Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Tourism: The Pattern of Exploitation, Assimilation and Erasure
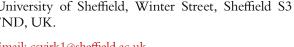
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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Indigenous tourism has surged in popularity, whilst often praised for being ethical and sustainable, for Indigenous communities globally. This article argues that this portrayal is the antithesis of what the reality is. Instead, Indigenous tourism will be argued to operate as a settler colonial structure that functions to strip Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and cultures of their deeper meanings, stylising the Indigenous into romanticised commodified packages that are less politically challenging to the settler hegemonic state. To investigate this, the article employs settler colonial theory and the analytical tool of settler bricolage to explore the constructed realities within tourism in order to reveal the colonial infrastructure that continuously recontextualises Indigenous identities for settler benefit. The article therefore positions itself in spanning the underexplored relation of Indigenous tourism and colonial infrastructures that distort and alter Indigenous representations.

CRYNODEB

Yn ystod y blynyddoedd diwethaf, mae twristiaeth frodorol wedi tyfu mewn poblogrwydd, ac mae'n cael ei chanmol yn aml am fod yn foesegol a chynaliadwy i gymunedau frodorol ledled y byd. Mae'r erthygl hon yn dadlau mai gwrthwyneb y disgrifiad hwn yw'r gwir. Yn hytrach, ceir dadl bod twristiaeth frodorol yn strwythur trefedigaethol wladychol sy'n dileu ystyron dyfnach ontoleg, epistemoleg a diwylliannau brodorol, gan ramanteiddio'r brodorol fel eu bod nhw'n llai o her wleidyddol i'r wladwriaeth hegemonaidd wladychol. Er mwyn ymchwilio i hyn, mae'r erthygl yn defnyddio theori drefedigaethol wladychol a bricolage gwladychwyr yn offeryn dadansoddol i drin a thrafod realiti gwneuthuredig twristiaeth er mwyn datgelu'r seilwaith trefedigaethol sy'n rhoi ail gyd-destun i hunaniaethau brodorol yn barhaus er budd y gwladychwr. Gan hynny, mae rhychwant yr erthygl yn edrych ar berthynas sydd heb ei hymchwilio'n ddigonol rhwng twristiaeth frodorol a seilwaith trefedigaethol sy'n ystumio ac yn newid cynrychiolaethau brodorol.

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'Moreover, the people live in a hostage economy where the tourist Industry employment means active participation in their own degradation' (Trask 1999: 50).

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous tourism is an ever-growing global industry. In the US alone, it contributed an estimated $14 billion to the national GDP in 2021 (AIANTA 2021). This rapid growth is expected to continue, with global Indigenous tourism projected to reach $67 billion by 2034, reflecting a nearly $20 billion increase over a decade from 2024 (FMI 2024). Many view this rise as positive, with organisations like the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recommending Indigenous tourism as a mindful and less resource and colonially exploitative form of travel (UNWTO 2021). Travel companies like Airbnb have also embraced this narrative, reporting increased economic activity and tourism development among Indigenous communities in the US and Canada (Airbnb 2023). From such a perspective, Indigenous tourism is often celebrated for its potential to benefit both Indigenous communities and tourists by fostering cultural exchange, knowledge sharing, and economic growth (Buckley 2012; Butler 2018; Holden 2000). Advocates argue that this form of tourism provides an opportunity for Indigenous groups to generate income and retain control over how their culture is represented. However, despite these potential benefits, there is still a need for critical analysis of how the industry can perpetuate colonial structures and power imbalances if not approached with care. Therefore, while Indigenous tourism is often praised for its cultural and economic benefits for Indigenous communities, this article will argue that it conceals a more sinister colonising undertone, one masked by the rhetoric of modernity and progress (Mignolo 2012; Trask 1999). The article will advance the notion that Indigenous tourism is not purely a vehicle for mutual benefit, but is in fact a colonial project, orchestrated by settler society to recontextualise and commodify Indigenous spaces (Bruyneel 2021; Coulthard 2014). Through this recontextualisation Indigenous spaces and cultures become more palatable, marketable, and partially assimilated to the needs of the settler colonial ambition (Barker 2021). By reshaping Indigenous identities to fit the expectations of settler society, Indigenous tourism subtly reinforces colonial power structures, even though it is portrayed as progressive or ethical to settler society (Trask 1999).

To analyse these power structures of oppression, settler colonial theory will be adopted as the theoretical structure for this article. Settler colonial theory will help bridge the gaps in the current literature in the field by arguing that tourism is a colonial structure and not an event, one that exerts real power relations over Indigenous communities in contemporary times (Wolfe 2016). In this, settler colonial theory is understood to explore the rationalisation and normalisation of colonial power dynamics in society that work to erase and partially assimilate Indigenous communities to contemporary society.

Settler colonial theory in this article will work as the theoretical tool to unsettle the normative values that have become part of the collective unconscious of settler society, distorting narratives and erasing Indigenous ontologies and culture (Barker 2021). Settler colonial theory as the theoretical structure for the argument will be used to critically analyse media sources alongside articles, books and other mediums to unravel the manner in which Indigenous tourism operates within the sphere of the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2007; Veracini 2021).

The main analytical tool employed in this article will be Barker's concept of settler bricolage, which is a subset of settler colonial theory (Barker 2021). Unlike Lévi-Strauss's (1967) notion of bricolage, which focuses on using existing materials to create something new, bricolage in Barker's work will be applied as 'both physical and conceptual elements. The appropriated works of art and cultural display that fill museums and private galleries are obvious, as is their use in reminding settler people of their cultural superiority and victorious condition with respect to Indigeneity' (Barker 2021: 108). In Barker's framework, settler bricolage functions to strip Indigenous knowledge and meanings of their significance, replacing them with settler colonial structures that support and justify colonial claims of progress and modernity (Barker 2021). Through repackaging Indigenous cultures to fit settler narratives, this form of settler bricolage contributes to a broader project of recontextualisation that undermines authentic Indigenous identities whilst perpetuating settler colonial narratives of dominance. This concept has not been explored in Indigenous tourism studies and yet it will be pivotal in bringing to attention the settler colonial infrastructure within Indigenous tourism.

As Indigenous tourism has not previously been analysed through the lens of settler bricolage and settler colonialism, this article will bridge the gap between decolonial settler critique and Indigenous tourism studies. The article's objective is to illuminate the hidden structures of oppression that settler society perpetuates through Indigenous tourism (Barker 2021). Given the rapid rise of Indigenous tourism in the twenty-first century, the field requires a deeper exploration to articulate and prevent further attacks on Indigenous communities – physically, psychologically, and epistemologically (Barker 2021; UNWTO 2021).

To ground the argument advanced in this article, the first section will critically evaluate the current body of literature with respect to the relation between Indigenous tourism and colonial power structures. The second section of the article will then offer a brief historical analysis of Indigenous relationships to tourism, followed in the third section by a contemporary case study of the Seminole and Miccosukee of Florida. Specifically, settler society and the two aforementioned Indigenous communities will be analysed to explore how tourism works as a colonial structure to oppress Indigenous communities in the twenty-first century. Seminole and Miccosukee are jointly discussed through settler colonial interactions due to their location in Florida and engagements with colonial society. Despite this closeness, it is imperative to clarify that the Seminole and Miccosukee have different identities, cultures and ontologies. This becomes particularly relevant when the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum is discussed, as it is specific to the Seminole's nations.

Indigenous ontologies will be understood as a form of World knowing, but one that faces continuous settler colonial attacks aiming to diminish and reduce these Indigenous understandings in the World. As Waters points out:

> colonial theism forcefully wrenched indigenous ontological constructs (embedded in linguistic structures and thinking of the indigenous mind) from indigenist thought, causing a continental shake down of Indigenous worldview. This ontological destruction was but one more notch on the belt of an ideology that functioned to maintain power over "others." These cultural extortions took a cavernous toll on Indigenous people, our families, communities, and belief systems. In this psychological dismembering, which was

eventually fueled by forced migrations, our fractures of ontology became chasms needing to be filled, gaps in the thought process (Waters 2004: 6).

Waters' quote supports the notion that there is a pluriversality of World ontologies; however, Indigenous ontologies are being attacked by settler colonial power structures that repress the complex Indigenous ontological and contemporary nature of these World views.

Importantly, it should be noted in no way is this article critiquing Indigenous communities who have adopted Indigenous based tourism. I acknowledge the way Indigenous communities must adopt methods of survival in a hyper-capitalist world, and how many communities use tourism as a form of colonial resistance. Rather, I aim to highlight how supposedly progressive Euro–Western development tools need critiquing continuously to explore hidden colonial power relations (Trask 1999).

Furthermore, I hold no genealogical Indigenous heritage or claim any relation. My positionality regarding the subject of this work is to bring to a wider attention the settler colonial power dynamics that have infiltrated Indigenous tourism.

INDIGENOUS TOURISM AND COLONIAL INFLUENCE

Indigenous tourism as a development tool, as noted previously, is unequivocally viewed as a progressive solution that works to uplift Indigenous communities, whilst simultaneously limiting mass exploitation from the tourist Industry. This narrative is ever present as Indigenous tourism is becoming an increasingly growing industry and many consumers choose this style of tourism over mass tourism, due to the shift in debate since the 1990s (McLaren 2003). A more conscious traveller arose, who wanted to 'authentically' experience local cultures rather than performative tourist traps. This supposedly happened alongside another shift in the 1990s, which saw the tourist market experience a green shift, due to the wider recognition of climate change (Buckley 2012; Holden 2000).

From these epistemological shifts travellers wanted a more harmonious tourism experience that was less extractive and damaging for the land and local populace. The tourist market has been predicted to enjoy exponential growth of $235 billion, from 2021 to 2025, encompassing a larger percentage year-on-year (Research and Markets 2021). For many tourists, Indigenous tourism will become the ethical solution to travel, compared to mass tourism (McLaren 2003). However, several dilemmas arise in relation to the ethical actuality of the market itself. Conflicting stakeholders within Indigenous tourism all portray varying objectives that clash and vie for hegemonic standing (Trask 1999). A review of relevant literature exploring these stakeholders' positionality will lead us into an exploration of the hidden colonial dynamics that can be revealed through settler colonial theory.

Tourism as an entity is inherently tied to the capitalist structuring of power; it focuses on those who have excess means and the power to travel, as opposed to those who are forced to host (McLaren 2003). Indigenous tourism falls into this category. Whilst many Indigenous communities do possess the capital to travel, many across the World have adopted travel as a means of economic rejuvenation (Butler 2018; UNWTO 2021). This relationship has only been enlarged through globalisation, which has allowed a burgeoning settler middle class to strive for tourism experiences that were once deemed unattainable (Butler 2018).

This form of travel has not gone uncritiqued in recent years as scholars are beginning to draw from Gibson-Graham's (1996) work on diverse economies to situate the field in a less exploitative way. Such scholars are calling for a system that does not operate in fixed capitalistic binaries, but rather challenges the notion of a capital-centric economy and the relations it has to the lumpen-proletariat. Gibson-Graham (2008) noticed there are different values and pedagogies that are not all socially recognised, yet still have value, and they argued for a rearrangement of economic processes separate from capitalism. This would allow for building a different mosaic of economic relations that could offer non-capitalist systems of economics to benefit Indigenous communities (Cave and Dredge 2020a).

This hypothesis has been revolutionary in Indigenous tourism studies, offering new possibilities for tourism engagement that hold the often exploited at the centre of the debate. Cave and Dredge (2020b) are two practitioners of diverse economies who highlighted how community-based tourism (CBT) offers an alternative to mass-corporate-based tourism. In their view, diverse economies would see real-time economic and social transformations for the community, rather than the accumulation of capital for corporations (Cave and Dredge 2020b).

Cave and Dredge furthered the concept of diverse economies by expanding its possibilities, suggesting that due to the digital era there is a 'pressing need to adapt to change, and the growing backlash against extractive and exploitative forms of tourism typified by over tourism and platform capitalism which has fuelled anti-tourism activism ignited a need to rethink the status quo, and to activate change' (Cave and Dredge 2020b: 474). Cave and Dredge acknowledged Indigenous groups and people from the Global South in their pushback against the hegemonic structures of economic capitalism, noting how Indigenous communities could utilise different spatial grounds, such as digital geography, as forms of alternative tourism practices.

Through Cave and Dredge's (2020b) argument, Indigenous tourism could structure itself in a way where different possibilities arise, ones that are less colonially exploitative than traditional forms of Indigenous tourism. One example would be through Indigenous communities occupying digital spaces where they could provide a community for knowledge-sharing with tourist groups that was centred on their epistemological traditions. This would work in countering colonial pedagogies which have monopolised Indigenous culture (Mignolo 2012). Such a breaking down of traditional capitalist binaries of monetary transactions through CBT in diverse economies, would work to benefit the environment and Indigenous communities. In this way, Indigenous communties adopting diverse tourism economies would not be peripheral in knowledge creation with respect to their own communities and ontologies (Cave and Dredge 2020a; Gibson-Graham 2014).

Therefore, applying diverse economic structures would release surplus value for the benefit of Indigenous communities, a value that was formerly accumulated and stored away in traditional privatised capitalist and neoliberal exchanges, (Robinson 2000). According to Gibson-Graham's (2014) diverse economies approach, surplus value would be redistributed throughout the Indigenous community, allowing for sustainable infrastructures to be built. This would create lasting Indigenous tourism legacies, centred on the host community rather than the tourist (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016). Gibson-Graham's work on diverse economies has

allowed tourist scholars to focus on factors that have been previously under-researched, such as home labour, education, and community sharing. These relations could work to create a new economic infrastructure to build up Indigenous communities as independent entities with control over tourism and also over their land and culture (Butler 2018; Gibson-Graham 2014; Reddy and Sailesh 2023). Airbnb noted this when in 2022, through hosting and experiences, Indigenous communities in the US made over $219 million that year. They were able to organise and structure their own experiences through the Airbnb app and dictate how they wanted to structure and offer Indigenous tourism in a way that does not impede or exploit them (Airbnb 2023; De la Maza et al. 2023). Through this, capital becomes more evenly distributed through the sharing of labour, people, and infrastructure, and those in the hidden economies, particularly women, are recognised and fairly compensated (Amoamo et al. 2020; Gibson-Graham 2006).

Whilst diverse economies work to redistribute surpluses to the local Indigenous populaces, due to the globalised transaction of the tourism market, it is still subject to a capitalist–neoliberal overview (Estes 2019). However, Bin (2018) argues that the goal of the capitalist may not only be the accumulation of capital, as was believed in classical Marxism. Through a decolonial / settler colonial perspective, assimilation, erasure and extermination are often seen as the goal of the settler capitalist (Waters 2004; Wolfe 2016). In settler colonial logic, Indigenous communities are pushed, through structures like CBT, to engage with capitalism as a form of development to entrench them in the settler sphere of influence (Lloyd and Wolfe 2016). This has been prominent with CBT in Indigenous communities participating in tourism in Kenya, who are taught to share knowledge systems with local agencies and conservationist groups, such as the African Wildlife Foundation (Imbaya et al. 2019; Ndlovu 2019). These agencies have argued that through mutual cooperation women have become business leaders in their communities and have moved towards green energy (Imbaya et al. 2019). This was seen as a sustainable way to allow Indigenous communities to forge a path of their own sovereignty. However, these communities are being indebted further into the capitalist system, through a belief in the Euro-Western understanding of modernity and progress being linear and technologically parallel to Euro-Western structures of advancement. Here, traditional forms of knowledge and ontologies face an 'epistemicide' as they are deemed unable to keep up with settler technologies (Deloria 2012; Mignolo 2012). In this relationship, diverse economies are still therefore peripheral to the core of capitalism, since communities are forced to ensure their survival through the assimilation of Indigenous tourism to the interests of capitalism (Nitzan and Bichler 2009). So, whilst Indigenous communities do gain more agency through diverse economies, the hidden colonial matrix of power is maintained through the centring role of assimilation and erasure (Coulthard 2014).

The foregoing review of the extant literature has highlighted that whilst Indigenous tourism is being interacted with critically, it primarily originates from economic positions of survival. Here, the valuing of economic sustainability becomes the main factor in Indigenous tourism survival and growth in the twenty-first century (Butler 2018). Diverse economies has begun to deal with cultural sovereignty and preservation through the work of Buckley (2012), and also of Cave and Dredge (2020a, 2020b), however, neither work has fully grappled with the colonial power dynamics of Indigenous tourism. Consequently, the remainder of this article will explore these colonial relations, analysing them through settler colonial studies, to

unravel how Indigenous tourism operates as a colonial structure that is used to further entrench Indigenous culture and ontologies into the sphere of the settler matrix (Wolfe 2016).

INDIGENOUS TOURISM AND HISTORY

Indigenous tourism is deeply intertwined with historical narratives of colonialism, where European colonial expansionism colonised Indigenous communities globally. This, coupled with literature and media becoming more easily accessible during the eighteenth century, saw Indigenous communities as a source of intrigue. Through this colonial societal interest, colonial bourgeois society commodified Indigenous identities for entertainment and profit (Cariou 2016). In this, a long dark history was created between Indigeneity and tourism. This was especially evident with the advent of human zoos during the nineteenth century, which quickly became commonplace, where settler people yearned for Indigenous experiences and land. This long-ignored history remains palpable in its contemporary iteration.

Human zoos were popularised in the nineteenth century as part of ethnographic tourism. These 'zoos' reflected the colonial mindset of European powers, who displayed Indigenous peoples in fabricated environments to emphasise their perceived exoticism and inferiority (Putova 2018). Colonial powers used these spectacles to reinforce their dominance by exaggerating differences in appearance, language, and behaviour (Putova 2018). This process led to the objectification and caricaturing of Indigenous communities, whilst reducing their cultures to stereotypes (Mignolo 2012).

Indigenous North American communities, including the last known member of the Beothuk people, Shanawdithit, were often central figures in human zoo displays (Cariou 2016). Their final months lived in a staged village, exemplifying a 'last chance tourism,' where colonial powers promoted the idea of witnessing Indigenous cultures before their supposed extinction (Bross 2001). This practice reinforced the 'dying Indian' trope that framed Indigenous people as remnants of a vanishing past, alienating them from contemporary Euro-Western society and into the annals of history and stories of the past (Deloria 2012).

Indigenous cultures were not only objectified but also mythologised as existing in a distant, pre-modern past, thereby serving to validate the colonial agenda of separation (Grosfoguel 2012). Writers, artists, and 'intellectuals' such as George Catlin played a significant role in promoting these stereotypes to the settler public, often portraying Indigenous people as the 'primitive' counterpart to the 'civilised' coloniser (Trask 1999). The process of this ahistoric representation of Indigenous communities exaggerated their differences from European society, creating a settler colonial discourse that framed Indigenous communities as the exotic 'Other' (Ndlovu 2019). Ndlovu argued that this was a deliberate reproduction of stereotypes to satisfy Western demands for exoticism, and to solidifying the dominance of the coloniser as the hegemonic progressive power (Ndlvou 2019; Veracini 2021). The commodification of Indigenous cultures during this period served to justify settler colonialism and sustain the power dynamics between Indigenous communities and settler colonisers.

This was supported by the terminology of 'dying,' which, when used in reference to Indigenous cultures, emphasises their perceived extinction (Barker 2018). Here, a settler bricolage of reality is constructed in how colonial societies define Indigenous peoples as relics of a bygone era, whilst

justifying their marginalisation and denial of history (Aldred 2000; Barker 2021). Through the continuous reinforcement of these stereotypes due to tourism, Indigenous communities have their situation located in the past. Trask notes how acts such as tourism operate: 'An ideology of racism justifies the denial of Native culture with blanket claims such as "Natives have no culture" comparable to the hegemonic one' (Trask 1999: 42). Along with Wolfe (2016), Trask argues that by framing Indigenous territories as devoid of life, and as disconnected from the present, settler–colonisers could justify their access to and the control of Indigenous land and resources.

Both Trask's and Wolfe's work highlight an ontological erasure, grounded in settler colonial discourse, that allowed colonisers to claim that the land was empty and available for exploitation due to the images and rhetoric that Indigenous tourism had created (Trask 1999; Wolfe 2016). Ultimately, the process of 'Othering' Indigenous peoples through tourism, temporally and ontologically, worked as a mechanism of colonial domination (Veracini 2021), one that consolidated the reinforcing of power structures that allowed for the continued occupation of Indigenous lands, culture and histories (Trosper 2022).

Whilst migratory human zoos faded during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the ingrained 'Othering' of Indigenous peoples persisted within the collective unconscious of settler society. This Indigenous tourist shift represented a move away from overt public spectacles to Indigenous place-based interactions. Yet it still retained through a foundation built on racism, stereotypes, and caricatures of Indigenous bodies and ontologies (Bruyneel 2021; Said 2019).

CASE STUDY OF THE SEMINOLE AND MICCOSUKEE

As globalisation progressed during the twentieth century and transport and information became more accessible, Indigenous tourism opened up to a broader segment of the population that had historically been excluded from travel (Clarsen 2017). This newfound accessibility reduced the need for human zoos. Rather than bringing Indigenous peoples to European audiences, tourists could travel to Indigenous lands and experience these cultures in their own settings (Seminole 2024). Whilst this marked a decline in the explicit and exploitative spectacles of human zoos, the underlying dynamics of voyeurism and exoticism persisted (Trask 1999). This was ever-present for the Seminole and Miccosukee of Florida, who experienced high levels of tourism during the twentieth century, with local South Floridan tourism pioneers, frequently marketing the Seminole and Miccosukee cultures as relics of a distant past, emphasising their perceived primitiveness or exoticness to attract visitors. This, coupled with Florida's growing population, created a catalyst of exponential tourist growth (West 2008).

The Seminole and Miccosukee, whilst having self-agency, were still seen by the settler populace as objects of curiosity, rather than as contemporary, evolving cultures, which they still are (Cattelino 2008). During this time, Indigenous tourism's relation to settler colonialism manoeuvred from explicit acts of violence to hidden settler colonial power structures (Wolfe 2016). Settler colonial society monopolised Indigenous tourism, and marketed it to a more widespread audience. Settler society also enlarged its rhetoric on Indigenous communities, through mediums like television, radio, and books, which were able to provide access to Indigenous cultures for those who could not travel, cementing Indigenous tropes globally (Bruyneel 2021). In essence, this was an early notion of Cave and Dredge's (2020b) work on diverse economies being utilised in an anti-Indigenous

manner but very importantly for Indigenous tourism in the 21st century which will be analysed below (Hanusch and Fürsich 2014; McLaren 2003).

Colonial tourist beginnings with the Seminole and Miccosukee

The Seminole and Miccosukee nations in Florida were historically pushed into the Everglades after centuries of settler encroachment and three wars. These nations faced further increasing interactions with settlers as Florida underwent rapid urbanisation between the 1930s and 1960s (West 2008). As settlers migrated into Florida en masse, they began to visit Seminole and Miccosukee communities (West 2008). Towns such as Indian Town, which was once centred around a former Indigenous trading post, were commercialised by the settler populace for an Indigenous experience. Indian Town branded itself as an Indigenous hub where tourists could engage with a romanticised version of Seminole and Miccosukee life. This practice mirrored earlier colonial exhibitions, where Indigenous culture was packaged for consumption and profit, reinforcing a reductive and exoticised view of Indigenous peoples but in different spatial locations (Cattelino 2008).

Through being forced into the deepest and most isolated parts of the Everglades for safety, the Seminole and Miccosukee were eventually drawn into the settler tourism economy through increasing settler urbanisation and reduced availability of ancestral land (Seminole 2024). This allowed settlers to further shape and control the narrative of Indigenous life for the Seminole and Miccosukee by presenting it as a static and consumable relic of the past, while undermining the ongoing struggles and resilience of these communities that had endured for several centuries (Seminole 2024).

Thus, settler colonisers occupying Seminole and Miccosukee lands could now purchase goods directly from these Indigenous nations (Downs 1995; West 2008). In this, the Miccosukee and Seminole were forced to adopt and adapt to tourism to survive within the new capitalist framework that was encroaching onto them (LaDuke 2016). They were forced to commodify aspects of their culture through reifying their ontologies to meet the demands of the market (Cattelino 2008). This practice, while allowing them to gain necessary capital, and preserve their independence from settler US society, began the forced monetary assimilation to the settler state. In this 'partial assimilation', the Seminole and Miccosukee had to engage with the capitalist economy by entering the tourist market, adopting language to converse with the tourists and similar economic models (Cattelino 2008; Grunwald 2007). However, this period of Indigenous tourism that had gained traction in earlier decades experienced a decline with the ready availability of mass tourism during the 1970s and 1980s (Butler 2018). The introduction of all-inclusive and package holidays, coupled with the growing availability of cheaper flights, shifted the focus of the tourism industry (Fabian 2021). As a result, tourists' demands shifted, so while visits to the Seminole and Miccosukee communities remained a component of some travel, they were no longer the central attraction (Cattelino 2008; McLaren 2003; West 2008).

With the rise of mass tourism, tourist demand moved towards more commercialised and leisure-based destinations, such as theme parks, urban centres, beaches, resorts, and pools, which were readily available in South Florida, with Disney, Universal, and Miami in close proximity (Grunwald 2007). While the Seminole and Miccosukee communities were still part of the broader tourism landscape through alligator wrestling, souvenirs and

airboat tours, their role had become more peripheral (West 2008) as global tourism adapted to cater to larger numbers of visitors seeking packaged, accessible experiences that emphasised entertainment over cultural engagement. The Seminole and Miccosukee had to adapt their tourism output for contemporary times in the twenty-first century.

Indigenous tourism in the twenty-first century

Colonial settler societies have historically manipulated and adapted signifiers of Indigenous identity across different epochs to fit evolving colonial objectives of domination. Through this, the Seminole and Miccosukee were marked with an 'exotic' value signifier that has persisted across time as a tool for Othering and dehumanising Indigenous peoples (Mignolo 2012). Mignolo highlights how colonial signifiers move and change between temporal boundaries, reshaping Indigenous realities in line with the needs and ideologies of the dominant colonial powers. Through this, the term 'exotic' has been consciously applied by settler societies to differentiate Indigenous peoples from settlers. This is still seemingly evident in the twenty-first century for the Seminole and Miccosukee nations, who, throughout the landscape of South Florida, are still portrayed through an exotic colonial lens in tourist media (Cattelino 2008).

For example, websites, leaflets and internet adverts from settler tourist companies in the Everglades have adopted homogenised Indigenous iconography to market to the tourist a fabricated Indigenous reality, as Figures 1 and 2 show. Settler companies such as Gator Park, situated on Tamiami trail, sell 'authentic' Indigenous goods, purportedly local to the area. These goods were primarily dream catchers and clay pots, not at all related to the Seminole or Miccosukee, and are used as signifiers of the term 'Indian' (figure 1). This reinforces the settler dictated image that reduces the Seminole and Miccosukee's ontological difference to the homogenised settler Indigenous perception.

Figure 1. Settler airboat company, Alligator Alley, Florida.

Photo credit: Cole Singh Virk, 2023 (CC BY 04).

Figure 2: Inside Gator Park Inc., Florida, selling 'authentic' Indigenous items.

Photo credit: Cole Singh Virk, 2023 (CC BY 04).

The statue and objects in Figure 2 reaffirm Indigeneity within the sphere of settler discourse and the commodification of culture (Biswas 2024). This alters Indigenous items and recontextualises them into a settler bricolage of realities, erasing the Seminole and Miccosukee's presence on the land, whilst assimilating them into the settler constructed image. Indigeneity in the US is reduced to a cluster of settler signifers quickly consumable through homogenising and stereotyping the Indigenous iconography (Barker 2021; Bruyneel 2021). Aldred noted how:

> New Age interests in Native American cultures appears more concerned with exoticised images and romanticised ritual revolving around a distorted view of Native American spirituality than with the Indigenous peoples themselves and the very real (and often ugly) socio-economic and political problems they face as colonised peoples (Aldred 2000: 333).

In this, the term 'exotic' works as a temporally limitless trope, whose meaning shifts according to the constructions of Indigeneity that colonial society imposes at any given time (Cordova 2007; Derrida 1993; Mignolo 2012). Initially, in the nineteenth century, 'exotic' implied aesthetic and physical differences that allowed colonial powers to justify the dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples (Cariou 2016). Through focusing on

visual and bodily distinctions, settler colonialists reinforce their perceived superiority and further their control, making it easier to dispossess Indigenous communities of their land and resources (Barker 2021; Mills 2017; Ndlovu 2019). However, in the twenty-first century, Indigenous tourism offerings are often stylised by settler society in Florida around culture. The Seminole and Miccosukee are homogenised into the settler Othering of the 'exotic' Indigenous through Indigenous settler-owned tourism, reinforcing the homogenisation of Indigenous culture into a singular entity as seen in figure 1. Here, settler society placed in situ the Seminole and Miccosukee not as individual actors with their own culture, history and place, but as a footnote of settler US history (Nielsen and Heather 2022). Bruyneel's (2021) work on settler memory highlights how Indigenous tourism constructs a settler memory that frames Indigenous communities through iconography as 'mnemonic devices, which tells us Indigenous people are both everywhere in symbolic form and absent as active, contemporary political subjects' (Bruyneel 2021: 112). In this, the 'exotic' label becomes a tool for both the physical and cultural domination of Indigenous peoples, reinforcing the settler colonial narrative that justified their exploitation and marginalisation of the Seminole and Miccosukee as peripheral but assimilated to settler society (Aldred 2000).

Settler colonial theory helps us explore how Indigenous tourism worked as a colonial structure to further fetishise Indigenous communities in the twenty-first century in order to build a settler bricolage of realities that partially assimilates the Seminole and Miccosukee into the settler narrative of the Indigenous. Such a narrative reduces the Seminole and Miccosukee as political entities, whilst further embedding them into the neoliberal matrix (Mignolo and Escobar 2010). This is done by the settler populace's tourists having a predetermined unconscious notion of how they interact and perceive Indigenous communities such as the Seminole and Miccosukee. This continuously replicated narrative by settler society and the tourist industry cements Indigenous communities and culture into the tourism industry. Here, certain elements of Seminole and Miccosukee Indigeneity became intertwined with the colonial tourism market, such as alligator wrestling, which is one of the largest tourist markets for the Seminole and Miccosukee (West 2008). Yet this is utilised as a process to further alienate Indigenous peoples, as they became attractions for settler society but in acceptable relations to settler notions of Indigeneity. Therefore, the separation of Indigenous peoples from mainstream settler life operates as a colonial tool to enhance Indigenous exotic values in settler perception. This leads to further construction of settler colonial imagery that portrays Seminole and Miccosukee culture as commodities to be consumed as a form of ethical travel (Barker 2021; Butler 2018; Cattelino 2008).

Hence, to survive in this settler-dominated economy and the growing settler-inspired Indigenous tourism markets that are commonplace in South Florida, the Seminole and Miccosukee were forced to reify their cultures, epistemologies, and ontologies in accordance with settler narratives (Coulthard 2014). The Seminole and Miccosukee presented their cultural practices as marketable attractions to settler tourists in order to secure necessary goods and economic stability (Cattelino 2008). This reification involved packaging Indigeneity in ways that catered to the settler gaze, aligning with the fluid colonial signifiers that had long shaped perceptions of Indigenous peoples (Ndlovu 2019). Settler colonial theory notes that settler society forces this relationship through offering little to no economic support for the Seminole and Miccosukee communities, who had to use

tourism and their proximity to destinations such as Miami and Fort Lauderdale to create attractions that would appeal to settler appetites (Cattelino 2008). This creates the phenomenon previously discussed by LaDuke and McLaren, where settler tourists and the Seminole and Miccosukee interact only on the settler-constructed surface level (LaDuke 2016; McLaren 2003). These colonially built images of Indigeneity result in the Seminole and Miccosukee being interacted with as objects of fascination rather than as complex, living cultures, with a past, present and future (Aldred 2000). This absence of acknowledgement reinforces the power dynamics of settler colonialism, and the settler bricolage of realities Indigenous tourism has built and the destruction of Indigenous ontologies as important World views. This dynamic also demonstrates how deeply the exoticisation of Indigenous peoples in contemporary society is rooted through Indigenous tourism, where control over Indigenous representation serves broader colonial objectives of domination, exploitation, erasure and partial assimilation (Veracini 2021; Wolfe 2016).

COLONIAL FACADE OF CARE

Since COVID, millions of people travel annually to Africa, Mexico, the US, Canada, Latin America, Australasia, Scandinavia, and other regions with Indigenous communities (Lara-Morales and Clarke 2022). This shift is partly driven by an ontological transformation in travellers, who increasingly seek sustainable forms of tourism due to the climate crisis (Holden 2000). In relation to this shift, Indigenous travel is heavily marketed as a sustainable and ethical alternative to traditional, extractive forms of tourism with the promise of supporting Indigenous communities and conserving the environment (UNWTO 2021). Tourists are encouraged to see this type of travel as an act of environmental and ethical responsibility (Barbieri et al. 2020). Consequently, the Seminole and Miccosukee are experiencing a resurgence in tourism. However, they still face similar challenges of settler competition in the area, which is working to monopolise the market due to their closer proximity to tourist hot spots like Miami.

Indigenous tourism for Seminole and Miccosukee is evolving in settler discourse to emphasise a fairer value of exchange and environmental conservation. This diverges from the exploitative relationships that characterised earlier forms of Indigenous tourism (Biswas 2024; Cariou 2016). Indigenous communities, through this evolution, are seen to have gained greater control over how they are represented, enabling them to reclaim aspects of their cultures and ontologies that have historically been distorted by colonial narratives. This is so much so that the Seminole have built the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, a state-of-the-art museum countering settler colonial tropes, whilst highlighting the community's importance on the global stage (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum 2024; Seminole 2024). The Seminole present themselves through the museum not as colonial tropes, but rather as holders of valuable knowledges that can benefit global society. All this whilst maintaining their autonomy and being subsumed into the homogenised settler discourse of Indigeneity (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum 2024).

This style of Indigenous tourism represents a significant step toward deconstructing colonial representations and the settler bricolage of realities that has been built (Barker 2021). However, whilst positive movements are being made, Indigenous tourism is still packaged as unquestionably ethical and sustainable. Settler society ignores the inequalities created from Indigenous tourism, which is surrounded by settler society, reifying Indigenous ontologies to mythologise them to the settler public as a form of

green tourism (Aldred 2000; Lukas 2017). As well as commodifying Indigenous goods and aesthetics, settler society reifies Indigenous ontologies with the environment as romanticised and purchasable. This reduces the Seminole and Miccosukee's complex philosophies into simple, marketable narratives, allowing settlers to purchase their way into Indigeneity (Kirk 2023). Aldred's work on plastic shamans, for example, analyses the colonial romanticisation that entangles Indigenous peoples with the natural landscapes they inhabit, turning both the people and their land into exoticised attractions for settler tourists to buy into (Aldred 2000). Aldred (2000: 1) noted that 'The New Age movement is one such response to these feelings. New Agers romanticize an "authentic" and "traditional" Native American culture whose spirituality can save them from their own sense of Malice.' This phenomenon evolves the settler bricolage of Indigenous tourism, as tourists, through this green shift, now visit Indigenous communities as believed stewards of the land (Bruyneel 2021). These interactions oversimplify Indigenous relationships with their environment, whilst homogenising Indigenous as philosophically monolithic and static. Cordova noted this as a trend in Western society, where the 'assumption that non-Western peoples are less complex than those of the West, is a common assumption' (Cordova 2007: 58; Waters 2004). Such simplifications fragment Indigenous ontologies, allowing settler society to distort and fill these representations with a settler colonial bricolage that deprives the Seminole and Miccosukee of agency (Barker 2021).

Romanticising Indigenous life as a simpler, nature-focused existence is the newest iteration of settler rhetoric on Indigenous tourism that correlates with the exoticisation of Indigenous culture (Bruyneel 2021). In this rhetoric Indigenous peoples are still placed epistemologically in the past, whilst they are nevertheless still alive and active in the present. Consequently, settler society has dedicated and pushed a narrative that, when done as Deloria argued, allows for settler society to centre itself as omnipresent, where 'Western history is written as if the torch of enlightenment was fated to march from the Mediterranean to the San Franscico Bay' (Deloria 2012: 62). Thus, through settler omnipresence in all contexts of Indigeneity, Indigenous communities are perpetually viewed as 'living relics,' and as trophies of settler colonialism's ability to 'preserve' Indigenous cultures and environments (Bruyneel 2021).

CONCLUSION: WHERE NEXT?

Through an analysis of Indigenous tourism, particularly focusing on the settler constructions of Seminole and Miccosukee nations, it becomes evident that settler colonial infrastructures are deeply entrenched in the tourism industry (Seminole 2024). These infrastructures function to dismantle and replace Indigenous histories, presents, futures and ontologies with a settler-driven bricolage of realities that replicate colonial hierarchies (Wolfe 2016). This settler bricolage uniquely highlights that Indigenous tourism, while often celebrated as ethical and beneficial, is still shaped by the same settler colonial power dynamics that have gone largely unchallenged since human zoos. Sequentially, the article raises important, underexplored questions about the role of settler colonialism in the twenty-first century and its influence on Indigenous tourism. In doing so, it urges a pressing re-evaluation of the unspoken assumptions that Indigenous tourism is inherently good, as well as the need for settler colonial theory and bricolage as critical tools, in exposing the hidden power structures at play (Barker 2021). These analytical frameworks help to unveil how Indigenous tourism

is far from being a neutral or purely positive practice. Rather, it replicates the systemic violent acts that dehumanise, erase and assimilate Indigenous communities into settler hegemony (Barker 2021; Wolfe 2016). Even in this latest iteration of Indigenous tourism, colonial structures continue to strip Indigenous ontologies and cultures of their profound meaning (Olusoga 2021). Rather than offering an authentic and respectful representation of Indigenous communities, settler society continues to represent Indigenous tourism as a settler bricolage of realities controlled by settler society that serves to fortify the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2007).

This colonial assemblage persists in reproducing power imbalances that have existed since the nineteenth century, demonstrating that despite claims of ethical and progressive improvements, Indigenous tourism remains deeply intertwined with settler colonial structures. Whilst these structures are evolving, they still maintain settler dominance over Indigenous communities (Aldred 2000; Barker 2021; Waters 2004). Therefore, this article offers the field a need to explore through settler colonial theory how settler society's primary objective is to have Indigenous tourism without the Indigenous, as this would reduce anti-colonial pushback that challenges the settler state (Estes 2019).

In conclusion, settler bricolage analysis of Indigenous tourism highlights how settler colonial society continuously remoulds Indigeneity into a stylised creation that reduces Indigenous communities into an assemblage of caricatured, exoticised colonial tropes and representations (Barker 2021; Trask 1999). This process erases the depth of Indigenous ontologies, cultures, and epistemologies, whilst allowing settler societies to control and manipulate the narrative of Indigenous tourism. It is one that denudes Indigenous communities like the Seminole and Miccosukee, by controlling their representations to the market (Bruyneel 2021). This prevents authentic representations. Instead, Indigenous tourism becomes another means through which colonial power-structures are maintained, reinforcing centuries-old hierarchies that marginalise, erase and partially assimilate Indigenous communities to settler society.

This introspection through the article on Indigenous tourism critically examined settler colonialism's relation to Indigenous tourism not as a past event, but as an ongoing structure that reinforces colonial boundaries: physically, sociologically, and psychologically (Trask 1999). By employing the analytical tool of settler colonial theory and settler bricolage, this article has achieved a previously unexplored analysis in tourism studies. This perspective reveals how colonial narratives continue to dominate Indigenous tourism by stripping Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies of their meaning. In so doing, the article has only begun to uncover the darker practices embedded in settler colonial societies' interactions with Indigenous tourism. Moving this research forward could spark crucial conversations around actively decolonising tourism in a way that prevents settler objectives of assimilation, erasure, and exploitation (Wolfe 2016). This work is not new and can be seen in initiatives like the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum that the Seminole operate, which offers an anti-colonial perspective. The museum challenges settler colonial normative values, teaching visitors about a complex enriching community with histories, a present and hopes for the future (Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum 2024). However, this would require getting tourists to actively engage and participate with tourist destinations such as the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum. In order to facilitate this, more work is needed from academia and research organisations to challenge and dismantle the unconscious settler colonial

understanding of Indigeneity and tourism for tourists. By breaking these ingrained narratives, tourism could shift from perpetuating colonial structures to embracing genuine, respectful engagement with Indigenous cultures and communities (Tuhiwai Smith 2012). This requires not only scholarly attention but also public discourse and support to create sustainable, decolonised pathways in the Indigenous tourism industry.

More broadly, this article calls for a critical re-evaluation of colonial practices within tourism, a re-evaluation in which it is essential that Indigenous communities take the lead in defining how tourism should be conducted (Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Western society should no longer co-opt Indigenous travel and reduce Indigenous cultures to marketable attractions. True progress requires allowing Indigenous voices to shape the direction of tourism in ways that honour their traditions, histories, and sovereignty.

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