

Battlefields, repatriation, and Indigenous Peoples Addressing dissonant heritage in warfare tourism in Australia and North America in the 21st Century

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Abstract

From an Indigenous perspective, warfare tourism includes a wide range of conflict sites, such as battlefields, areas where human remains are or have been wrongfully buried, removed or repatriated, locations where Indigenous peoples have been incarcerated and enslaved, scenes of frontier violence, as well as issues central to Indigenous people's involvement in the armed forces and their struggles for self-governance in post-colonial contexts. The relative absence of Indigenous men and women, including recognition of their perspectives of, and involvement in, these conflicts and the resultant narratives surrounding these events have resulted in selective dialogues that have in turn contributed (either directly or indirectly) to the erasure of these Indigenous contributions from visitor experiences. The goal of this presentation is to examine the omission of Indigenous narratives in battlefield and repatriation sites while also highlighting how certain sites of conflicts have attempted to address this heritage dissonance by diversifying interpretation strategies and implementing collaborative management approaches. This is accomplished through content analysis and field research and a series of recommendations emerging from the analysis of the case studies. By providing an Indigenous and post-colonial perspective of warfare tourism, we add to the discussion on warfare tourism and critical studies.

Introduction

If heritage interpretation is the selective understanding "of past events for current commemorative and commodification purposes, then all heritage is competing, conflicting and dissonant" (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 63). Warfare tourism (i.e., visitation of battlefields, war memorials, cemeteries, war museums, and attending battle re-enactments) is a term often studied under the umbrella of dissonant heritage. From an Indigenous perspective, warfare tourism includes a wide range of conflict sites, such as battle sites, areas where human remains are or have been wrongfully buried or removed, areas where Indigenous peoples have incarcerated and enslaved, locations of frontier violence (e.g., in Ngarrindjeri Ruwe/Ruwar¹) in

¹ Indigenous Australian philosophies of being are based on an interconnection between country, body and spirit. This interconnection is fundamental to wellbeing. The Ngarrindjeri nation in southern South

Australia (Hemming, Rigney and Berg 2010). Many of these sites of conflicts involving Indigenous peoples trace their origins to the expansion of colonial settlements across various continents, which initiated massacres (Myall Creek and Rufus River in Australia, Wounded Knee, USA), and created numerous clashes between colonial armies and Indigenous groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Ruapekapeka Pa on the North Island), Australia (the Battle of Windjana Gorge), and Canada (the Battle at Batoche).

The repercussions from some of these events have been the reinforcement of cultural imperialism through the grand narratives of colonialism, where hegemonic ideologies of progress and democracy and Aboriginal erasure, have remained, until quite recently, virtually unchallenged (Lemelin et al. 2013; Lemelin et al. in-press). For example, the defeats of colonial forces at the hands of Indigenous forces have often been described as heroic stands, whereas the tactics of Indigenous forces have been described as underhanded (Hannam 2006). Other examples involve battlefields where colonial powers used expropriation and killing to achieve the extension of their empires (e.g., the Battle of Windjana Gorge in Australia), and which have subsequently been downplayed or interpreted as mere “[s]kirmishes between European settlers and Aboriginals” (Prideaux 2007: 23). Prideaux (2007) further claims that the fact that Aboriginal people were defending their homelands is hardly acknowledged as significant and the sites themselves do not receive very much visitation. Thus, the recognition of the nation’s military history occurs primarily “through museums, memorials and monuments rather than through battlefield visitation” (Prideaux 2007: 23). As such studies of warfare tourism ought to pay greater attention to where Indigenous people participated in historic events and how Indigenous communities are involved in managing the sites. However, as Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) indicate, challenging meta-narratives through dissonant heritage can be problematic for when a site “is not memorialized, it can be read as suppression; if it is

Australia use the term *Ruwe/Ruwar* to encapsulate this concept and argue healthy lands and waters are critical to healthy Ngarrindjeri people and culture.

commemorated, such heritage may be construed as unethical or [as a] compromised truth” (Graham et al. 2001: 20). As such, any management approach implemented at these heritage sites or lack thereof, can result in socio-cultural and/or political dissonance. On the other hand, for Indigenous² peoples in Australia, North America and elsewhere, as well as groups who may have been oppressed at some point in dissonant heritage can and has been used to address past wrongdoings and challenge the assertions of the neo-colonial state (Ashworth 2002). Such strategies can fundamentally “lead to influence or control of the institutions themselves, through community involvement” (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 40).

These case descriptions presented next, demonstrate how Indigenous communities are striving for greater involvement in telling these stories and engaging in their own management and site development strategies. In the ensuing section we articulate three new theoretical concepts or views that illustrate how these cases are indicative of important matters of fairness and self-determination for Indigenous communities. The conclusion/discussion section stresses why tourism research has an important responsibility to pay attention to processes of transformation and reconciliation.

The Case Studies

The Northwest Resistance

Encroaching settlements by non-Indigenous settlers and development projects financed by the Canadian government led to an armed Métis, Dakota and Cree uprising in 1885 (Boyden 2010). After some initial success against the North-West Field Force (Canada’s 1st Army division) at the Battle of Tourond’s Coulee/Fish Creek, the outnumbered Métis and their allies were besieged at Batoche in what would later become the province of Saskatchewan, and

² While the term Native American is often used in the USA, we use the terms Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples interchangeably throughout the text. In the Canadian context, when referring to a specific Aboriginal group (Indian, Inuit and Métis) we will use First Nation, Inuit, and Métis to denote this group. Ngarrindjeri is used in the Australian case study.

subsequently defeated (Boyden 2010; Lemelin et al. 2013). Their leader, Louis Riel, who had led a previous uprising in what would later become the province of Manitoba, was captured, convicted of treason, and hanged along with eight First Nation allies in Regina on November 16th, 1885 (Osborne 2002). Gabriel Dumont, the Métis military leader, who after the battle of Batoche had taken the women and children to safety in the USA, later received amnesty and was permitted to return to Batoche, where he died, and now lies buried (Préfontaine 2011).

Batoche was declared a national historic site in 1923. Today the site features a visitor reception centre featuring an exhibit hall, book store and cafeteria, the remains of the St. Antoine de Padouche church and its rectory, shallow rifle depressions, the zareba and camp of general Middleton, Caron Sr. House, the Métis Mass Grave and the tomb of Gabriel Dumont (Parks Canada 2000). Currently, there are approximately four to six Métis working at the site in a number of positions (management, interpretation, maintenance) both seasonal and permanent. According to the parks management plan, the site is visited by approximately 24,000 people annually (Parks Canada 2000). In addition to these visitors, thousands of Métis gather near Batoche to celebrate the annual Back to Batoche Days (Hutton 1996).

Since 1998, the site has been managed through a shared management approach, meaning that all parties (in this case Parks Canada and the Métis Society of Saskatchewan) are responsible for ensuring that the commemorative integrity of the NHS and its characteristics are protected through adaptive management strategies (Parks Canada 2000). In the case of Batoche shared management approaches have been used to address the many-voices at the site and integrate the Métis Nation into the management of these battlefields (McCullough 2002).

Shared management approaches like other types of collaborative, cooperative and co-management approaches in Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Parks in Australia and Kluane and Torngat Mountains National Parks in Canada for example, are perceived as

alternative management structures, aimed at reducing conflicts, encouraging better management of resources, and ensuring more equitable distribution of revenues (Martin 2006). The idea is that a state agency often prompted by provincial, state and federal law develops a partnership with local residents and resource users “which specifies and guarantees their respective functions, rights and responsibilities with regard to the [area]” (Carlsson and Berkes 2005: 66). The role of the Métis in collaborative management approaches is recognized (albeit informally) in some historic sites in Canada (i.e., Riel House in Manitoba, Fort St. Joseph in Ontario), however, the management plan for Batoche is the only one which makes specific reference to shared management approaches between Parks Canada and a provincial Métis Association (The Métis Society of Saskatchewan).

It should also be noted that despite the emphasis on shared or collaborative management approaches, national legislation and policy recommendations in Canada ensures that the authority of the Minister of the Environment (the agency responsible for overseeing Parks Canada) remains unfettered and uncontested (Martin 2006). In other words, committees created through these legislative tools remain largely advisory in nature.

The Battle to Protect the Old People (Human Remains)

The province of South Australia was established under the 1834 Act passed by the British Parliament. The South Australian Letters Patent of 1836 included instructions to the colonists to respect the rights of Indigenous people and this promise continues to be a contentious issue currently being explored Indigenous leaders (Berg 2010). Although the colonisation of the province of South Australia began in 1836 the battle on the frontier with Europeans occurred prior to this period characterised by disease and illness, warfare, enforcing slavery upon women, and massacres all of which are dark aspects of Australia’s colonial history (Foster et al. 2001). For example, Tasmanian and other Aboriginal women from Australia “were

forcibly taken to Kangaroo Island by European men to support their sealing and whaling activities” (Berndt et al. 1993: 1). As a result, there were ‘inter-marriages’ and many Ngarrindjeri families are descendants of these initial colonial relationships.

Within Ngarrindjeri ruwe, the traditional lands and waters of the Ngarrindjeri people, there are various ‘sites’ and ‘places’ of trauma that have significance to both Ngarrindjeri and the broader community (at various local, national and international levels). This significance includes cultural and spiritual associations that people have with such places in addition to their archaeological, physical and/or social aspects. Over the last few decades, this has created a tourism industry within Ngarrindjeri ruwe which provides a potential ‘site’ for positive transformation, reconciliation and education, predominately led by Ngarrindjeri people (Hemming 1994, 2007). This contemporary process, however, must be contextualised within the broader process of colonisation and its impact upon Ngarrindjeri people. There are four themes that capture this colonial history and Ngarrindjeri struggles for basic human rights including: initial colonisation and frontier violence; the removal and trade of Ngarrindjeri Old People (human remains); the involvement of Ngarrindjeri people in the armed services; and, the contemporary struggle for self-determination and self-governance (Wilson 2007, 2009). These themes can be understood through an anti-colonial lens as an ongoing, violent conquest that has sought to erase Ngarrindjeri people from their own ‘country’. The continued non-Indigenous tourism in this space continues this act of violent erasure through the imposition of a ‘white’, sanitised history and a continued ‘forgetting’ of the history of race relations and the survival of Ngarrindjeri people in this place (Foster and Nettlebeck 2012; Hemming et al. 2010).

Repatriation and reburial of Old People (human remains) is a familiar process evident in countries colonised by western civilisations (see Lemelin and Baikie 2012 for a similar discussion in a Canadian context). Within Australia, the repatriation of Old People to their communities has been termed the ‘repatriation debate’ and the ‘reburial issue’; it emerged in the

1970s and 80s. This history is discussed here to illustrate its impact on living communities. Ultimately, Indigenous communities want to expose the theft of Old People from their original resting places, with the subsequent 'study', 'display' and 'storage' in museums, university departments and other 'collecting' institutions around the world and work collectively to find strategies that best support Indigenous peoples in the process of repatriating their Old People back to their country. This includes the exhausting process of reburial and ongoing care for burial grounds that are often still included in visits to the region by non-Indigenous tourists (see Hemming and Wilson 2010).

The Ngarrindjeri nation is familiar with the repatriation and reburial process in Australia and the UK. In 2003, over 300 Old People were repatriated to the Ngarrindjeri nation from the University of Edinburgh in collaboration with the National Museum of Australia (NMA)'s Repatriation Unit marking one of the largest repatriation events to occur in Australia. In the following year, another 74 Old People were repatriated from the Museum Victoria under the Return of Indigenous Cultural Property (RICP) Program (Wilson 2007). In September 2006, Ngarrindjeri began reburying Old People returned from the University of Edinburgh, following three years of discussions and debate within the Ngarrindjeri community. The process involved management and planning between the NHC, Flinders University staff, and the NMA's Repatriation Unit to ensure that there were enough resources, specialists and community members involved in the preparation, organisation and reburial process. As a result of this collective effort, a total of 22 Old People were reburied at Hacks Point and Parnka within Ngarrindjeri Ruwe. The reburial ceremonies marked the end of a long journey for the Old People as well as Ngarrindjeri community members who were affected by their removal (Hemming 2007, Hemming and Wilson 2010, Wallis et al. 2008).

From an Indigenous perspective, those who visit such museums to see the remains of Indigenous skeletal remains (given the origin of how the remains were acquired), are engaging

in a form of disrespect, whether or not the visitors themselves see it that way. It is not enough for museums and other places like it to simply live up to this history by modifying the descriptions of the exhibits to reflect history and current circumstances (e.g. contemporary Indigenous demands for repatriation). They must instead engage in transformation, which will involve in almost all cases, acts of repatriation. Repatriation must be guided by the communities whose ancestors are at issue. It must be their project. Thus, the redevelopment of a museum or library site away from a site of conflict tourism and the subsequent re-patriation/re-burial of the Indigenous communities' ancestors at a site that they designate as consistent with their customs and traditions, are matters of intercultural justice and reconciliation that tourism research has a responsibility to raise awareness of in a way that encourages self-determination. While it is unclear if these reburial sites will, like the burial chamber of numerous repatriated Inuit skeletal remains on Sallikuluk Island (Rose Island), located in the Torngat Mountains National Park, Northern Canada, become tourism attractions (Lemelin and Baikie 2012), these reburial sites have for many Ngarrindjeri and Australians, become sacred grounds. With many individuals traveling to these sites to honour and in some cases, atone. However, in the case of Sallikuluk Island (Rose Island), questions regarding the appropriateness of visiting this site, remain (Lemelin and Baikie 2012). Therefore, strategies to manage and educate visitors traveling to these sites whether they be Indigenous or otherwise are required.

Views of Fairness and Self-Determination in Site Development

Tourism research should focus more on the Indigenous aspects of these sites as a means of creating awareness of matters of *fairness* and *self-determination* involved in dissonant heritage and dark and warfare tourism. Whether sites can become places of pilgrimage or tourism destinations that respect history often comes down to what view of fairness is adopted by the parties responsible for managing the site and whose ancestors participated in the battle but are

not be part of the site's formal management process. In general, fairness is the issue of how the touristic design and management of battlefield sites prevent unnecessary harm to the descendants of battle participants and help to address the current needs of the communities for whom the site remains a significant part of their heritage.

Building strong Indigenous political systems is important because they are the ones that community members see as historically and contemporaneously legitimate; these political systems are also best networked into the communities' specific religious, moral and culture lifeways (which of course may include being better able to negotiate the presence of more than one religion in the community, for example; pluralism abounds in many parts of the Indigenous world). Transformative fairness sees tourism management of conflict sites as a dialogue that promotes the contemporary needs of the descendent communities insofar as the battle is part and parcel of colonialism. The dialogue takes on the characteristic of transformation insofar as it disrupts American, Australian, Canadian and other colonization nation's assumptions about being the only nation with sovereignty over these continents and lands. Such a disruption—if it fits within the Indigenous community's goals for tourism—can build public awareness of their national presence and nationhood.

The transformative view calls for transformation in two ways, though the second way is optional, depending on the nuances and complexity of the situation. First, the view is *always* transformative because, whatever role they decide to play in the touristic aspects of the site, Indigenous descendants as Bunten (2011) suggest are accorded the status proper to their being nations for whom the site is part of their national heritage. Second, the view asserts that it is acceptable for Indigenous peoples to tailor the touristic aspects of the site to disrupt colonial narratives; however, given their current circumstances, they may influence historic tourism sites in ways that are appropriate for achieving other ends of their communities.

Conclusion

While we are not the first to examine and compare the relations between colonialism, Indigenous peoples in Australia and North America and heritage dissonance in battlefields and conflict sites (Buchholtz 2012; Buntten 2011; Ryan 2007), this analysis does provide an overview of dissonant heritage and sites of conflicts involving Indigenous peoples from tourism, Indigenous and philosophical perspectives. Through a critical historical overview and Indigenous perspectives we demonstrate the importance of addressing historical injustices while implementing pro-active management strategies which help to heal the hurt and hear the voices of the many.

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