast media of texts: passports, plane tickets, itineraries, travel books and brochures, newspapers, laws, government policy, photographs, artwork, school books, television programs, and etc. In the following sections I will describe text and discourse through actual experience and how this relates back to larger social and political issues in indigenous Australia.

### *Kakadu National Park*

Kakadu National Park, like many of the other parks in Northern Territory such as Uluru-Kata Tjuta, is under co-management between Aboriginal traditional owners and the Australian Government. The “Aboriginal traditional owner” is defined in Section 3[1] of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) of 1976 as “a local descent group of Aboriginals who have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for that site and for the land, and who are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage over that land” (Rose

1996:40). Those who are found to be traditional owners are able to make land claims; by the mid-nineties 36% of Northern Territory and 85% of its coastlines had been successfully turned over to Aboriginal Freehold Title (Rose 1996:36). This means that the land is legally recognized as belonging to the traditional owners of the land claimed, however this land is then leased back to the Australian Government (Rose 1996:37) to be managed as a National Park. Traditional owners are deemed as such by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner, and so it is up to the Aboriginal people to demonstrate their authenticity through genetic links as well as traditional knowledge about spiritual and sacred qualities of sites on the land (Holcombe 2004; Rose 1996:40-41). However, in practice such guidelines may not be so rigidly adhered to, especially considering the vast displacement of Aboriginal people as a result of the Stolen Generation (Rose 1996:41). Additionally, the Act and its conditions also mean that there is an unequal distribution of land amongst Aboriginal groups in the Northern territory. For instance, Gagudju and Anangu peoples in Kakadu and Uluru respectively are granted a degree of control over economically and environmentally rich areas, while other Aboriginal groups are still left disadvantaged (Rose 1996:38).

The first and second days of our trip were spent at Kakadu National Park. Upon arrival we received a park ticket and a Visitor’s Guide (2008) that included maps of the park as well as information on park habitats, safety,

activities, park laws and the Aboriginal traditional owners. The Visitor's Guide may play a huge role in coordinating and controlling a visitor's experience in the park, however, in my experience the authority of the Visitor's Guide was delegated to a tour guide, so it served little purpose beyond that of a souvenir. At the entrance of the park was a billboard introducing us to the traditional owners of the park; their faces hung like class pictures next to park information that I did not bother to read. Some had their faces covered up – this was part of Aboriginal mourning practices, we were told. After an individual dies, it is forbidden to speak their name: this practice had been adapted to the confines of photographic reproduction by covering the individual's image. However, we were also informed that traditionally Aboriginal people consider photography taboo, especially images of people.

My group carried on to watch the sunset at Ubirr, a rocky outcrop that overlooks a floodplain with Arnhem Land to the East. The rock was packed with visitors all anticipating a beautiful sunset. Ubirr is well known in popular culture as we were told on a number of occasions that this site was featured in *Crocodile Dundee* (1986). The next day we explored some of the most popular sites in Kakadu, including Nourlangie Rock, which is notable for its rock art and significance to Aboriginal culture, and spent the afternoon on a wildlife cruise. The walking trails around the rock art galleries are directed by guides and wooden pathways, and are restricted from immediate access

by boardwalk partitions. The art that is more significant or considerably odd to the visitor's eye is explained via informational placards.

The traditional heritage of the Aboriginal people in this area is consistently relayed to visitors, and in the absence of the physical individuals (in my experience), their presence was constant through the organization of texts throughout the park that both informed and directed our movements. Beginning with the guidebook that welcomes you to Aboriginal Lands, the images of the traditional owners, to the rock art sites and the Aboriginal myths that were told to us when we stopped at significant sites, texts – a guidebook, photographs, artworks, stories, and the landscape itself - organized our entire experience in the park. The Aboriginal presence was paramount through texts in the absence of their physicality. The sites we visited and experiences we had were those promised to us in the itinerary.

### *Alice Springs*

Four days after our visit in Kakadu, I joined a handful of individuals from my tour group to go on the Aboriginal Dreamtime and Bushtucker Tour just outside of Alice Springs. We had been told that this was an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal culture, sample traditional bush foods such as the witchity grub and kangaroo tail, learn to throw a boomerang and purchase authentic arts and crafts.

I was surprised to discover that our tour guide was a white Australian –

I expected the tour to be run entirely by Aboriginal people. I was not the only person surprised, as I recall one of the girls asking the guide why he was lecturing on Aboriginal culture instead of an actual Aborigine. He told us it was because too much would be lost in translation – we would not be able to understand an Aboriginal guide. Regardless, this experience was probably the most informative on Aboriginal culture, despite the plethora of sacred Aboriginal sites we visited on the trip. Christina described the tour:

We went out, basically into the middle of the bush, a completely desolate area and go to this contrived little hut, and aborigine people don't even have huts, and we sat in that. This man who had been living and working with the aborigines for years and years and years and knew them really well started telling us about the culture and their native ways and how they lived before Europeans and how they continue to live in the presence of Europeans, and we got to experience a few of the native things like the native food and stuff [...] It was very interesting. I learned a lot about aborigines that I never knew before and probably ought to have. And I learned a lot about bush tucker which was cool, because you learn that there's a lot out there, despite being desolate and empty in the centre of Australia, you can do a lot with what's there, which is something quite remarkable. Even how cold it is in the desert at night, in the negatives, and still [Aboriginal people] managed to sleep outside for thousands of years in the middle of the desert. It's just such ingenuity that I suppose it doesn't occur to you. It's a really harsh landscape and [in Australia] they've got a reputation for being stupid and lazy and having no technology – but the technology and the knowledge is obviously there because they survived for that many thousands of years in those conditions. I suppose that was a real eye-opener because you

don't really learn much about the technologies of Aboriginal people.

At the end of the tour we were able to meet with some Aboriginal women who were producing arts and crafts for sale. They had been driven in to this location from elsewhere by the guide, he told us, and described how they maintained a traditional lifestyle – one example the guide used was their insistence on sleeping outside. The women spoke to each other, but had very little interaction with us outside of financial transactions. I personally felt uneasy, uncomfortable – here were these people who had just been described as unfathomable to someone like me, and what felt like at best shyness and at worst resentment from the women made me feel like a trespasser. I felt guilt for participating in what felt like an unequal relationship of power that seemed physically exaggerated as the women sat on the ground painting while white tourists walked around them surveying their work. I was worried I was participating in their exploitation. Or was this a mutual exchange? A positive experience for both these women and myself? I purchased a painting from a woman named Noreen, she wrote on the back “Kangaroo Dreaming – This is about how the man hunt for kangaroo.” I asked her permission to take her picture so that I would not forget her or this experience, she conceded; but it still felt wrong knowing the photography taboo I had been told of earlier. Others reported the same sense of unease:

I was sort of... well not surprised, but just a bit... not confused, not put off,

*Uluru-Kata Tjuta  
National Park*

but that sort of area of emotion. They were so... you know. They don't talk to you that much. They were so shy. It was surprising because I'm just not used to that [...] I was surprised how shy they were actually [...] It was really strange with the women. For me, I've never been that up close to aborigines that are living their lifestyle. I've met plenty of people that are aborigine and might like it, might not, and they'll talk about it with pride, but not anything where they're actually living it. It's like stepping back in time.

Although not part of the bush tucker tour, a fellow traveller described his reaction to Australian Aborigines in comparison to her other experiences in indigenous tourism:

In New Zealand I actually felt like [the Maori] were willing to let you in, you know, to provide you with more information about themselves. But in Australia, [Aborigines] were kind of distant. That's what I felt anyway. They don't [seem to] care about you knowing them and getting to know them [or having] some sort of interaction. I mean it's totally different. Yeah it was weird [...] I felt like they were not exactly thrilled about us getting into their world. They're not exactly letting us in. So I felt like any further interaction would be an intrusion. You're feeling like you are not exactly welcome there.

Apart from this experience in Central Australia, we had no other face-to-face interactions with Aboriginal people. "Othering" was uncomfortably blatant in this experience. Between the tour guide telling "us" that we were too different from "them" to learn from them, and the interaction with the women where status was so marked, the line between typical touristic ignorance and "tourism as colonialism" felt like it had been crossed.

Two days later we had carried on from Alice Springs and arrived at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park where a couple of Australia's most famous land marks are located – Uluru (once called Ayer's Rock) and Kata Tjuta (also known as the Olga's). Much like our experience in Kakadu, we were given a park entry ticket and a Visitor Guide (2006). We were briefed in park protocol before entering and told some of the Aboriginal beliefs about the area and, significantly, their wish for us to choose to not climb Uluru (though it is not prohibited). The decision to climb or refrain from climbing Uluru was left up to the individual – a decision that was described as a demonstration of Aboriginal respect for our culture, in that they realize "we" do not have the same beliefs as "them." The decision to refrain from climbing the rock is framed as an act of respect for the spiritual concerns of the traditional owners and the Anangu community as a whole. I chose not to climb Uluru and instead opted to walk around it. The walk around the rock takes approximately two hours and there are different placards along the way offering information about Aboriginal beliefs, as well as signs reminding you to be respectful, demarcating especially sacred spots where photography is prohibited (though this is also not strictly enforced). After learning about Aboriginal beliefs, wishes, and attitudes towards tourists at Uluru, several of my fellow travellers decided not to climb Uluru as well. One said, "You respect things

when you didn't expect to have that reverence. It's like how I didn't climb Ayers Rock – I could have. But then I [thought], 'I don't feel comfortable with it anymore'." Clearly not everyone feels this way since many visitors to Central Australia continue to climb Uluru. Though framed in terms of respect, not everyone perceives this decision on such moral grounds. For instance, one woman in my tour group made the decision to climb:

For me [climbing Uluru] was sort of [a] feministic achievement – when I saw those guys [looking almost] dead along the way and I was still climbing. But it was good, it was really fulfilling [...] But it is an important part [of] Aboriginal culture, so I was feeling like I was being a part of something while climbing it, although they're not exactly thrilled about it.

This brings up many questions about ownership, rights, and the land itself. Because the rock is located on traditional Aboriginal territory, does that necessarily lessen the significance of spiritual and personally valuable experiences that non-Aboriginal people have there? For instance, Whittaker reports the perceived sacredness of Uluru to white Australians as well:

Given this mystical and sacred communion, many white Australians claim that it is a lifetime dream to climb the Rock and that it should be accomplished before one dies. The spiritual quest, even dying for it, is tantamount to being a true Australian (Notzke 2006:168).

Perhaps even comparable to the masses of people that attempt to climb some of the world's most renowned mountains, like Everest, K2, or Kilimanjaro, the meaning these sites hold to a visitor is certainly

different from those held by the traditional inhabitants; actions and expressions of reverence are different too. Yet the pure sacredness of a site is not in question. While some may argue that respect and priority should be given to the traditional owners, when the economic benefit of opening up a site to foreign adventure-seekers is large, the issue is complicated. This is made more complex when a co-management structure is in place, like Uluru's, and negotiations between diverse interest groups must take place.

The gift shop at Uluru-Kata Tjuta, Ininti Café & Souvenirs, was similar to those visited at other sites on the trip. Movement was directed by spaces between merchandise, moving from key-chains, magnets, and trinkets to books, CDs and DVDs about Australia, and Aboriginal beliefs and culture. It was a vast world of indigenous Australian culture and knowledge in a variety of forms, condensed and made available for quick purchase. Artwork and clothing was available too, including the rather politically loaded t-shirts with declarations such as "I climbed Ayers Rock" and "I didn't Climb Uluru" – the purchase of either assuming an affiliation, political, social, and spiritual, with one side of a proverbial culture-coin. Tourist knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal Australia are shaped by such various media and by the texts that coordinate our experiences with the "sacred" landscape.

*Northern Territory  
in Summary*

The continuous reference to Aborigines as the Other is relayed through the texts that coordinate the tourist's experiences in Northern Territory. This is particularly true in the case of organized tours such as the one I joined because individual travel is so restricted and controlled by the itinerary and collective group experience. As I have demonstrated, this message was executed not by Aborigines themselves, but through indirect means. Studies and surveys have shown that in terms of indigenous tourism, tourists generally expect face-to-face interaction with indigenous peoples (Notzke 2006:93-95); arguably this is confirmed through the success of businesses such as Tiwi Tours and Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park where such interactions are provided. The situation in the Northern Territory, especially in the cases of Kakadu and Uluru Kata-Tjuta, is different in that Aboriginal culture is *not* the primary attraction, but comes as such by default. The landscapes people travel to visit are legally Aboriginal-owned through Land Trusts, but at the same time controlled by Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. They are important land marks for not only Aboriginal and Australian national identity but as attractions for mass tourism. "Having accepted national park status for their ancestral land, [the Aboriginal owners] were ill prepared for the onslaught of visitors that ensued as a result of World Heritage status of Kakadu and Uluru and the development of extensive infrastructure" (Notzke 2006:137-138). In many different ways these are meeting points between Western and

Aboriginal cultures.

It has been reported that Aboriginal Australians, particularly in the Northern Territory and confirmed by my own experiences, are disinclined to engage with the sort of cultural touristic interaction that is so often expected in areas where indigenous tourism is popular (Notzke 2006:15, 33, 139, 145; Parsons 2002:14). The majority of Aboriginal Australians contribute to the tourism industry through indirect tourism and the sale of arts and crafts (Notzke 2006:97; Parsons 2002:14). Indirect participation also has to do with their concern over sharing spiritual information with non-Aboriginal people, though this is not always the case as many groups go to great lengths to share their culture with visitors (Notzke 2006:145). Therefore, due to their legal status and property rights in areas like Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta, and the intricate connection of Aboriginal people to their land, participation in tourism is a fine balance between Aboriginal interests and those of the Australian Government. Rather than actively engaging with the hordes of tourists that visit these locations every year, Aborigines are presented to foreigners much like another element of the landscape to be read and interpreted in particular ways. The "connection between people and their "country" is unparalleled in its intricacy and near-incomprehensibility to outsiders" (Notzke 2006:145), and this is reiterated time again through the many types of text encountered in the tourist experience - as a relationship and way of life that is entirely Other to visitors.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the stereotyped views that many tourists have of Indigenous cultures, peoples, and places (Beck and Somerville 2002:4), the history of colonization, experiences of social and political marginalization, loss of identity and often involuntary physical displacement of people have radically changed Indigenous cultures and ways of life. Some groups have been able to hold on to their cultural traditions even in the wake of what can only be considered the catastrophic and devastating intrusion of power brought on by colonial expansion. This carries on in different forms today. Indigenous tourism, in the cases where control over ownership and representation is in the hands of those whose culture is on display, has been seen as a form of cultural and economic redress. Yet, these cultures do not exist within a vacuum; they have not stayed the same since time immemorial. Often, indigenous tourism reinforces the notion that cultures are bounded, discrete, and impenetrable to change by exposing visitors and patrons to those aspects of culture that are different, stereotyped, and thus become part of the tourist's expectation (for example in Australia some of these include the supply of dot paintings and didgeridoos for sale, boomerang throwing, tasting "bush tucker," or witnessing Aborigine performances, all outside of their original contexts). This demand for a perceived authenticity of indigenous cultures is the crux of the indigenous tourism enterprise (Parsons 2002:25; Voase 2006:284). The supply of the tourist demand for the

"authentic" does not exclude the fact that sharing culture with tourists for many Aboriginal groups is a source of cultural pride and empowerment.

The preconceptions that people travel with are the result of a number of factors that affect their lives and ways of knowing the world. These include the messages from the popular media, the news, advertising, tourism marketing, photographs and television shows. Preconceived ideas are so naturalized they can be considered subtle at best until effectively unpacked. These media, arguably, repeat the same discourses found in colonialism, while the terminology has changed – for instance the "primitive" and "savage" have become the "undeveloped," "marginalized," "Fourth world," and dare I say "indigenous." Significantly though, there have been important social and political changes that make these categorizations different from one another. However this essay is not so much an examination of indigenous tourism in Australia as it is a brief analysis of Western convention. "The analysis of representation as content and representation in context, necessitates a close examination of cultural codes, conventions, and practices as well as the social and political relations which sustain or marginalize them" (Hallam 2000:5). In indigenous tourism especially, the complex articulations between indigenous groups and global forces, national governments, and mass industry become visible.

Institutional ethnography provides us with an alternative avenue to examine

what some have deemed a sort of cultural hybridity (Greene 2001:479; Hallam 2000; Sahllins 1994). Instead perception is framed by individual experience and relations of power as mediated by text. The concept of “shells” is useful here (from Smith 2005:197) – in order to be successful in tourism, indigenous groups must “fit the shell” that defines a tourist market, since if they do not appeal to tourist desires inevitably the business will fail. Marketability and tourist demand can be considered shells, largely created out of colonialist discourse as I have described. Additionally, though, indigenous people must also fit the shell of “indigeneity,” a category of authenticity that is internationally recognized and politically, socially, and even biologically verified through various processes of identification. That is not all: as we have seen in Australia there is also the shell labelled “traditional owner” that must be filled in order to be recognized and have the right to resources and residence on traditional land. When couched in the framework provided by institutional ethnography, the relationships of power that infiltrate everyday lives are clearly illuminated.

“Tourism is only ‘seemingly slight’” (Bender 2001:14). People briefly enter the lives and territories of others, rarely stopping to consider the impact of such a short visit. However, “we affect and are affected by the landscapes we move through” (Bender 2001:15). The tourist experience is connected to a much larger web of relations, connecting power structures and institutional discourses

from local, regional, national, and global levels. In the experience of the tourist, this takes form through texts that organize one’s experiences in travel, facilitating a narrow glimpse into life elsewhere.

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**INTERVIEWS**

All names have been changed or omitted to protect the privacy of participants.

Interviews conducted via Skype by Katie Bresner, November 2009.