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## **Knowing and Being Known. Approaching Australian Indigenous Tourism through Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Politics of Knowing**

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**Abstract:** Based on ethnographic research conducted with Bardi and Jawi people, an Indigenous group from the Northwestern Kimberley region of Western Australia, the aim of this paper is to approach the complexities related to Indigenous tourism in Australia through the politics of knowing and not-knowing as embodied by Indigenous tour guides and non-Indigenous tourists. It examines the notion of knowing (or not knowing) and its usages by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the context of their tourist encounter. 'Knowing' represents an important aspect through which Aboriginal people and their non-Indigenous guests negotiate their interactions. In particular, the paper shows how Indigenous and non-Indigenous expectations from tourism lead actors to adopt divergent positions and to assert renewed claims in relation to knowledge or knowing, casting new light on issues of self-representation and empowerment in the domain of Indigenous tourism.

**Keywords:** Australia, Indigenous tourism, knowing and not-knowing, self-representation

## Introduction

This paper analyses the complexities of Australian Indigenous-owned and -operated tourism through the lens of the politics of knowing. My specific focus is the way in which this politics of knowing is embodied in interactions between Indigenous tourism operators and non-Indigenous Australian domestic tourists who visit the Northwestern Kimberley region. Approaching tourism as both a contact zone (Pratt 1991; Clifford 1997) and a space of cultural production (Stanley 1998; see also Fullagar 2001; Bruner 2005; Bunten 2008), this article explores issues of self-representation and empowerment present in Indigenous tourism and tourist encounters. It shows how the notion of knowledge — with its dual meanings and usages as both a commodity and an attribute in its verbal form for the definition of the interaction (knowing, or not knowing) — is the main ‘object’ around which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people gather and negotiate their interactions in the tourist context. In fact, as I will illustrate in this paper, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike have expectations from tourism that lead them to adopt different positions and to assert different claims in relation to knowledge or knowing. An analysis of these knowledge claims can cast new light on issues of self-representation and empowerment and their negotiation in Indigenous tourism. In particular, the positions adopted by Aboriginal people involved in tourism activities on the one hand, and their guests on the other, illustrate how any achievement of self-representation or empowerment in a tourism context is the result of a social co-production. In this respect, this paper equally aims to contribute to an analysis of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships and construction of identity more generally.

Based on twenty-two months of fieldwork conducted during intermittent periods between 2008 and 2015, this paper presents a case study of the tourist activities developed by Bardi and Jawi people in Western Australia. It shows how the issue of Aboriginal self-representation is closely associated with the ways those Bardi and Jawi people involved in tourism teach some aspects of their ecological knowledge and ways of knowing the land during their performances in cultural guided-tours. These actors, embodying the roles of ‘teacher’ or ‘mentor’, underline their status as knowledge-holders. Through these claims of knowledge, Bardi and Jawi tour guides challenge existing representations of ‘Aboriginality’. My case study will illustrate how the role of ‘teacher’ played by Aboriginal tour guides, as well as the relationships in which they engage with the tourists, allow them to coproduce an assertion of authority and empowerment. Yet, in accord with other authors (for example, Galliford 2009, 2010, 2012), I will show that it is not just Indigenous people who engage in acts of self-representation in Indigenous tourism, but also the tourists themselves. Indeed, for non-Indigenous Australians, issues of self-representation and self-examination are implicit in: the role of ‘novice’ they adopt toward their Indigenous guides, the claims of ignorance they assert regarding Indigenous culture, and their expectations to learn from and about Aboriginal people. Indigenous tourism therefore provides an opportunity for domestic tourists to reconsider their nation’s colonial past.

The research presented in this paper was undertaken mostly through long-term participant observation as well as formal and informal interviews with Bardi and Jawi tour guides, local

people from the Bardi-Jawi communities<sup>1</sup>, and Australian domestic tourists (who were also asked to self-complete questionnaires). This research was conducted with the permission and active collaboration of Bardi and Jawi Elders and Law Bosses, who were also directly involved in tourism as tour guides. In addition, tourist camp owners and other members of the Bardi-Jawi communities (in which, or near which, tourists either stayed or participated in cultural tours) also collaborated and gave permission. Overall, twenty Bardi or Jawi people participated directly in this research, of which five (four Bardi men and one Jawi man) were working as tour guides. Four of these tour guides are considered by their own communities as senior Law men, and one used to play an important role in mediating with Western bureaucratic administration.

Over the years, I spent several months in Bardi-Jawi communities and bush camps. In order to also acquire the perspective of the visitors (the importance of which is underlined by van den Berghe (1994) Edensor (1998) and Selänniemi (2001)), I spent several weeks conducting research among tourists and accompanied Bardi-Jawi guided tours as a ‘full participant’ (a fieldwork technique also used by Ebron (2000) and Louie (2001)), recording all Aboriginal narratives and Indigenous / non-Indigenous interactions.

Before discussing the ethnography, I will start with a brief review of the conceptual framework from which this paper draws, as well as discuss the literature to which it aims to contribute. I then provide a short overview of Bardi-Jawi tourism activities and discuss how Indigenous guides teach their environmental knowledge and ways of knowing the land as a mode of self-representation. I will then examine the role they play as ‘teacher’ and the type of relationship this role allows them to build with the tourists. I argue that playing the role of ‘teacher’ or ‘mentor’ contributes to the guides’ capacity to (re)assert an authority to speak about themselves, which also entails the power to remain silent about particular aspects of their cultural knowledge, or about specific practices such as those related to Bardi-Jawi initiations. In the last part of this paper, I investigate Australian tourists’ claims of ignorance and their expectations from Indigenous tourism. We will see how tourists, adopting the role of ‘novices’, engage with Indigenous authority, and doing so, contribute to the co-production of self-representation.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This paper takes Indigenous cultural tourism activities, specifically an Indigenous-owned and –operated tourism enterprise, as the setting for the analysis of the politics of representation and Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in Australia. In this particular case study, non-Indigenous tourists participate in Indigenous-guided tours with the expectation to learn about Aboriginal people and their cultures, while Indigenous guides use their environmental knowledge as the main theme of their tours. This paper analyses the interactions between Indigenous hosts and non-Indigenous guests and focus is directed towards the interface of this tourist encounter. In the case study that is presented here, tourism is regarded as a space of exchange in which people take on prescribed or semi-prescribed roles: those of host and

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<sup>1</sup> I will come back later in this paper on the notions of Bardi and Jawi. There are three main communities, or settlements, in Bardi country: Djarindjin, Lombadina and One Arm Point (also known as Ardyaloon).

guest, or alternatively, the role of teacher and novice. This paper draws from and contributes to two main bodies of literature. The first is the large body of work on tourist encounters and issues of self-representation emerging from them (see Leite and Graburn 2009). The second is an anthropological tradition of enquiry which focuses on issues of knowledge and the construction of ‘ways of knowing’.

One of the main arguments of this paper is that the relationship between Indigenous tour guides and non-Indigenous tourists is the basis on which particular acts of self-representation are made possible. The investigation of self-representation, a central facet of most tourism encounters, has generated a large body of literature that has raised questions about the degree of self-commodification within tourism, the effects of thinking about place and culture as a commodity (see for example Bunten 2008) as well as more general questions regarding the authenticity of the self-representations made within this encounter and whether the version of a place or culture experienced by the tourist, or performed by the host, can be considered authentic (MacCannell 1973; Cohen 1988; Moscardo and Pearce 1999; Wang 1999, 2000; Taylor 2001; Olsen 2002; Carry 2004; Bruner 2005; Reisinger and Steiner 2006; Cohen 2007; Cole 2007; Condevaux 2009; Cook 2010; Cohen and Cohen 2012; Mackley-Crump 2016).

In more recent times, researchers working in tourism studies and the anthropology of tourism remain concerned with issues of identity and self-representation. Many continue to be interested in questions of Indigenous empowerment (see for instance Scheyvens 2002) and political sovereignty. Some authors have contributed to the analysis of self-representation in Indigenous tourism, examining, for example, how actors ‘choose to authentically represent themselves’ (Mackley-Crump, 2016, 173; also see Bunten 2008, 2010, 2011, 2014; Stocker 2007; Condevaux 2009). These authors emphasise how tourists’ hosts ‘may perform aspects of their identities that reflect both tourist and local imaginaries’ (Bunten 2014, 93; see also Salazar 2010). In line with what I suggest later in this paper, they also stress the tendency of tourists’ hosts to act as cultural brokers, and their capacity to subvert dominant paradigms and tourists’ representations and expectations about their hosts (Bruner 2005; Salazar 2008, 2010; Bunten 2014). This capacity to influence tourists’ representations echoes the works of many authors in the tourism arena, who have more broadly examined the role of tour guides and their power in shaping tourists’ behaviours (Holloway 1981; Cohen 1985; Cheong and Miller 2000; Dahles 2002).

Following Stanley’s (1998) work, as well as other authors such as Fullagar (2001), Bruner (2005), Stocker (2007), and Bunten (2008, 2010, 2011), and bearing in mind the tour guide’s role as an intermediary, I regard Indigenous tourism as a border zone: a discursive space of cross-cultural encounter, production, and shared experience between locals and visitors. The concept of the border zone or space of encounter is a useful frame to analyse this tourism encounter because it is a productive space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people meet and interact. However, while many authors have focused on the authenticity of both the encounter itself and the knowledge presented within this space, the approach that is adopted in this paper, decentres the (often circular) authenticity debate to examine how Indigenous hosts and their and non-Indigenous guests represent themselves in touristic encounters in

which they consider themselves as, respectively, teachers and learners, and how their claims of knowledge and ignorance operate within these encounters. As I will demonstrate, the tourists' experience of learning about Indigenous culture through guided tours is sensory: it entails the full involvement of their minds and bodies. Guides demonstrate their knowledge through the enactment of local techniques, which the tourists are then asked to reproduce. Thus, in addition to the tourist literature concerned in issues of self-representation and cultural production, this paper draws equally from the anthropology of knowing and not-knowing (Harris 2007; Dilley 2010; Marchand 2010; Dilley and Kirsch 2015).

The authors that have contributed to the anthropology of knowing are mainly interested in processes of learning and ways of knowing (Downey 2007, 2010; Harris 2007; Marchand 2007, 2010) and not tourism *per se*. They argue for a practical, skill-based definition of knowledge or knowing as being always situated and emergent: that is, as something that cannot be transmitted, but which has to be individually and constantly constructed in 'fields of practice' (Ingold 2001; Harris 2007; Marchand 2007; Downey 2007; Marchand 2010). Following these authors, I do not intend to suggest a singular definition, or produce 'normative statements about what knowledge is', but rather wish to 'examine what the recognition of something [...] *as knowledge does*' (Leach and Davis 2012, 210, original emphasis).

In the tourist encounter that is presented here, Aboriginal guides show or represent their cultural knowledge to paying Australian tourists, an act that requires both guides and tourists to be able to recognise what constitutes cultural knowledge in this situation,<sup>2</sup> as well as recognise who has and does not have this knowledge. Knowledge has value because it is what the tourists seek in the encounter, and it is what the guides promise to provide in their tours. The notion of knowledge and its recognition in turn shapes the interactions between the tourists and their guides. The act of tourists recognising Aboriginal people as holders of knowledge (as knowledgeable) allows Aboriginal people to represent themselves as authoritative: to claim authority. In Australian domestic tourists, on the other hand, this knowledge is recognised as absent, but this absence also opens up space for self-representation because it provides an opportunity for them to relate to Aboriginal people in a role of novice, and subsequently access Indigenous cultural knowledge in a quest of self-indigenisation. This argument of 'settler indigenisation' through the engagement of Australian tourists with Indigenous tourism builds on the literature on post-colonial Australian national and settler descendant identity, and the critique on the foundations of Australian national identity that originated with public academics such as Stanner (1968) and that continues to this day (see Lattas 1992; Hage 1998; Reynolds 1999; Elder 2007; Healy 2008; Galliford 2010).

Finally, this paper will equally illustrate the necessity to consider both knowing and not-knowing, and to apprehend them

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<sup>2</sup> Leach and Davis (2012) also outline how knowledge recognition processes are heavily influenced by the western definition of knowledge as something that has an effect on nature. Yet, the Indigenous guides I met tended to indeed use this western definition as a point for the recognition of their knowledge by the tourists.

not simply in terms of an opposition by means of which one is seen as the negation of the other, but also in terms of how a dialectic between knowledge and ignorance is played out in specific sets of social and political relations (Dilley 2010, 176-177; see also Dilley and Kirsch 2015).

As we will see, Indigenous tour guides' claims of knowledge, or the role of teacher they play, would not be possible without assertions about the tourists' ignorance, or without the role of novices adopted by the tourists.

### **Tourism on Bardi Country**

Bardi and Jawi people live on the coast of the northern tip of the Dampier Peninsula, in Western Australia. They represent two different Indigenous linguistic groups living today in shared communities<sup>3</sup>; they share the same kinship system, as well as the same Law and religious ceremonies (Robinson 1973, 106; Bagshaw 1999, 18–20; Glaskin 2002, 41). They are collectively recognised by the state as the traditional owners for the Bardi and Jawi Native Title determination area, which was determined by the Federal Court of Australia on 30 November 2005 (*Sampi v State of Western Australia* [2005] FCA 777)<sup>4</sup>. The Bardi and Jawi people of these communities represent a population of about five hundred spread over three main settlements and several surrounding outstations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017)<sup>5</sup>. They refer to themselves as either Bardi, Jawi or Bardi-Jawi people. In this paper, they will be referred to as 'Bardi and Jawi people'. Bardi-Jawi will be used in reference to their shared country, practices or communities.

Most tourist activities take place on an area of freehold land returned in 1986 by the government to the Bardi and Jawi people. Overlooking the ocean, the bush, and the coast covered in vibrant red ochre and white beaches, this site is located on top of a red cliff and offers some of the most spectacular views in the Kimberley region. In the late 1980s, Bardi and Jawi people turned the site into a tourist camp jointly owned by the communities of Djarindjin and One Arm Point (Ardyaloon). Today, *Kooljaman at Cape Leveque* is one of the most successful Indigenous-owned and -operated tourist ventures in Australia, visited by more than fifty thousand tourists each year. A board of directors comprised of Bardi and Jawi people operate the site and supervise a staff of non-Indigenous managers who run the place on a daily basis. The camp provides a restaurant, several campsites, a dozen safari-tents as well as a few cabins and beach shelters. Visitors can also participate in half-day cultural tours

<sup>3</sup> For more information on how these two linguistic groups came together, see Glaskin 2002, 2018 and Robinson 1973.

<sup>4</sup> This determination granted Bardi and Jawi people the 'right of possession and occupation as against the whole world', meaning, among other things, the exclusive right to refuse, regulate and control the use and enjoyment of their land by others on the mainland. The 2005 decision was appealed to the Full Court in 2010 to include exclusive rights on the islands as well as non-exclusive rights to the ocean (within the limit of three nautical miles) (see *Sampi on behalf of the Bardi and Jawi people v State of Western Australia* [2010] FCAFC 26).

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/ILOC50100201?opendocument&navpos=220](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/ILOC50100201?opendocument&navpos=220), and [http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/ILOC50100205?opendocument&navpos=220](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/ILOC50100205?opendocument&navpos=220), last consulted 03.31.2017

with activities such as bushwalking, fishing, spear making or mud crabbing. In Kooljaman, tourists are offered three different Indigenous guided tours: a ‘bush tucker tour’ and a ‘spear-making tour’, which are operated by a senior Bardi man from a neighbouring community, and a ‘tag along tour’ driven by another member of the same community. A ‘cultural talk’ is also given weekly by the Bardi-Jawi Rangers. Other members of Bardi and Jawi communities operate other (although much smaller and family-based) tourist camps where visitors can stay and go on tours that are very similar to those available in Kooljaman.

Until recently, visitors were mainly international tourists. For several years, Bardi and Jawi people worked, for example, as tour guides for groups of students participating in an exchange program between the University of Notre Dame, a private Catholic University in the United States and The University of Western Australia in Perth. Today, non-Indigenous domestic tourists represent about seventy percent of Kooljaman total tourist numbers. This recent change in tourist population, (Bardi tour guides state that this change occurred over the past five years) is highly valued by Bardi and Jawi tour guides, who view the increase of Australian visitors as an opportunity to build awareness about Aboriginal people among their fellow citizens. A Bardi tour guide explained this to me in the following terms in 2015: ‘Australian people, more than any other people, need to learn about Aboriginal people’.

The predominance of domestic tourists in the context of this research contrasts with other authors’ conclusions that state that ‘Indigenous tourism is generally more attractive to international tourists than domestic tourists’ (Vermeersch, Sanders, Wilson 2016; see also Ruhanen, Whitford, McLennan 2015; Ryan and Huyton 2002). Similar to the case studied by Vermeersch, Sanders and Wilson (2016), the Australian visitors in my case study are predominantly ‘experienced’ travellers, and some of them have experienced Indigenous tourism before. Some tourists I have met have even lived or worked in Aboriginal communities. At the same time, most of them (including all ages and professions), stress and regret their lack of familiarity with Aboriginal people. This aspect again contrasts with other authors’ findings, which emphasise that ‘Australians often perceive that they have knowledge of Aboriginal culture and thus do not need to participate in Indigenous cultural activities’ (Vermeersch, Sanders, Wilson 2016, 186; see also Buutljens, Gale, White 2010). As we will see below, domestic tourists in Bardi-Jawi guided tours predominantly take the opposite view: they blame the Australian school programs for not ‘being told’ and ‘not knowing much’ about Aboriginal people.

## **Teaching Environmental Knowledge**

One day, on the Dampier Peninsula, one hundred and twenty kilometres north of Broome (Western Australia), a senior Bardi man is standing with a group of Australian visitors on the bank of a tidal creek, his eyes firmly kept on the horizon. Pointing to the creek and the incoming tide, he explains: ‘This is our supermarket out there. Bardi people, we don’t eat kangaroo. Today you’re gonna learn how to spear a fish, and you’re gonna learn about Bardi people’. Patiently peeling the bark of a wooden stick, he



is watching over two men from Melbourne who are trying to straighten the wood of the acacia tree that will be used to make the fishing spears they will have to use to catch their lunch. The group of visitors, five adults and three children from Perth and Melbourne, has been instructed to make a coal fire, and their guide showed them how to soften the wood of the acacia sticks with the heat to give them a straight shape. Now, the senior Bardi man has sharpened the thinnest extremity of his own spear with a small hatchet, and shows the group how to attach a metal rod against it with a thick fishing nylon wire, before adding aloud: ‘Now. This is how we do it!’ (Extract from field notes, August 2015)

Aboriginal tour guides with whom I worked describe tourism as an activity of ‘sharing’ and ‘teaching’. During their tours, they demonstrate some of their hunting or fishing techniques and *savoir-faire*, along with other practices of natural resources management, and provide the visitors with local Indigenous interpretations of the landscape or the medicinal and culinary uses of bush plants. The tours are principally based on the display of local ‘ways of knowing’ (Harris 2007, 327), or the means through which the guides present how Bardi and Jawi people interpret and interact, on a daily basis, with their social and physical environment through an embodied engagement with it (Marchand, 2010). Indeed, most of this knowledge is passed on to the visitors through a bodily, sensory experience (also see for instance Veijola and Jokinen, 1994). In this context, knowledge refers to an ‘ongoing process’ (Harris 2007, 4), something to be grasped in action or in ‘fields of practice’ (Ingold 2001, 114). This practice involves that tourists are asked to reproduce the techniques performed by their guides. They have to listen, but are also invited to touch, taste and feel. The ways in which Bardi and Jawi tour guides teach the tourists are comparable to an ‘education of attention’ (Gibson 1979), where skills and meanings ‘are not so much constructed as discovered’ (Ingold 2000, 22). This aspect is similar to what Wergin (2016) describes for the Lurujarri Trail, another Indigenous tourism experience taking place a hundred kilometers south of Bardi country. Here as well, visitors’ experience depends on their ‘active engagement’ and relies ‘on what Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants “do on country”’ (Wergin 2016, 491).

Yet Bardi and Jawi tour guides have chosen to teach their ecological practices with the explicit purpose of fostering an understanding of who they are, that is, as a way to represent themselves. This objective is one of the first elements they explain to their visitors: ‘Today you’re gonna learn about Bardi people and how they survive off this great country’ (a Bardi guide during a tour, 2011). Making their ways of knowing tangible, Bardi and Jawi tour guides first and foremost produce discourses about who their people more generally are and who they are not. As other authors have shown in relation to songs and dances cross culturally (Mitchell 1956; Kapferer 1995; Magowan 2000; Henry 2012), performances of fishing skills, or narratives about the landscape by Bardi and Jawi tour guides, can be interpreted as embodied cultural expressions as well as reflexive and political discourses about their own identity. Indeed, the guides accompany their performances with discourses about identity and self, illustrated through mythical stories or personal anecdotes related to particular sites, as well as through depictions of the beings (human and non-human) who

inhabit these places, all of which explained to be grounded on practices performed for thousands of years.

Moreover, in asking visitors to reproduce practices Indigenous guides depict as the techniques, movements and inferences they use in their own daily lives, they encourage their visitors to experience what it means to be a Bardi or Jawi person. In doing so, they use interactions with tourists as a way to represent themselves. They also apprehend these interactions as an opportunity to make the ‘audience’ experience and engage with this process of self-representation. As I stated earlier, this process is the result of a coproduction because it involves cultural reinterpretations and the inclusion of visitors’ understanding of Indigenous ways of being. Moreover, in a general context in which Aboriginal people are still depicted as being people in need of education, help and assistance, Bardi and Jawi guides challenge existing representations of ‘Aboriginality’ that often accompany the framing of Indigenous matters as an ‘issues’ needing a solution in mainstream media and political debate (Dalley and Martin 2015; also see Altman and Hinkson 2010).

Indeed, through the enactment of their ecological knowledge, Bardi and Jawi guides first and foremost represent themselves, and possibly through this, Bardi and Jawi people more generally, as knowledgeable and capable people. To this end, they employ various means to make this knowledge appealing and convincing to non-Indigenous eyes. Bardi and Jawi tour guides imbue their knowledge with value in emphasising its effectiveness, that is, the verifiable effect and impact on nature which was, according to my interactions with Western tourists, a central aspect of the recognition of Indigenous knowledge. For most Western visitors, indeed, ‘knowledge is its effect on nature, because the notion of knowledge we operate makes no sense without “nature on which we can see its effects”’ (Leach and Davis 2012, 220-221). To support this view, Bardi and Jawi tour guides associate their ways of knowing to the idea of their proven capacity of survival, both physical (in the bush) and cultural (in the colonial and postcolonial worlds). Or, they call on the scientific evidence, citing the medical patents that were filed on the use of bush fruits they present to their visitors. Although the guides are saying that their way works better than the skills that the Australian government wants to teach them, they also feel compelled to show that these techniques ‘work’ in ways that would be recognisable to western audiences. For, after all, one can only recognise what he already knows (Glaskin and Dousset 2011). Thus, in order to get their knowledge recognised as such (and as potentially superior to western knowledge), the guides have to work with the western understanding of the notion. Obviously, the economic transactions involved in the tourist display of Bardi-Jawi knowledge also add a monetary value to it.

Bardi and Jawi tour guides equally stress the superiority of their ways of knowing, compared to non-Indigenous Australians’ knowledge, in contrast to the skills they are asked to develop by policy makers: ‘I know about the mainstream, but the knowledge of the mainstream cannot tell me how to survive’ (a senior Bardi guide, during a tour, 2015). In a context where policies and bureaucratic definitions of Aboriginal identity are often based on the idea of a deficit or a gap to be filled (Poirier 2009, 102, 104), Bardi and Jawi guides also emphasise their ability to learn and adapt to ‘whitefella ways’, while non-Indigenous people fail to do so

with regard to Indigenous cultures. In June 2012, for example, a guide addressed a group of Australian tourists with the following words:

Now, I'm gonna teach you how to make a spear and how to spear a fish. My daughter is actually the best hunter of our community. It's a shame my little one, her little brother, is not here, he would have shown you how to do it. Now, can *you* do it?

The tourists stayed silent, not daring to answer. The guide went on:

How much do you know about this country? Your country, too. Australia. How many languages here? How many skin groups? How much do you know about Aboriginal people? Very little? I suppose it took us only fifty years to learn how to live as a White man. But you guys still don't know how to survive in the bush (a senior Bardi guide to a group of visitors, 2012).

As other authors argue in relation to other contexts (Bunten 2008, 2010, 2011, 2014; Stocker 2007), tourism is a way for Indigenous people to challenge existing structures of power while asserting their rights to exist in the contemporary world on their own terms' (Bunten 2011, 77), as well as to represent themselves 'authentically' (Mackley-Crump 2016, 173). For Bardi and Jawi people, it is also a way to represent themselves as authoritative. As we shall see below, I contend that in teaching their ecological knowledge to their visitors, the tour guides equally assert a form of superiority and power. In this sense, Bardi and Jawi guides are perhaps less concerned with the content of their own discourses than they are with the process of their production.

### **The Role of Teacher and the Assertion of an Indigenous Form of Power**

Kooljaman at Cape Leveque. A group of Australian tourists, eight adults and six children, wait for their guide to arrive. They were supposed to depart for a 'Tag Along Tour' half an hour ago. The adults start to get impatient and moody, when their guide, a Bardi man, dressed in worn out shorts, a black shirt and a pair of thongs, emerges from nowhere with a large grin on his face and a coffee in his hand, and starts shaking their hands energetically.

'Hi everybody!'

(the tourists, hesitantly) – Hi...

The guide asks the group to lower the tyre pressure of their big, new and heavily equipped off-road vehicles, before jumping into his own old rusted Toyota, still firmly holding his coffee. The tourists follow him as best as they can. Some get stranded in the sand and it takes all the skills and humour of their guide to help them out and keep going. Surreptitiously railing against the difficulties, yet not managing to remove the smiles off their faces, the tourists finally get out of their cars and happily join their

guide, already sitting on the sand. Dispersed and noisy at first, they suddenly settle down, and listen attentively when their guide starts talking:

‘Today I will show you how to catch a crab in the mangroves. As well as a few other things. My people have been living here for thousands of years. We still practice the same Law and culture. Our young people still go through initiations every year. But I cannot tell you about that. It belongs to the Law. We don’t talk about the Law’.

(Extract of field notes, August 2015)

While Bardi and Jawi tour guides are willing to share some of their ecological ways of knowing with tourists, their tours also engage with a political economy of knowledge, comprised of a control of visitors’ access to knowledge. This control is structured through the notion of ‘teaching’. Aboriginal tour guides do not share everything with tourists. They choose what to show or tell, as well as the way to do so. The guides explain, as we have seen in the example above, that there are things that cannot be told. That which belongs to an area of restricted knowledge related to their Law and ceremonies, a domain which is regarded as ‘sacred’ by the group, has to remain untold and unknown by all but the fully-initiated men. In doing so, the guides reproduce in the tourist context an asymmetry that is observed within their own communities, defining the authority of older men over women and over younger people (Keen 1994, 254).

Guides also play with the dialectic between knowledge and ignorance when engaging in the relationship with the tourists. Bardi and Jawi tour guides employ various means to control, limit and regulate tourists’ access to such knowledge. The guides equally retain information by rendering it difficult to understand. Much like the Native Americans in Bunten’s (2010, 301) case study, who use a ‘careful balance of sharing and secrecy’ to control their self-representation, Aboriginal guides use, for instance, local words and narratives, or mythical references with which visitors are not familiar, and thus assert and secure ownership of knowledge as well as express a form of authority and power.

The form of power asserted by the guides, in so doing, is reinforced by the explicit role of ‘teacher’ they adopt during the tours, a role that necessarily entails the enactment of hierarchical relations between them and the participants. For example, one guide often called tourists his ‘students’ and explained that he was ‘working hard on their brains’. He asked them to listen and focus, and kept testing their attention during the tour, or kindly mocked them when they struggled to move around in the mangroves or could not understand what they were told.

Bardi or Jawi tour guides grant access to their knowledge based on merit and a will to learn and therefore on the disposition of tourists to adopt the ‘novice’ role. Tourists are asked to prove that they are willing to make an effort to understand. They have to listen, taste and try when they are asked to. They are in Marchand’s (2010a, 8) sense, ‘subordinated to the expert status of [their] instructor’, who also directs their sight and most of their movements through

the education of their senses and bodies in the environment.<sup>6</sup> Visitors are also tested and pushed beyond their ‘comfort zone’, having, for example, to follow their guide and walk for hours in the sun or in the mud of the mangrove. In this respect, Bardi and Jawi guides also place tourists in a relation of dependence because tourists not only rely on ‘their’ Aboriginal guides to access knowledge and learn about Indigenous culture, they also depend on them in relation to material aspects, such as dealing with the local climate (the heat), and other aspects (driving off-road, or walking in the mud).

In the context of an enduring paternalistic domination of the state (Lattas and Morris 2010), Bardi and Jawi people could very much be seen as reversing a relation of power in this context (Travesi 2017). Tour guides, however, do not really seek to dominate their ‘students’ and accompany their practices with humour and self-derision. Moreover, the role of ‘teacher’ is not the only one they choose to play. Guides also like to act as mediators or translators, and are concerned with reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous views or experiences, trying for example to translate more general Bardi-Jawi aspirations or concepts such as why it is important to *look after country*.

Yet, Bardi and Jawi guides also use the authority inherent in their position as ‘teachers’ to stress what they expect from visitors in return for the knowledge they provide: respect (although Bardi-Jawi economic expectations from tourism are obviously also significant). The guides consider the notion of respect as an important motivation for engaging in tourism. This consideration goes beyond the guides, as a member of a Bardi community told me in 2011: ‘Tourism for me is teaching people that come to my country to respect my country’. Thus, a good tour is one during which the tourists listen, ask questions and do what they are told:

It was a very good tour! They [the tourists] asked a lot of questions. They tried and tasted things. They were willing to learn, to understand. To show respect.

(a senior Bardi guide, 2010)

Yet Bardi and Jawi guides do not only expect respect and participation from the tourists on an interpersonal level. They also expect tourists to respect the decisions Bardi and Jawi communities make more generally to enforce the respect of ‘country’, such as restrictions on access to certain portions of land.

My mum’s mother, she’s a Bardi woman. Just down the tracks, that’s my father’s country. This is my land here. And this is my story for this land. That’s the way we lived for generations and it is about the Dreamtime stories and how we connect to country and why the land is so important to us. Because it gives us everything that we need. (a Bardi senior guide to a group of tourists, 2012)

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Urry (1990), for a discussion of power and the gaze in tourism.

During their tours, Bardi and Jawi tour guides explain that their spiritual and genealogical connections with land entitles them to traditional authority to speak about it. In demonstrating their extensive environmental knowledge and their close relationship with the land, they also provide an impression of having a natural ability to look after ‘country’ and the legitimacy to talk about it. This is at least the impression that tourists are left with, as the example of a lady from Melbourne demonstrates: ‘We have a lot to learn from them to become more ecofriendly!’ Through the relationship tour guides build with their visitors, they also enable the members of their communities ‘to speak for’ themselves: to make decisions and enforce them, such as granting access to portions of land to tourists or not. For example, during the tours, Bardi or Jawi guides ask their guests to respect the restrictions on land access that have been decided by their communities:

Everyone is welcome here, but there are rules and protocols to be respected. There are significant places that even we do not attend. When arriving at a community, please go straight to the office for permit. Don’t go around the community, there are people living there. And there are signs at certain times to be respected, meaning there are ceremonies happening. Except for that, please feel free to do anything. But ask first (a Bardi-Jawi Ranger to a group of tourists, 2012)<sup>7</sup>.

The guides also reassert, in the name of the wider Bardi-Jawi community, its authority over land matters. They do so by reproducing the same rationale that it had to undertake when seeking the recognition of its legal land rights and interests by the Federal Court of Australia. Bardi and Jawi people had indeed to prove the continuity of their traditional laws and customs on the land being claimed before their claim to Native Title could be partially recognised in 2005 (*Sampi v State of Western Australia* [2005] FCA 777), and fully recognised following their appeal to the Full Court in 2010 (*Sampi on behalf of the Bardi and Jawi people v State of Western Australia* [2010] FCAFC 26). Indeed, tour guides often insist that the tourists witness the traces of the antiquity and continuity of their people’s ongoing relationships with the land as they are inscribed in the landscape. They show tourists where their ancestors used to eat their food, or on which paths they used to travel, leaving shell middens or footprints on the rocks behind them. In doing so, Bardi and Jawi tour guides appear to make explicit their status as Traditional Owners, as well as their exclusive rights to refuse, regulate and control the use and enjoyment of their land. Although asserting the right to ‘speak for country’ is by no means an artefact of the tourist encounter, Bardi and Jawi find in tourism an opportunity to seek a broader public recognition of their claims (Travesi 2015).

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<sup>7</sup> Bardi and Jawi Rangers do not work as tour guides. However, they give talks at Kooljaman about once a week, with the aim to raise the tourists’ awareness about Indigenous local practices and the restrictions that have been decided by the communities with respect to access to land. Their audience includes both participants and non-participants to Indigenous-guided tours.

### **Australian Tourists' Politics of (not-)Knowing and Claims of Ignorance**

Aboriginal tour guides' assertion of authority is largely legitimised by the tourists themselves. Many tourists recognise that there is a lot of knowledge to absorb, and that it is hard to remember everything they are taught or shown. The atmosphere can also become tense when tourists are questioned once again about the knowledge they do not have, as it happened in 2013 when a tourist from Melbourne exclaimed: 'We are all just guessing here!' Still, visitors appreciate the educative aspect of the tour and what they regard as their tour guide's pedagogic skills. More importantly, they justify their guide's authority by stressing their own ignorance and need to learn. One day, a retired woman from Melbourne, who had just been criticised and gently mocked by the tour guide for not being able to answer the question he had asked, turned towards me and exclaimed desperately: 'He's right! I don't know anything! That's why I'm here. To learn! They are right to be harsh with us. We deserve it'.

I first contemplated the possibility of interpreting this behaviour as a playful stance, and the Australian tourists' interaction with their Indigenous hosts as a sole role-playing game. For some authors (Graburn 1983; Ritzer and Liska 1997), after all, fun, play and entertainment should be considered as a major, if not the main concern for tourists. Yet, Australian tourists take this 'game' rather seriously. Playful, noisy and dispersed only minutes before the tour starts, both adults and children become very serious, focused and considerate when their guide appears in front of them. Depending on the guide's attitude, they would ask questions and be willing to try or taste anything, or they would stay quiet and attentive.

In fact, most Australian participants of the tours explained their presence not just motivated by a desire to learn, but also by a lack of knowledge. Indeed, the vast majority of visitors with whom I spoke admitted that they participated in an Indigenous guided tour either in order to 'learn about the culture', 'to learn about Aboriginal life', or 'to get another perspective'. According to other studies of Australian attitudes to Indigenous tourism (for instance, Vermeersch, Sanders, Wilson 2016; Buutljens, Gale, White 2010; Ruhanen, Whitford, McLennan 2015) many Australians consider themselves to have gained sufficient familiarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through schooling or employment, making Indigenous tourism unattractive. In my experience, however, most Australian visitors I met on Bardi country lament that they lack opportunities to interact with Aboriginal people and regret that they could not learn more about their cultures or history at school. Some authors, who have commented on Australians' assertions of lack of knowledge, tend to regard them as an excuse or a justification to explain a national inclination to 'forget Aborigines' (Healy, 2008) in a context in which they sometimes admit to experience difficulties in dealing with their colonial history and what is depicted in the media as the contemporary poor living conditions of Indigenous people. According to Healy (2008), this stance belongs to a 'rhetoric of "doing away with" Aborigines – their erasure as subjectivities and intelligences from history and contemporary Australia' (Morrissey in Healy 2008, 9-10; see also Stanner (1968) or Reynolds (1999), for a critique of the Australian silence about Aboriginal people).

In a context where Australians are sometimes regarded as seeking to define and identify with a national identity which the main characteristic would be to remain open and undecided

(Lattas 1992; Hage 1998), while also being based on ‘the dispossession, murder and (ongoing) oppression of the original owners of their country’ (Galliford 2010, 232), ignorance of Indigenous cultures can be seen as allowing people to better deal with feelings of shame or guilt. Driven by mixed feelings of shame, pity and desire for Aboriginal people (Povinelli 1998), or the imperative to comply with a national ideology of self-examination promoted by the political discourses of reconciliation (Galliford 2010, 232), some non-Indigenous Australians seek to understand who Indigenous people ‘truly’ are. Discourses of ignorance or not-knowing can thus equally support a will to know (in opposition to a will to forget). In this respect, tourists sometimes explain their participation in an Indigenous guided tour as being part of an educational and pedagogic project: ‘We came here so our children know and maybe they can do better than us’ (a tourist from Melbourne, 2012).

According for Galliford (2010, 228, 229), Indigenous tourism meets with the desire of non-Indigenous Australians to identify with the country’s first inhabitants in order to legitimise their own presence, or ‘certify’ their occupation of the land, and to find ‘another (an/Others)’ way of viewing and understanding not just Aboriginality but themselves’. In what is regarded as an ‘identity crisis’ context (White 1981; Stratton 1998; Elder 2007; Galliford 2010), some of the Australian tourists I met indeed expressed the need to identify with positive images of ‘Aboriginality’, such as those that are used in national tourist promotion (Waitt 1999) which advertise Indigenous peoples as living in close harmony with nature. As a woman from Perth explained to me, in reproducing and appropriating some of their Indigenous guides’ environmental practices, Australian tourists also hope ‘to feel a bit more part of the land’; or to borrow an Aboriginal phrase, ‘to belong somewhere’. In other words, learning Aboriginal practices is understood as strengthening non-Indigenous Australians’ relationship with, and sense of belonging to their country. Most tourists I met equally lamented that they had ‘no history’, and explained that building a relationship with, and learning from, Aboriginal people made them feel like they could connect to and share their history. Thus, identifying with and appropriating what in public knowledge is often depicted as one of the most ancient living cultures on earth, contributes for Australian tourists to reconcile with the past and to substitute a history of colonisation with an ancestral native history.

The will to identify with Aboriginal people leads the tourists to search for intimacy; an intimacy ‘borne of intercultural engagement’ (Galliford 2010, 230). During my fieldwork, Australian visitors looked to build a personal relationship with their guide. They tried, for example, to spend some time with him alone, apart from the rest of the group, to seek advice about good fishing spots along the coast, and to discuss aspects of their lives, also actively and explicitly searching for things they have in common. I witnessed several scenes where tourists would even look for genealogical connections with their guides. One day, in 2012, a tour guide was explaining that his great-grand-father was an English settler who lived up the coast for a while, when a woman from Melbourne exclaimed: ‘Your great-grand-father came from England? Wait a minute. He’s got the same name as a cousin of mine!’ This lady was then delighted when she heard the guide answer: ‘Yeah, you never know, we could be related!’



## Conclusion

My intention in this paper was to show how the consideration of the notion of knowledge, its usages and meaning, and more particularly the politics of knowing and not-knowing that unfold in the context of tourist interactions would benefit an analysis of Indigenous tourism in Australia.

I have presented the case of tourist activities and interactions developed by Bardi and Jawi people in the Northwestern Kimberley region of Australia, to illustrate how both Indigenous tour guides and non-Indigenous tourists draw on conceptions of knowing and not-knowing, claims of knowledge and assertions of ignorance, to adopt two different although convergent positions. These positions are both original responses to a broader context where Aboriginal people are viewed in terms of their inabilities, and where non-Indigenous people are asked to reconcile with their past.

In teaching their environmental knowledge, their ancestral history and the features of their country to their visitors, Bardi and Jawi mainly seek new ways to represent themselves and to foster non-Indigenous Australians' understanding of Aboriginal people and cultures in general. Australian visitors are asked to build this understanding through action and through their bodies, reproducing the movements and practices of their guides. Adopting the role of teachers equally allows Bardi and Jawi guides to reassert their right and authority to speak about themselves as well as take and enforce their communities' decisions regarding their land and future. While the tour guides describe their tourism occupations as activities of sharing and teaching, they also define tourism as an opportunity 'to build self-confidence and a capacity to speak', and often encourage their own children to accompany them on their tours. Following Mackley-Crump (2016, 159) teaching tourists can thus be seen as 'vehicles for cultural transmission and identity creation' (see also, Condevaux 2009; Magowan 2000; Henry 2012). Yet, the guides' will to build their children's 'capacity to speak' on behalf of their communities through tourism illustrates that tourism can also be regarded as a particular setting for the transmission and practice of a political consciousness (Tonkinson 1999).

In the context of my research, Australian tourists sought new forms of awareness. This awareness was achieved through a claim of ignorance regarding Aboriginal ways of lives and history. Accepting a position of 'novice', or a role of 'apprentice' towards their guide, contributes to construct a revised form of self-representation and identity. Thus, claiming ignorance and asking to learn from and about Aboriginal people is also a means to deal with feelings of shame or guilt related to the colonial past. In so doing, we could speak of non-Indigenous tourists being motivated by a need to achieve a form of self-indigenisation.

Although driven by different concerns, the roles played by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the context of tourism meet to become mutually constitutive and allow to experiment new forms of hierarchies. The roles adopted by Aboriginal people and their Australian guests illustrate how any achievement of self-representation or empowerment in tourism is always the result of a coproduction. In this sense, this paper has shown that investigating Indigenous and non-Indigenous interactions through a perspective interested in the politics of knowing and not knowing, can cast new light on the processes of self-representation and empowerment.

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