



The politics of knowledge as a tourist attraction

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THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AS A TOURIST ATTRACTION.

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Abstract

The past ten years have seen an increasing interest in the politics of knowledge production in tourism studies. However, tourists' hosts' politics of knowledge, the ways in which tourists' hosts can use local knowledge as both a tourist attraction and a way to negotiate power relationships, are yet to be explored. This article identifies the need for more analysis of the political uses of cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction, reporting on an ethnographic study of the politics of knowledge unfolded by an Aboriginal group of Western Australia in the context of their tour guiding activities. It will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the political conditions and potentials for local cultural knowledge (re)production and utilization in tourism.

Keywords

Power; knowledge; indigenous; Australia; Bardi Jawi

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INTRODUCTION

Recent contributions to tourism studies have been increasingly interested in the notion of knowledge and the analysis of the relations of power associated to the production of tourism knowledge (see for instance Ateljevic, Pritchard & Morgan, 2011; Belhassen & Caton, 2009; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). In this sense, the politics of tourism knowledge production are an increasingly well-discussed subject of inquiry and concern in tourism studies. The level of involvement of Indigenous people and epistemologies in the production of this knowledge, for instance, is one among many of the important issues pointed by this literature. The politics of knowledge that can be unfolded by tourists' hosts, however, are far less considered. In this respect, research dedicated to the analysis of local knowledge (the cultural or ecological knowledge of host communities), when this knowledge serves as a tourist attraction are not manifold. Furthermore, the socio-political conditions of the (re)production, circulation and uses of this knowledge in tourist settings, or the ways in which tourists' hosts can use it in order to confront, negotiate or resist existing power relationships are yet to be explored.

Yet, while contributions to tourism studies, and Indigenous tourism studies in particular, have stressed the importance of educating tourists as both a tourists' hosts' aspiration (Galliford, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003) and a promising trend for tourism research and planning (Walker & Moscardo, 2016), authors such as Kjell Olsen (2002) or Mark Galliford (2012) also describe situations where Indigenous tour guides' knowledge and their role of educating tourists can produce or reverse relations of power. Several authors, looking at the relationship between tourism and power, have also deconstructed earlier interpretations of power as something that could almost exclusively been exercised by the tourists (see for instance Cheong & Miller, 2000; Galliford, 2009; Leite & Graburn, 2009). Instead, these authors demonstrate that tourists' hosts are not passive victims of global tourism constraints and that they can equally shape tourists' behaviors (Cohen, 1985; Dahles, 2002; Holloway, 1981).

Although this body of work provides a powerful insight into the relationship between tourists' hosts' knowledge and the power Indigenous hosts can exercise when working as tour guides, there is still a critical need for tourism research to provide more analysis of the uses of local cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction and the relations of power these uses can serve or entail. For these analyses can help us build a better understanding of the political conditions of, and potentials for, local cultural knowledge (re)production and utilization in tourism.

The purpose of this article is to report on an ethnographic study of the politics of knowledge unfolded by Bardi and Jawi people, two Aboriginal groups of Western Australia, in the context of their tour guiding activities as an acknowledgement and contribution to this need. The Bardi-Jawi politics of knowledge will be used as an illustration of the significance of the direct relationship that can be drawn between the utilization of local cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction, or a means to educate tourists, and the relations of power that can unfold in this context. Indeed, this paper will show how, in teaching tourists, Bardi and Jawi tour guides also exercise a form of power and assert an authority to speak which can be seen as a pursuit of their claim to self-definition and self-determination.

This paper will begin with a broad discussion of the existing literature on knowledge and power in tourism studies, followed by an examination of the politics of knowledge unfolded by the Bardi and Jawi. It will first describe the growing interest of tourism studies for knowledge as an agent of change and for the politics of tourism knowledge production. This article will also stress the significance of power as a well-discussed subject in tourism studies, sometimes associated with the role of tour guides, before pointing to the literature's failure to consider the role of tourists' hosts' knowledge and its use as both a tourist attraction and a political resource. The need for more analysis of the relationship between the use of tourists' hosts' knowledge as a tourist attraction and the (re)production of relations of power that this use can entail will then be emphasized before the research case study, its setting, conduct and outcomes are presented.

KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN TOURISM STUDIES

There has been a growing interest for knowledge in tourism studies in the past ten years, with several recent publications dedicated to the analysis of tourists' knowledge and skills (see for instance Huang, Gursoy & Xu, 2014; Tsaur, Yen & Chen, 2010) or the politics of knowledge management in tourism (cf. Cooper, 2006; Paraskevas, Altinay, McLean & Cooper, 2013) and a stronger focus on the politics of the production of tourism knowledge as both an epistemological and ethical concern (see for instance Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2011; Belhassen & Caton, 2009; Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Fullagar & Wilson, 2012; Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013; Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011; Pyo, 2012; Tribe, 2006; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016; Xiao & Smith, 2007).

The politics of tourism knowledge production

Many scholars working in tourism studies increasingly emphasize the need to include more of Indigenous or non-Western knowledge and epistemologies in the production of knowledge about tourism (Hollinshead, 1992; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013; Tribe, 2007; Whitaker, 1999), calling for a decolonization of social sciences (Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008; Grosfuguel, 2007) and tourism studies (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Hollinshead, 2013).

Tourism studies also call for, and proved to support, more research and concern for community well-being (see for instance Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003; Hinch & Butler, 2007; Nielsen & Wilson, 2012; Weaver, 2010), issues of ethics (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Jovicic, 2014; Weaver, 2014) and self-determination or empowerment in tourism (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2016). Eventually, there is also a growing number of research interested in Indigenous views on tourism (Berno, 1999; Bunten, 2010; Carr, 2007; Greathouse-Amador, 2005; Strickland-Munro & Moore, 2013; Theodossopoulos, 2010; Walker & Moscardo, 2016).

While it is widely acknowledged that tourism has often been used “as an economic development tool reflecting the rise of neo-liberal approaches to both tourism and community development” to which Indigenous people had to adapt (Walker & Moscardo, 2016, p. 1244; see also Greathouse-Amador, 2005; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006), tourism, and more particularly Indigenous tourism, is also increasingly seen as a “powerful social force” (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) contributing to foster cross-cultural understanding and tourists’ attitudinal change (Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland, 2011; Christie & Mason, 2003; Galliford, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003, 2005; Scheyvens, 2002; Uriely, Reichel & Ron, 2003; Walker & Moscardo, 2016; Weaver & Lawton, 2007) or to promote peace and justice (Higgins-Desbiolles 2003, 2006; Scheyvens, 2002; Wearing, 2001).

Knowledge in tourism is thus also seen as an agent of change. Wearing (2001), for instance, describes volunteer tourism as having the potential to induce change in the views or attitudes of tourists and their hosts (see also Scheyvens, 2002; Sin, 2009; Uriely Reichel & Ron, 2003). In Australia, Freya Higgins-Desbiolles (2003, p. 35) argues that Indigenous tourism can “contribute to the socio-cultural developments of a nation” and “foster social justice and reconciliation within a divided society”. Using the Deleuze and Guattarian’s (1987, p. 256) concept of becoming, Mark Galliford (2012, pp. 404, 420) examines how tourists can indeed “become open to re-evaluating their previous thoughts, attitudes and opinions on Aboriginality” and “reflect more on fresh possibilities for their own subjective, *and* national, presence and belonging”. Eventually, Kayne Walker and Giana Moscardo (2016, pp. 1256, 1248) also demonstrate in their description of the interpretive practices of Indigenous tour guides on

Stanley Island, in north-east Australia, that Indigenous tourist experience has the potential to provide “positive learning experiences”, to promote “transformative change” and “to result in increased cultural cross-cultural awareness and understanding amongst tourists”.

The power of educating tourists

Power and power relations are subjects that have been discussed at length in tourism studies. In early studies, tourism was often seen as an agent of change with negative impacts on local populations (cf. Greenwood, 1972, 1989; Nash, 1989; Nunez, 1963; Smith, 1989) where power was almost exclusively exercised by tourists (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Galliford, 2009; Leite & Graburn, 2009). However, several authors have since demonstrated how tourists’ hosts could also influence tourists, direct their gaze and their understanding or shape their behavior (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Cohen, 1985; Dahles, 2002; Holloway, 1981). The role of tour guides (Cohen, 1985; Holloway, 1981; Salazar, 2008, 2010) or tourist information centers (Wong & McKercher, 2011) as cultural or knowledge *brokers* has been a well explored topic, sometimes with a political dimension attached to it (see Dahles, 2002; Ong, Ryan & McIntosh, 2014).

While the first studies drew on the concept of acculturation (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936), assuming that “tourist destinations in the ‘global South’ —viewed as the powerless, the poor, the colonized— were reacting to overwhelming outside pressures from the rich, metropolitan North” (Leite & Graburn, 2009, p. 40), more recent research show how “instead of accepting their predicament, tourists’ hosts can be proactive and resistant, as they constantly negotiate and contest the direction of development in the pursuit of their rights and interest” (Cheong & Miller, 2000, p. 373), proving that “cultural tourism is more than just a passive tourist product or commodity to be consumed, or ‘cannibalized’ as Dean MacCannell (1992) would have it” (Galliford, 2012, p. 406).

However, the relationship between the power of tourists’ hosts and their use of local cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction has yet to be explored in more depth and detail. Indeed, research dedicated to the analysis of tourists’ hosts’ knowledge and the conditions of its (re)production, circulation and uses by the same hosts, when this knowledge serves as the tourist attraction, are not manifold.

Yet authors such as Freya Higgins-Desbiolles (2003, p. 36) or Mark Galliford (2012, p. 407) stress that Aboriginal tour guides often refer to the idea of educating tourists as the most important aspect of their tours. Kjell Olsen (2002, p. 175-176), in relation to eco-tourism ventures in Kenya, further explains how the skills and knowledge of Maasai tour guides actually

contribute to shape the relationships between the guides and the tourists who feel like they have to subordinate to their guide's leadership. Mark Galliford (2012, pp. 407, 406) identifies a similar situation in Australia where the "positions of power of those with the knowledge and experience", here the position of the tour guides, lead to what the author describes as an "alteration or 'inversion' of power" and the possibility to talk about the "ability of cultural tourism to subvert or overturn the conventionally perceived relationships between the (dominant) tourist subject and (subaltern, subordinate) tourist object".

However, although these authors provide an interesting insight to the importance of knowledge for Indigenous tour guides as something that can be passed on to tourists and to the potential implications of this use of Indigenous knowledge with regard to the (re)production or negotiation of relations of power, they fail to provide a more in-depth or detailed analysis of the relationship between the use of local knowledge as a tourist attraction and the relations of power that this use can entail.

The following section presents and discusses the results of a research that was conducted with Bardi and Jawi people, an Indigenous group of north-western Australia, between 2009 and 2015. These results were consistent with those of Freya Higgins-Desbiolles (2003) or Mark Galliford (2012) in that they showed how Aboriginal tour guides' main aspiration from tourism was to be able to share their knowledge in order to educate tourists. But the research demonstrated how the particular politics of tour guiding entailed by this aspiration also led to the inversion of a relation of power and the assertion of the right and ability of Bardi and Jawi people to speak and enforce decisions about their land and communities by the tour guides.

BARDI JAWI TOURISM: A CASE STUDY

Bardi and Jawi people belong to two Indigenous language groups who live on the northern coast of the Kimberley, a remote region of Western Australia. Their practices, culture and lifestyle are still mostly based on the ocean and they mainly define themselves as *saltwater people*. Bardi and Jawi people got involved with tourism in the 1980s as part of a wider project consisting of an Aboriginal people's return to their ancestral lands, a project they describe as going back to, and looking after, country. This movement was politically supported by the government as part of its former self-determination policy, as long as it was associated with an economic project such as the development of a tourist activity. This section describes the context, aims and methodology of the research that was conducted on the discourses, practices and interactions that define Bardi Jawi tourism activity today.

The research context

Bardi and Jawi-speaking people (today a population of about five hundred people spread over three main communities and several surrounding outstations)¹ originally lived on different *countries* or territories. The Bardi lived on the mainland while Jawi people inhabited the adjacent islands. However, they always shared the same kinship system, as well as the same Law and ceremonies (Bagshaw 1999, pp. 18–20; Glaskin 2002, p. 41; Robinson 1973, p. 106). Today, they are also collectively recognized as the Traditionally Owners for the Bardi 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). The determination of their Native Title granted Bardi and Jawi people the exclusive right to refuse, regulate and control the use and enjoyment of their land by others on the mainland. The case was restated in appeal in 2010 to give them additional exclusive rights on Jawi islands as well as non-exclusive rights to the ocean within the limit of three nautic miles (see *Sampi on behalf of the Bardi and Jawi people v State of Western Australia* [2010] FCAFC 26).

In 1986, the Western Australian government agreed to give a particular land area back to Bardi and Jawi people as freehold, provided that they had a development project associated to it. The Bardi Jawi turned it into a tourist place jointly owned by two of their communities. Once a campground, *Kooljaman at Cape Leveque* became one of the most successful Indigenous tourist camps in Australia, hosting about fifty thousand visitors a year. Bardi and Jawi people own and operate the place, but they employ non-Indigenous managers to run it on a daily basis. The camp offers campsites and accommodations such as safari-tents, cabins, or beach shelters, a restaurant, as well as Indigenous guided tours. These tours are based on activities like hunting, gathering and fishing, the local Indigenous interpretation of the landscape, and information about the local culture and history. The tours also allow visitors to access normally restricted land. In this respect, Bardi Jawi tourism is a tourism in which Indigenous people are “directly involved”, both “through control” and “by having their culture serve as the essence of the

¹ According to the 2017 Australian population census (Australian Bureau of Statistics : 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, last consulted 03.31.2017)

attraction” (Hinch and Butler, 2007, p. 5). There are also many other, although much smaller, tourist camps owned and operated by Bardi and Jawi people on the outstations surrounding the communities. They generally offer the same tours as *Kooljaman* as well as some kind of accommodation. Visitors include international tourists but are mainly Australians.

In a context of ever-growing pressures towards Indigenous involvement in mainstream jobs and other forms of paid employment, Bardi and Jawi people, as other Aboriginal people, regard tourism as an opportunity to generate an economic income and support their communities. But Bardi Jawi tourist camp owners and tour guides also describe tourism as a way to teach their youth about their culture, as well as as a way to “sustain traditional values and a way of life” (a young Bardi man, personal communication). Although Bardi Jawi tourism remains dependent from the resources of the mainstream and the national industry for its survival, Bardi and Jawi people with whom I worked in fact regard tourism as an alternative to mainstream activities or employment opportunities. Where tourism is often perceived by the experts as a binding and prime activity driven by the values and constraints of the market economy (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006), in the Bardi Jawi case, it is regarded as one activity among others, and one that cannot prevent its actors to engage in other occupations.

The Bardi Jawi also resist definitions of tourism that would describe it as an activity involving qualified skills validated by education or training. In fact, Bardi and Jawi people who work in tourism do not have any university degree or school diploma. Some of them would have undertaken some form of training with TAFE (*Australian Technical and Further Education*), a higher education institution delivering certificates in Hospitality and Tourism. Most of the time, however, Bardi and Jawi tour guides or tourist camp owners progressively built their practices on a learning-in-doing basis.

Aims of the research study

In a context where “most tourism discourse emerges not only from the neo-liberal economic paradigm but also from a narrowly ‘western’ set of experiences” (Higgins-Desbiolles 2006, p. 1192), the aim of this research was to identify and convey Aboriginal aspirations and definitions of tourism, and to better understand the meanings and practices associated to it by Indigenous Australians when they chose to engage in a tourism activity. Authors such as Higgins-Desbiolles, Trevorrow and Sparrow (2014; see also Strickland-Munro & Moore, 2013) have indeed demonstrated how previous Indigenous tourism policies encouraging Indigenous people to adapt to mainstream tourism practices have failed because of “a lack of understanding of

Indigenous culture and ignorance of Indigenous community aspirations” (Walker & Moscardo, 2016, p. 1244). This research was thus an attempt to analyze Indigenous tourism as a cultural practice holding particular meanings (Higgins-Desbiolles 2006, p. 1203).

In addition to this, the research was conducted with the permission and active collaboration of the Bardi Jawi Elders and Law Bosses who were also directly involved in tourism as tour guides, tourist camp owners, as well as of the collaboration of other members of the Bardi Jawi communities in which, or near which, tourists would stay or participate in cultural tours. An overall of twenty Bardi and Jawi people participated more directly in this research, of which five were working as tour guides. The following sub-section explains how the research process and its expected outcomes were discussed and negotiated with Bardi Jawi Elders and community members. It also explains how this research was designed and conducted as an attempt to convey Indigenous voices, as well as their aspirations, definitions and concepts.

Methodology

The research presented in this paper is based on a twenty-two months anthropological fieldwork conducted during intermittent periods with Bardi and Jawi people between 2008 and 2015. Its results mostly draw on participant-observation, long-term immersion and interviews, using a qualitative approach to data collection and coding as well as credibility-related techniques (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the following sub-section shows, the researcher’s “engaged interestedness” (Jamal and Hollinshead, 2001, p. 73) as well as her geo-political and body-political location (Grosfuguel 2007) or positionality were also acknowledged as important constitutive aspects of the research process and outcomes.

1.1. Data collection and analysis

The researcher shared the everyday lives of both tourists and Indigenous people, spending several months in Bardi Jawi communities and tourist camps. This allowed her not only to record Bardi Jawi views on tourism, but also to get a better understanding of the broader social, economic and political context of Bardi Jawi tourism. The researcher conducted informal, open-ended discussions, in various settings (during the tours as in the course of Bardi Jawi daily activities such as family gatherings or community events), with Bardi and Jawi tour guides or tourist camp owners, as well as with Indigenous community members who were not directly involved in tourism. Notes from participant-observation and discussions were coded and

analyzed using a research diary to identify tour guides' main definitions of, and aspirations from, tourism².

The researcher also participated in five different tours (a *bush tucker tour*, two *mud crabbing tours* and two *Tag Along tours*), with five different tour guides, accompanying the same tour guides on the same tours over the years, about ten times each year. Tour guides' narratives as well as their interactions with tourists were recorded using notes, as well as audio and video materials that were transcribed and coded using a simple content analysis approach to identify the major themes and characteristics of the tourist interactions.

About eighty one-to-one informal, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with tourists during or after the tours, and a survey using a self-completion questionnaire was handed to them. The questions of both the interviews and the questionnaire were designed following a consultation with Bardi Jawi tour guides and tourist camp owners who wanted to get their feedback. They included various questions such as the following:

- (1) Have you been on an Indigenous tour before?
- (2) What were your expectations from this tour?
- (3) What aspects from the tours did you like the most/dislike?
- (4) How would you describe your experience?

The interviews were either tape-recorded or noted in the form of hand-written notes with consent from the respondents. The answers to both the interviews and the questionnaire were coded and analyzed using a simple content analysis approach.

The research used credibility-related techniques such as prolonged engagement and immersion in the research participants' everyday lives, persistent and participant observation

² In addition to this, about fifteen more formal, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Bardi Jawi people's non-Indigenous partners, advisors and mentors, Kooljaman's managers or the community Council's CEO in order to get a broader understanding of Bardi Jawi tourism, the various actors and interests (directly or indirectly) involved, as well as the model of tourism management and planning on which it was based. These interviews were tape-recorded with consent from the respondents. The recordings were then all transcribed and coded in themes, using a simple content analysis approach (see for instance Ingram, 2005; or Walker and Moscardo, 2016).

or triangulation. Other methods such as ‘transferability’, ‘dependability’ and ‘confirmability’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) were also used. In this respect, the researcher’s interpretations were tested in different settings and contexts, with various participants in order to obtain and compare multiple point of views until a certain form of saturation of information appeared. The process and output of the inquiry were regularly examined using a research diary which allowed an iterative and constant interpretive explanation of the data collected and the research questions.

The research also draws on a constructionist approach to knowledge. An inductive method such as the one promoted by the ‘grounded theory’ (see for instance Strauss et Corbin, 1990) was used, allowing the research questions to evolve according to the researcher’s observations from the ‘field’. The research also relied on a certain form of methodological relativism, privileging the native categories used by the research participants and ‘near-experience’ concepts (Geertz, 1973) rather than (Western) academic concepts.

However, as a research study focusing in experience and meaning, it also necessarily involves something of the ‘messy texts’ described by Tazim Jamal and Keith Hollinshead (2001, p. 71-72; see also Marcus, 1994 p. 573). In this sense and following Claude Levi-Strauss’s (1962) famous metaphor, the results presented in this paper must be understood as resulting from “a bricolage, a ‘complex, dense, reflective, collagelike creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis” (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, p. 3).

1.2. *Epistemological concerns*

This paper also acknowledges the importance of the researcher’s “engaged interestedness” (his specific interest in engaging with the topic) and the need to reflect on the researcher’s “own position, interest and role in the re-telling of the participants’ narratives” (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001 p. 73) as well as on her *geo-political* and *body-political* location (Grosfuguel 2007; see also Denzin 1997, p. 220) as a non-Indigenous, foreign, young, female anthropologist and, to a certain extent, as a tourist (see for instance Crick, 1995; Simoni & McCabe, 2008) with an epistemic location in the Western academy (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015).

Having mainly interests in the means Indigenous people mobilized in the (re)production of their subjectivities, as in the importance the marine environment played with regard to these matters for people who define themselves as *saltwater people*, I had actually no particular interest in tourism when I first started this research but was brought to the subject by the research participants themselves. This research is thus an example of the “cross-cultural

partnerships with, between and among indigenous researchers and allied others” (Roger & Swadener 1999, p. 31) or the designing of collaborative projects that could be more systematically developed in tourism studies (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015). The research project, its topic, aims, status, interest and possible use was discussed with Bardi Jawi people who participated in this research (tour guides and tourist camps owners asked for being able to access and utilise the research’s results in their funding applications and further developments of their activities) and a research agreement stating the conditions of the research conduct was signed with the council of the community in which some of the participants lived.

The research was also conducted in an attempt to render the multiple points of views, narratives, emotions and voices of both the participants and the researcher (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001, pp. 76-77). The research’s aim was to present the participants’ very own definition of tourism, describing it as an activity shaped with their own interests and agendas (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 20) rather than as an ‘industry’ dominated by marketing and neo-liberal definitions (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

In addition to this, the Indigenous politics of knowing and learning unfolded by Bardi and Jawi tour guides in the tourism context also informed the research process and findings that are presented here. Like the tourists, I had to *learn*. Like them, I had to do this through my body and senses. In this sense, the situated particularity of the researcher’s body and emotions (see for instance Emerson, 1981; Bordo, 1993, 1998; Harraway, 1988; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994) played an important role in the construction and conduct of this research. The researcher’s embodied position, however, is not only defined by the researcher’s epistemic location or gender (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001), but also by the research participants. Thus, this research must also be read as the result of the coproduction of situated interactions and reciprocal interpretations resulting from the positions the researcher and her interlocutors attributed to each other.

RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE BARDI JAWI POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND TOUR GUIDING

Conversations with Bardi and Jawi people about tourism involved a wide range of topics including their aspirations to economic independence and sustainable income for their communities, building self-confidence, sustaining traditional values and way of life, or looking after country. However, this research found that their main aspiration from tourism was to be able to teach and educate tourists, and more particularly Australians, and to foster their

understanding of, and respect for, Indigenous people and land. Observations of tour guides interactions with their guides showed that Bardi and Jawi tour guides unfolded particular politics of tour guiding and teaching which also involved the inversion of a relation of power with regard to knowledge as well as the assertion of the right and ability of Bardi and Jawi people to speak and enforce decisions about their land and communities.

Knowledge as a tourist attraction

Bardi Jawi knowledge, which I rather consider, following Harris (2007, p. 327), as “ways of knowing” or the means through which Bardi and Jawi people interpret and interact with their social and physical environment through their embodied engagement with it (Marchand, 2010), appeared to be the main theme of the tours. In addition to information about Bardi people and history, the tours involved indeed the demonstration and experience of fishing and hunting techniques (along with other practices of natural resources management), various ways of interpreting the landscape, as well as explanations about the medicinal and culinary uses of bush plants. Most of it was then passed on to tourists through a bodily, sensitive experience (see for instance Veijola & Jokinen, 1994 on the embodied and corporeal knowledge in tourism) and an education of attention (Ingold, 2000, p. 22). Tourists indeed had to touch, taste, experience and understand by themselves. Knowledge in this sense, was more revealed than given. It also referred to something that could mainly be grasped in action and to an “ongoing process” (Harris, 2007, p. 4) rather than to “a certainty” (Berger & Luckmann, 1971, p. 13). How to make a spear or how to use it to catch a fish for instance is not something that can be known in an instant or something that can be achieved in one way only.

Learning, on the other hand, was also the main theme resulting from tourists’ answers to questionnaires and interviews. In fact, most tourists explained their presence by a desire to learn and a lack of knowledge. Here are some of their answers to the questionnaires tourists were asked to complete concerning their expectations from the tours:

- (1) To learn about the culture
- (2) To learn about Bardi culture and history
- (3) To learn about Bardi people
- (4) To learn about Aboriginal life
- (5) Knowledge of Bardi culture
- (6) To learn more and get another perspective
- (7) To gain a better understanding of Aboriginal culture

(8) To get a new information and a new experience

In this sense, Bardi Jawi tour guides' aspirations from tourism also fit tourists' expectations from the tours. But the research also showed that the tours involved other particular ways of sharing or teaching Bardi Jawi ecological and cultural knowledge, which entailed the instauration of a relation of power between subaltern, ignorant tourists and their knowledgeable, dominant tour guide. These particular ways of sharing and teaching are detailed in the subsection below.

Bardi Jawi politics of teaching and tour guiding

While Bardi and Jawi tour guides were willing to share their knowledge, they also employed different means to control, limit and regulate tourists' access to it. They would explain for instance that "there are things that cannot be told" because they belonged to the sacred and restricted domain of rituals and initiation rites. In so doing, the guides reproduced a practice that is actually observed within their own communities as in other Aboriginal groups where this domain is strictly restricted to fully initiated men and defines the authority of men over women and younger people (Keen, 1994, p. 254). But the guides also retained their knowledge by complicating its access for the tourists, using, for instance, local words and narratives that visitors would find hard to understand, asserting and securing at the same time the ownership of their knowledge as well as a form of power. For in deciding whether, what and how they allowed the tourists to access their knowledge, Bardi Jawi tour guides stressed an inequality between them and their guests (who do not know what they know). They also exercised a form of power that was reinforced by the relation of dependence in which tourists were placed towards them. Indeed, the research showed that tourists not only relied on their Aboriginal guides to access their knowledge and learn about their culture, but that they also depended from them for material aspects, such as dealing with the local weather (the heat) and conditions (the mud or the off-road driving).

This power was also supported by the role of teacher Bardi Jawi tour guides assumed during the tours, a role that some of them took very seriously. One guide, for instance, used to call the tourists his students and explained that he was "working hard on their brains". This guide would also test the tourists' attention, asking them questions, giving them instructions and reminding them to listen. Another tour guide, acting more like a mediator (Cohen, 1985), was more concerned with reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous views on colonial history and

contemporary socio-political matters. This guide tried to translate Bardi Jawi aspirations and concepts such as the importance to *look after country*, and answered tourists' accusing questions on the high level of Indigenous unemployment by detailing the challenges Aboriginal people have to face in remote communities (the lack of education tools and job opportunities, the isolation, etc.). This guide would also regard learning and knowing as a mutual exchange:

Keep asking me questions guys. That's the way, so we can learn from each other. Then you know what's happening in our communities and I get to know what's happening in your world (Tag Along Tour 1, Kooljaman, 2011).

All guides who were involved in this research however also based the access to their knowledge on merit. Tourists were thus asked to show they were willing to make efforts, having to listen, taste and try when they were asked to, or having to follow their guide and walk for hours in the sun or in the mud of the mangrove. As Bardi Jawi tour guides explained to the tourists, respect was also an important component of their tours: "My tour is about survival and it's about respect" (Bush tucker tour, Kooljaman, 2011). Bardi and Jawi tour guides presented this notion as a pivotal educational principle in their communities:

One of the things we try to teach the kids is respect. We teach them about the land. Your brothers you don't look them in the eyes. It's not being rude, it's about having respect for your brothers. Very important in our culture. And you respect those guys who are trying to teach you about something. So that's what we teach our kids (Tag Along Tour 2, Kooljaman, 2012).

Eventually, the research revealed that Bardi and Jawi tour guides sometimes explicitly stressed what they would present as Australian tourists' ignorance or the superiority of their own knowledge and capacities:

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 (Tag Along Tour 2, Kooljaman, 2012).

In the context of an enduring paternalistic domination of the state (Lattas & Morris, 2010) and a patronizing attitude on the part of the representatives of the organizations operating in their communities, Bardi Jawi tour guides could very much be seen as reversing a relation of power. However, the research also revealed that Bardi and Jawi people were perhaps more importantly concerned with the assertion of a practical authority to speak and the pursuit of a claim to self-definition and self-determination.

The assertion of the Bardi Jawi right and ability to speak and enforce their own decisions

During their tours, Bardi and Jawi people explained that their spiritual and genealogical connections with the land entitled them with the traditional authority to speak about it. Moreover, in demonstrating their extensive ecological knowledge and close relationship with the land, Bardi Jawi tour guides also gave the impression to have an almost natural ability to look after the land and thus more legitimacy to talk about it, but also to control its use and access, asserting at the same time their right and capacity to speak *about* themselves as well as their right to take and enforce decisions on behalf of their communities (what Bardi Jawi people call speaking *for* themselves).

Through the demonstration of their skills and ways of knowing (Harris, 2007) for the tourists, Bardi Jawi tour guides indeed produced authoritative discourses and representations about themselves as knowledgeable and capable people. These representations were also validated by people who participated to their tours. As tourists' answers to both the interviews and the survey that was handed to them showed, they all stressed their guide's knowledge as the highlight of the tour. But Bardi and Jawi tour guides also tried to convince their guests to respect the restrictions they decided to introduce on their land access. They asked tourists to seek for permission and to be accompanied by a Traditional Owner at all times when going beyond the main road or local communities, explaining that some places were invisible burial sites or significant spiritual and ceremonial grounds that were only attended by initiated men on specific occasions and always with caution.

In addition to this, Bardi Jawi tour guides regularly stressed their status of Traditional Owners of the land (the legal name for Native Title holders) or the existence of the recognition of their Native Title which allows them to refuse, regulate and control the use and enjoyment of their land by others. Bardi and Jawi people also insisted that their guests witnessed the traces of the antiquity and continuity of their people's ongoing relationships with the land as they were inscribed in the landscape in the forms of footprints in the rocks or the shell middens (sand

dunes covered with waste made of seashells and bones) left by their ancestors. This can be seen as an attempt from Bardi Jawi tour guides to enforce the rights to refuse, regulate and control the access and use of the land that were recognized to their communities by the determination of their Native Title. But it can equally be argued that they were more broadly reasserting their people's cultural or "traditional" entitlement to speak *for* their land. Indeed, the Bardi and the Jawi can control others' access and use of their land, but they could not counter a government decision to lease it to a mining company may this situation occur. Their entitlement to make and enforce their own decisions about the land was thus only partially acknowledged by the determination of their Native Title.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to report on an ethnographic study of the politics of knowledge unfolded by an Aboriginal group of Western Australia in the context of their tour guiding activities, as both an acknowledgement and contribution to the need for more detailed analysis of the uses of local cultural knowledge as a tourist attraction and the relations of power these uses can entail. The research was conducted with the permission and collaboration of the Bardi Jawi people, a coastal Indigenous group from Western Australia who define themselves as *salwater people* and use their cultural and ecological knowledge as the main theme for their guided tours. The aim of the research was to report on Bardi Jawi definitions and uses of tourism in order to better understand the meanings, as well as the values and practices Aboriginal people associated to tourism.

What was found from the research conducted with Bardi and Jawi people on their cultural tours was consistent with other studies (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003; Galliford, 2009, 2012) showing that Aboriginal tour guides' main aspiration from tourism was to be able to share and teach their knowledge in order to educate tourists. But the research also demonstrated how this aspiration relied on the unfolding of particular politics of tour guiding and ways of sharing and teaching which lead to the symbolical inversion of a relation of power, as well as what could be seen as the assertion of a practical authority to speak and the pursuit of a claim to self-definition and self-determination. It resorted from the research that Bardi Jawi tourism could thus be seen as a particular setting for the expression of Aboriginal political consciousness (Tonkinson, 1999) where local politics of knowledge that took place in this context were actually informed by broader political claims and assertions. In this respect, this research showed that knowledge could play an important role in establishing, maintaining or resisting a

relation of power in tourism, a relation that could benefit local communities, especially when their knowledge served as a tourist attraction to which they could also control the access.

However, Bardi and Jawi tour guides are not the sole producers of the relation of power that was described in this paper. Tourists' will to learn, as it appeared from their answers to both a survey that had been handed to them and interviews that were conducted with them during the tours, was a powerful contributor to their "domination" as well as their main expectation from the tours. Furthermore, the tourist encounter cannot be reduced to the interaction described in this paper and its interpretation should not be oversimplified. As Cheong and Miller (2000, p. 376) remind us, "individuals are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising [...] power". Yet this research demonstrates that the interpretation of the tourist encounter would also benefit from an analysis of the way local cultural knowledge, the conditions of its (re)production, circulation, assertion and recognition, when serving as a tourist attraction, can inform the (re)production of, or resistance to, relations of power in tourism.

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