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# SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF TOURISTIC IMAGERY: CASE OF FIJI

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to contribute to a fuller understanding of the complex interplay between touristic representation and wider society. It traces the historical making of touristic imagery of Fiji, which centres on the amiability of indigenous Fijians, and provides a sociological analysis of the ways in which this process has been mediated by the broader patterns of social relations and conditions in colonial/post-colonial Fiji. In particular, the imagery is shown to be a simultaneously colonial, corporate and ethno-nationalist construct. The paper further explores how this imagery, although essentially dynamic, has in turn become reified and exerted considerable power over institutional arrangements and practices within and beyond the industry, most evidently in the allocation of specific touristic roles to indigenous Fijians. **Keywords:** touristic representation, images, Fiji, sociology. 

## INTRODUCTION

Images of destination peoples and societies have attracted much research attention over the past decades. Social scientific interest in this subject can be traced back to at least as early as the 1970s (see, e.g., Britton, 1979), and, as evidenced by Cohen's (1993) review, a substantial body of literature had emerged by the 1990s. To date, this literature has highlighted, amongst other things, the socio-cultural, politico-economic and ideological forces at play in touristic representation in diverse empirical contexts. Such analysis has been informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives, including semiotic and discourse analysis (Albers & James, 1988; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2002), postcolonialism (Palmer, 1994; Yan & Santos, 2009), feminism and gender studies (Aitchison, 2001; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000) and management and marketing (Prebensen, 2007).

Underpinning much of this literature is the overarching notion that touristic images cannot be studied narrowly in isolation from the wider social milieu; they are social phenomena intertwined with prevailing societal structures and arrangements. In particular, destination images

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have been found to be profoundly shaped by, and complicit in, colonial (and patriarchal) ''othering'' of peoples and communities. At the same time, many studies focus predominantly on contemporary images, and the actual historical process by which these images are constructed and re-constructed tends to be under-examined (Adams, 2004). The existing studies also often link touristic images almost exclusively with a particular (colonial, gender, etc.) power relationship, indicative of the need for an approach that is sensitive to a multiplicity of social relations that mediate on-going processes of touristic representation.

For instance, Silver's (1993, pp. 309–310) analysis of the Orientalising effects of touristic images is amongst many postcolonial studies that examine tourism marketing/promotion as ''one facet of...a complex asymmetrical relationship between Europe and the Other.'' The impact of such images is similarly discussed by many, such as Yea (2002), who scrutinises the ways in which Western images determine the destination status of indigenous communities in Sarawak, Malaysia. The assumption of inherent authorship of touristic representation is particularly evident in Bandyopadhyay and Morais's (2005) study, which contrasts ''two representations'' of India, one constructed and disseminated by American media (i.e. an embodiment of colonial discourse) and the other by the Indian government (i.e. a vehicle for anti-colonial resistance). These studies may be usefully complemented with a broader historical and analytical scope that explores the dynamism and multi-dimensionality of touristic images. This article hence seeks to contribute to a fuller understanding of the complex and on-going interplay between tourism and wider society with a closer examination of the process of the social construction of touristic images, namely, those of Fiji.

Fiji is a Pacific island nation with a population of 837,271, 56.8% of which is indigenous Fijian, 37.5% Indo-Fijian (largely the descendants of colonial indentured labourers from India) and 5.7% other ethnic groups (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2011). A British colony from 1874 to 1970, it is a developing economy that has historically depended on sugar exports and tourism. Since 1989, tourism has been the country's leading foreign exchange earner (Ministry of Transport and Tourism, Deloitte and Touche & Tourism Council of the South Pacific, 1997). Accordingly, tourism promotion occupies a prominent place in the economic and social life of the nation.

This industry has for decades relied upon a widely established notion of smiling and amiable (especially indigenous) populations as its primary marketing image. While the origins of this imagery predate modern tourism, its subsequent consolidation and popularisation owes much to the growth of mass tourism from the 1960s onwards. Along with the tropical climate and natural environment that provide an ideal setting for ''sun, sand and sea'' tourism, indigenous Fijians have taken centre stage in tourism promotion and advertising. They have been described as ''the world's friendliest people'' (Fiji Visitors Bureau, 2003), and official tourism reports have identified the reputation of the ''smil-

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ing, friendly, welcoming people'' (Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Energy, 1988, p. 54) as Fiji's only significant advantage over other similar destinations.

Despite such prominence, the touristic imagery of Fijians received scant research attention until recently. This contrasts with the large body of literature that exists in relation to colonial representation of Pacific Islanders. The paradisiac imagery of (especially the eastern) Pacific Islands and the notion of the Noble Savage, which was often associated with the Islanders during the ''contact'' period, have been studied extensively by historians, literary scholars and others (Connell, 2003; Nicole, 2001; Smith, 1960/1989). Representations of western Pacific (''Melanesian'') Islanders (and northern Pacific Islanders or ''Micronesians''), on the other hand, have received secondary attention, and there is a near-absence of research that focuses on (pre-)colonial representations of Fijians (for exceptions, see Kanemasu, 2005; Weir, 1998).

In the Pacific tourism literature, representation of the Islanders is yet to receive full attention, since much of its focus to date has been the economic, socio-cultural and environmental effects and potentials of tourism in the island societies (Britton, 1983; Farrell, 1977; Narayan, 2004; Rajotte & Crocombe, 1980). Notable pioneering work of relevance includes Cohen's (1982) historical sketch of the paradisiac imagery of the Pacific Islands. Cohen traces the incorporation of European philosophical/religious traditions of quest for terrestrial paradise into institutionalised tourism, which has created a form of ''constructed authenticity.'' A similar process is identified by Douglas and Douglas (1996), with a specific focus on Hawaii, while Douglas (1996) provides one of the few existing studies of imagery of hard savagery as the primary attraction of ''Melanesian'' tourism.

In the case of Fiji tourism, a few recent studies provide a basis for further research. Kanemasu (2008) and White (2007) both note the significance of the notion of amiability in touristic imagery of indigenous Fijians, the former exploring tourism workers' responses to this imagery and the latter highlighting the implication of the imagery in touristic quest for authenticity as well as in differentiation of indigenous Fijians from Indo-Fijians. Harrison (2010) examines early pictorial postcards from Fiji and other Pacific Islands and identifies their key themes, ranging from colonial discourses of savagery to contrasting representations of ''Polynesia'' and ''Melanesia.''

The present article seeks to contribute to this emergent regional literature and the wider tourism research by shedding light on the historical making of today's well-established touristic imagery of indigenous Fijians (henceforth ''Fijians'' for the purpose of convenience) and providing a sociological analysis of the ways in which this process has been mediated by the broader patterns of social relations and conditions in colonial and post-independence Fiji. Whilst the connection between touristic representation and relations of power has been studied by many, the article shows that such representations are not an embodiment of a monolithic power relationship but shift-

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ing images intersected by multiple and changing social relations. Simultaneously, far from a mere reflection of surrounding social arrangements, the images, through a process of reification, may exert considerable power over institutional arrangements and practices within and beyond the industry. Particular attention is paid here to the ways in which the imagery has shaped Fijians' roles and positions within the industry. In short, the article seeks to illuminate the dynamic interplay between touristic representations and wider social relations.

Such a perspective is broadly informed by Gramsci's (1971) treatise on ideology as a symbolic and cultural process of social interaction. His emphasis on the implication of ideas and symbols in hegemonic struggle of conflicting social groups is today incorporated into various theoretical schools, and especially Cultural Studies, which postulates culture as contested terrain that needs to be understood in relation to specific social and political contexts. Symbolic and cultural practices are a ''sort of constant battlefield'' (Hall, 1981, p. 233), where social groups interact, compete and negotiate to define their dominant meanings. These theoretical insights provide a broad conceptual framework for this study.

The discussion presented here is based on qualitative analysis of a selection of textual and visual representations of Fijians located in tourism advertisements, brochures, posters, travel journals, newspapers, magazines and postcards dating from the late 19th century to the present. These representations are not statistically representative. Given the objective of the study to outline the dominant touristic definitions of Fijians and their transitions, the representations were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of the scale of the circulation and/or influence that they are likely to have enjoyed, the salience of their themes identified through interpretation, and/or their practical accessibility. The main technique that facilitated the analysis is qualitative coding, which involved grouping of segments of texts and images under concepts and themes, followed by their examination in relation to wider socio-historical contexts.

It is acknowledged that the meaning of a text or visual image is essentially arbitrary and inexhaustible, and that attempts to identify its ''true'' meaning are epistemologically flawed. However, without denying the essential plurality and indeterminacy of meaning, one may argue that ''within a given cultural system, power and authority stabilise floating and arbitrary expressions to establish and generate structurally dictated sign concreteness'' (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994, p. 467). Such ''fixing'' of meaning is particularly evident in tourism advertising/promotion, whose primary aim is to produce typified destination images. This article identifies and examines such ''salient,'' dominant themes and meanings of representations on the premise that the tourism industry produces ''a field of common signifiers which are identified, fixed and transmitted . . . to provide a mutually supportive, orderly and coherent articulation'' (Taylor, 1998, p. 6).

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## HISTORICAL MAKING OF THE AMIABLE FIJIAN

### *Colonial Origins*

In contrast to their present reputation as ''the world's friendliest people,'' Fijians were first introduced to the Western world by the writings of missionaries, explorers and beachcombers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as violent and cruel savages of the ''Cannibal Isles.'' During this period, Westerners who visited or settled in the islands in pursuit of evangelical, commercial and political interests were often met with Fijian defiance and resistance, which resulted in violent conflicts (see e.g. Routledge, 1985). The dominant literary representations of Fijians at the time, with an antagonistic emphasis on their ''hard'' savagery (crystallised in cannibalism, violence and hostility), collectively constituted imagery of the Ignoble Savage who challenged and threatened Western interests and dominance in the islands (Kanemasu, 2005). What may be considered nobility (such as intelligence and kindness) was often suppressed with a definition of the ''Fijian character'' as inherently contradictory and irrational. What may be considered excessive threat, which endangers the notion of Western superiority, was negated with contrasting representations of Fijians as primitive inferiors in awe of Western power and manufactures. These rendered the early literary representations a peculiar mixture of overwhelming ignobility, negation of its threat and suppressed elements of nobility.

This imagery underwent gradual transformation in the late 19th- and early 20th-century colonial and literary writings (Kanemasu, 2005). As coercive pre-colonial domination gave way to increasingly hegemonic colonial rule, elements of nobility began to surface while those of ignobility were gradually submerged and relegated to the periphery, eventually coalescing into soft primitivistic imagery of the Good Savage—or ''embraceable natives'' to use White's (2007, p. 33) expression—that celebrated the amiability, hospitality and other virtues of Fijians. The annexation of the island group to the British Crown in 1874 symbolically completed the ''pacification'' of the former rebels. At the same time, the newly emerging imagery continued to assert the ignobility of Fijians by highlighting their self-subordination, and at times, potential defiance. Such shifting emphasis on ignobility and nobility was gradually shaped into the basis of the imagery with which Fijians are widely known today.

By the mid-20th century, the laudatory imagery of the amiable (yet self-subordinated) Fijian became decidedly predominant, with remnants of threatening hard savagery remotely persisting in the background. Such was the initial emergence of the imagery as an evolving colonial construct, which became progressively laudatory, ''ripe'' for corporate appropriation at the inception of mass tourism in the 1960s.

### *Embryonic Stages: Early Tourism*

Yet tourism in Fiji emerged with only a marginal part played by the local population in its promotion. The earliest touristic activities can be

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traced back to the second half of the 19th century, when visitors, who had purposes other than leisure for their stay, occasionally took time to experience the exotic and the novel for pleasure. Since the imagery of the Good Savage was still in the making, it was the islands' natural beauty that attracted these visitors, although a few recorded purchasing such indigenous artefacts as cannibal forks and war clubs (see e.g., Goodenough, 1876, pp. 220, 225), which would later become Fiji's principal tourist souvenirs.

In 1892, *Handbook to Fiji* was published with a small section spared for the subject ''Fiji as a Place of Resort for Tourists and Scientists.'' The central tourist attractions identified here were again ''botanic beauties'' and ''a healthy climate,'' but the idyll of palm-fringed beaches and underwater beauty—''sun, sand and sea'' elements—were also mentioned (Handbook to Fiji., 1892, pp. 43,45). By this time, Fiji was beginning to receive its first tourists who arrived specifically for pleasure (Stephenson, 1997) and aspects of indigenous culture, such as the fire-walking ritual, were beginning to attract tourist attention (see Allen, 1907/1984). The purchase of cannibal forks became so popular that by the beginning of the 20th century ''fake'' ones began to appear for tourist consumption (see Thomson, 1908/1968).

Among the earliest pictorial postcards were those featuring staged ''tribal war,'' cannibalism and warriors (Stephenson, 1997), which suggests persisting Western interest in the former imagery of Fijians—particularly men—as Ignoble Savages. On the other hand, Fijian women were presented, though fewer in number, in an evidently soft primitivistic manner reminiscent of the established Western imagery of ''Polynesian'' women (Stephenson, 1997). The earliest touristic representations of the indigenous population were thus characterised by a combination of persisting images of the Ignoble Savage and elements of emerging soft primitivism, although these remained a ''token'' presence within the infant industry (Harrison, 2010).

Modern tourism slowly emerged as Suva, the capital city, became established as a steamship port of call from the late 19th century to the 1930s (Douglas & Douglas, 1996). In 1923, the White Settlement League set up the Suva Tourist Board (replaced by the Fiji Publicity Board in 1925) with the aim of attracting Western immigrants and tourists (Scott, 1970). Figure 1 shows one of the Board's earliest advertisements, which describes Fiji as ''The Riviera of the Southern Seas'' and repeats the list of attractions noted earlier. With an equal emphasis on sporting activities and ''a virile, picturesque and interesting Native Race,'' the islands are defined primarily as an exotic health/winter resort.

This was followed by the post-war tourism growth, prompted by Fiji's position as a key refuelling stopover for air travel in the 1940/50s (Britton, 1982). By this time, the Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB) had succeeded the Publicity Board as the main tourism marketing agency. Advertisements of the period suggest that the focus had shifted somewhat from the previous winter holiday of excursions and sports towards ''sun, sand and sea'' tourism. A 1950s resort brochure (Figure 2) implies that it is not so much the botany and sports but the idyll of beaches and coconut trees that now comes to the fore.

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**Figure 1. Fiji Tourist Board Advertisement (Source: The Colony of Fiji 1874–1924, 1925)**

*Rise of the Amiable Fijian: Tourism Boom of 1960s*

The introduction of air travel and the ensuing global tourism expansion set off a mass tourism boom in Fiji in the 1960s and early 1970s (Coopers & Lybrand, 1989). This entailed large-scale foreign investment and a hierarchy of industry ownership topped by

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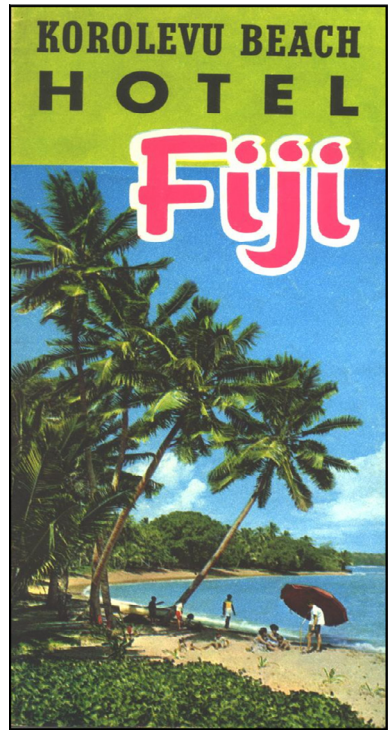


**Figure 2. Korolevu Beach Hotel Brochure, Circa 1950s (Courtesy of Bruce Sowter)**

foreign/multinational corporations, followed by ''local European'' businesses (i.e. those owned by Fijians of Western descent), then by ''part-European'' and Indo-Fijian businesses, with marginal participation by indigenous Fijians (Britton, 1980). It was during this period that the images of Fijians began to figure prominently in tourism promotion/advertising, while Indo-Fijians and other non-indigenous Fijians were consistently underrepresented, despite their occasional and marginal appearance (Kanemasu, 2005).

The centring of Fijians started with the featuring of the policeman. Fiji's policemen in their unique uniform had been popular among tourists since about the 1930s, and their images began to appear in pictorial postcards around the 1950s (Bruce Sowter, personal communication, February 2000). They were actively incorporated into tourism promotion/advertising by the 1960s, as illustrated by the FVB's 1963 poster (Figure 3), which became something of a symbol of Fiji's tourism until the early 1970s. Participation by the Fiji Police Band in promotional events became (and remains today) a routine activity around this time (see, e.g., Legislative Council of Fiji, 1963, 1970). The policeman thus became the first systematically highlighted Fijian

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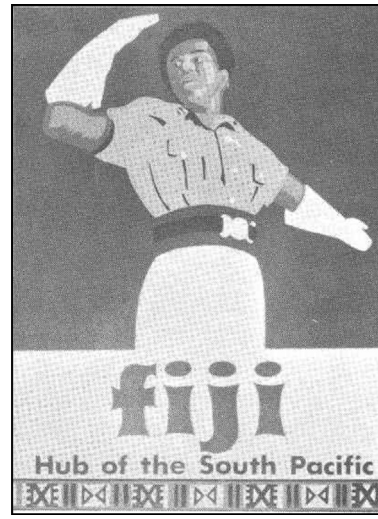


**Figure 3. FVB Poster (Source: *Fijiana,* 1970 June 1970)**

figure, although the emphasis remained simple exoticism featuring the distinctive appearance.

A new advertising approach was also underway. By the mid-century, the dominant literary representation of Fijians had transformed into the celebratory one of the Good Savage, and the islands had acquired a Tahiti-like paradisiac image, which appealed well to modern-day Western romanticism and began to be increasingly incorporated into tourism promotion/advertising. From the late 1960s, more and more advertisements highlighted the amiability of Fijians, who were presented in ''traditional'' or seemingly more ''natural'' settings, combined with a primitivist/romanticist message that alienated individuals of the industrialised West need an escape to the refreshing, unspoilt state of nature for spiritual rejuvenation.

The FVB advertisement that appeared repeatedly in the *Time* magazine in 1968 (Figure 4) exemplifies this approach. Along with the text that emphasises ''the *friendliest*, most fun-loving islanders,'' its pictorial image shows a white man in a business suit sitting on a canoe, apparently enjoying an escape from the Western world of work and distress. The Fijian man complements the tourist's escape to the primitive by wearing only *sulu* (a garment of oblong cloth wrapped around one's waist) and poling the canoe, while also expressing his subordination to the tourist by the fact of silently labouring in the background for the latter's pleasure. This became a recurring image in Fiji's tourism advertising/promotion.

Notably, while the colonial representation of the Good Savage had at times indicated remnants of the former antagonism, the emerging imagery was conspicuously devoid of the menace of the Ignoble Savage: the touristic version of the Good Savage was rendered entirely

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**Figure 4. FVB Advertisement (Source: *Time* 9 August 1968)**

harmless and purged of threat. Representations of ignoble hard savagery continued, most evidently in pictorial images and performances of war dances and souvenir cannibal forks and war clubs; but they came to play an accentuating rather than conflicting role in the soft primitivistic celebration of today's amiable Fijians.

The significance of this imagery becomes more evident when it is compared with representations of the other western Pacific Islands, notably Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, where touristic images remained closely connected to the 19th-century Western notion of ''savage Melanesia'' (Douglas, 1996, p. 90). Touristic representations of Fijians, by contrast, became evidently soft primitivistic and ''Polynesianised,'' which, however, featured not so much feminine attraction (as in the case of the eastern Pacific) as sturdy,

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muscular, yet harmless, smiling men. Thus in the light of the established Western vision of the Pacific in which ''Melanesians were fearsome males; Polynesians demure maidens'' (Connell, 2003, p. 565), Fiji presents a peculiar case.

### *The Hegemonic Amiable Fijian: 1970s Onwards*

The industry experienced a slump from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s (Coopers & Lybrand, 1989) and suffered further damage when two military coups d'état took place in 1987. The touristic imagery of Fijians experienced systematic consolidation during this period as the industry and the FVB sought desperately to recover and strengthen Fiji's market presence.

In 1980 the FVB launched its most successful advertising theme to date, ''Fiji: the Way the World Should Be'' (FVB, 1982). Initially introduced by Air Pacific and adopted and actively disseminated by the FVB, the phrase became Fiji's best-known tourism slogan. By the 1980s, along with images of cultural practices, a smile had become a traditional theme, and many advertisements featured it as Fiji's primary attraction, with visual images of smiling faces and titles such as *Where Swapping Smiles Is a Way of Life* (FVB advertisement, *Islands*, 1987), *The Friendly Face of Fiji* (Air Pacific advertisement, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1988, p. 40) and *Isles of Smiles, Miles of Isles, Fiji Islands* (Figure 5).

Subsequently, the tourist arrival numbers indicated gradual but relatively steady growth in the 1990s. The imagery of amiable Fijians took on renewed importance in the face of severe international competition. In 1989, *Tourism Masterplan Project* (Coopers & Lybrand, 1989) noted that the nation lacked a distinctive image to set it apart from

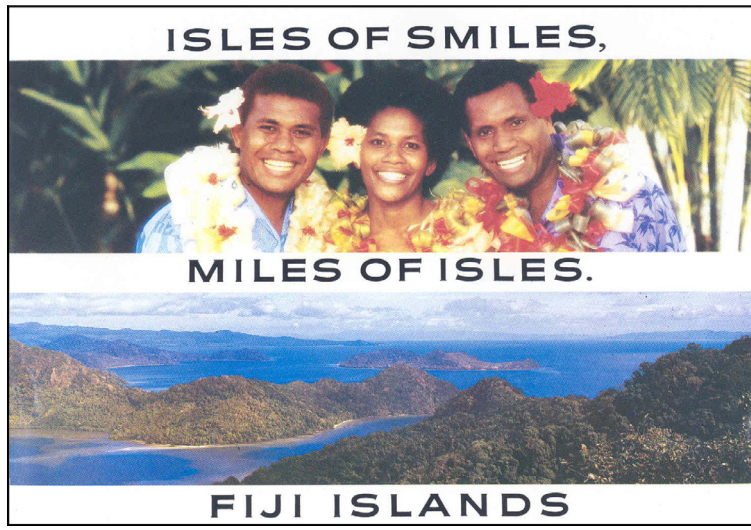


**Figure 5. FVB Poster (Source: FVB, 1990)**

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other tropical destinations, and similar concerns persisted in the 1990s (see Stollznow Research, 1992; FVB, 1994). Hence the smiling Fijian began to assume added significance, while indigenous history and culture were given renewed interest as potential areas of tourist attraction (Ministry of Transport and Tourism, 1997). Curiously, the FVB experimented with a different advertising approach around this time. The advertising image of ''Fiji Man,'' presumably designed and named after the cartoon character Superman, was used in the United Sates amid controversy from 1993 to 1995. The campaign was however discontinued due to unfavourable reception (FVB, 1994, 1996), showing how entrenched the soft primitivistic imagery had become by then.

Indeed, by 2000 a smile had become synonymous with Fiji's tourism, so that an industry representative's concern during the coup in that year (the third in the country's history) was solely centred on it: ''The icon of Fiji—the friendly face of Fiji has been severely damaged . . . Our task will be to get that friendly face back'' (''The Free-Fall of Tourism,'' *The Fiji Times* [FT], 18 June 2000). Fiji experienced yet another coup in 2006, which has placed the nation under military rule until today. In the face of the prolonged periods of political instability and damage to the international media coverage of the country, sustaining and capitalising on the established imagery of Fijians became


**Figure 6. Air Pacific Advertisement (Source: iTry., 2012)**

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more than ever important. Today's tourism advertising continues what has by now become an unquestioned marketing tradition (Figure 6).

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE AMIABLE FIJIAN

### *Touristic Imagery as a Colonial Construct*

Thus emerged the touristic imagery of the amiable Fijian, a product of a process of gradual but continual differentiation, typification and consolidation. The historical sketch above shows that this imagery, which is today accorded a taken-for-granted, hegemonic status, is a historical construct, embedded in concrete social relations and conditions that have shaped its complexities and specificities.

At its historical roots, the imagery is deeply embedded in Western colonial imaginings about Fiji, and especially about its ''hard'' and ''soft'' savagery. The Western colonial imagery of Fiji shifted from the initial antagonistic emphasis on ignoble hard savagery to the soft primitivistic and romanticist celebration of amiable savages. The latter is more suitably called the ''Good Savage'' than the ''Noble Savage.'' While the imagery has some commonality with the Noble Savage in that both are affirmative notions of the perceived ''primitiveness'' of non-Western peoples, the Savage of Fiji is distinctively characterised by amiability, crystallised in the act of a smile. As explained by Goffman (1979/2001, p. 48) a smile can be seen as a ''ritualistic mollifier'' in social interaction, an expressive offering with which the subordinate individual displays approval and appreciation of the superordinate. Repeated, conventionalised representation of Fijians with a smile, then, expresses a subtle combination of good will and self-subordination. Smiling Fijians embody their voluntary denial of threat and aggression, which effectively smoothes out remnants of the old Ignoble Savage and accentuates their (assumed) submission today. Such qualities make them ''good'' and even exemplary subordinates, yet not so ''noble'' after all.

Notably, the imagery often (though not always) centres around the tamed Fijian male who had formerly embodied threat and defiance. A typical example is found in a 1950s hotel brochure (Figure 2):

> Here, the traveller feels miles away from the hustle and bustle of civilisation…A short stroll along the beach ensures complete privacy and our traveller could imagine himself a Crusoe on a desert island, perhaps finding Man Friday as a beaming youth strolls along the beach with a couple of fish on the end of his spear.

Combined with romanticist celebration of escape to nature is one of the earliest (and most explicit) touristic representations of the Fijian as an amiable and self-subordinated Good Savage (Man Friday). Fijians in touristic images thus continued to represent ''savagery'' but particularly of a ''soft'', non-threatening kind. The subsequent images lost overtly pejorative emphases, yet elements of self-subordination persisted in the periphery. Indeed, the classic 1968 image of the Fijian man poling a canoe for a tourist (Figure 4) resurfaced repeatedly—

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in 1979 (Figure 7), 1999 (Figure 8)—and continues to be reproduced today (see Air Pacific advertisement in Tourism Fiji., 2012).

As noted earlier, representations of hard savagery have remained in souvenir cannibal forks and war dance performances. These not only serve as tokens of the ignoble past but, by the fact that they are today reproduced for tourists' pleasure, signify that ''their context of use has been abolished'' (Thomas 1994, p. 127) and that their original threat is securely locked in the past. Cannibal forks, war clubs and war dances, all carefully reproduced by today's amiable Fijians, crystallise the wonder of their transformation from Ignoble Savages, a theme which continues to be repeated by contemporary tourism. Touristic representation of Fijians is thus inextricably linked to constructions of savagery, and in particular, symbolic conquest of the rebellious ''Cannibal Isles'' that once threatened Western moral and physical superiority.

### *Touristic Imagery as a Corporate Construct*

While the connection between touristic images and colonial discourse has been highlighted by many, it is equally important to note that these images undergo a process of continual re-construction in the context of changing social relations. Indeed, the evolution of the imagery of Fijians is directly linked to the material interests of the tour-

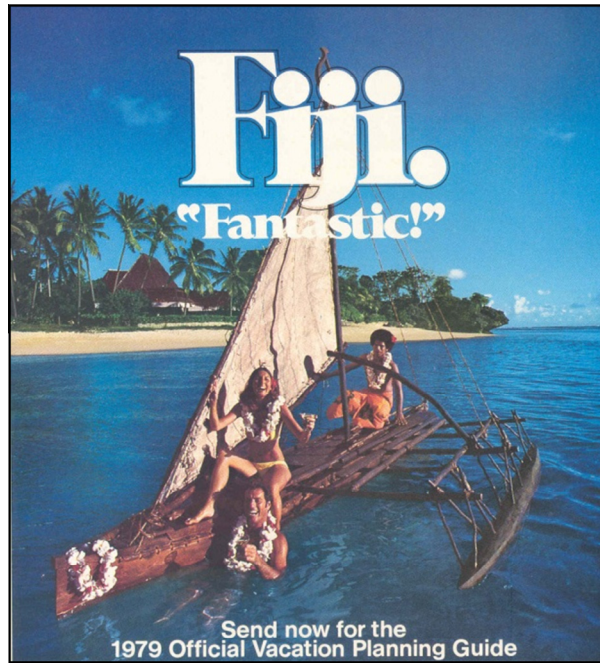


**Figure 7. FVB Advertisement (Source:** *Pacific Travel News***, March 1979)**

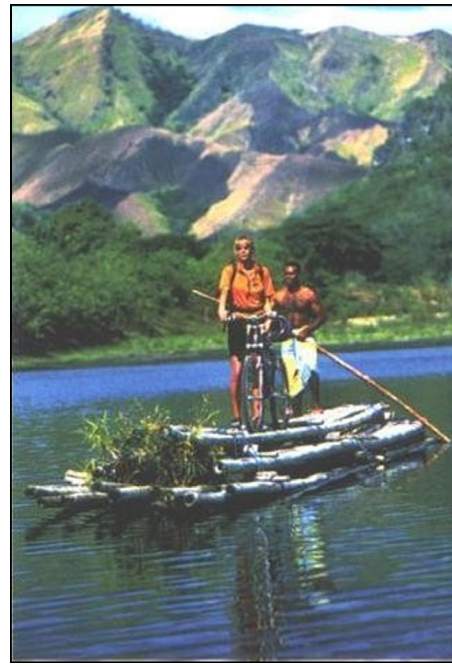

**Figure 8. FVB Poster (Source: FVB, 1999)**

ism industry. As noted by many researchers, the ''construction of place corresponds with the materialistic demands of the tourism industry…. [A]dvertisers seek to 'add value' to tourist products through the production of a certain 'image unity''' (Taylor, 1998, p. 6).

The touristic re-invention of the colonial imagery was actively undertaken by the FVB and tourism businesses. It is probable that this was encouraged by the successful example of Hawaii, where the paradisiac theme had been adopted by commercial interests since the 1850s (Douglas & Douglas, 1996). Moreover, in addition to the general appeal of soft primitivism, the imagery of Good Savages was marked by a latent suggestion of their subordination, particularly suitable for the promotion/advertising of tourism, in which local workers were expected literally to serve (mostly) Westerners with eagerness. It may hence be speculated that the imagery fitted in well with the marketing requirements of the industry. Subsequently, as it became an increasingly urgent task to establish a distinctive selling image to compete with other destinations, the imagery provided the industry with its only significant competitive advantage (see Coopers & Lybrand, 1989;Stollznow Research, 1990), resulting in powerful corporate investment in its typification and dissemination. In this regard, the imagery is clearly a corporate construct actively mobilised in service of (largely transnational) business interests.

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It is worthy of note that the FVB, a largely state-funded body, has played a leading role here. The national government, through its grant to the FVB, has heavily subsidised the marketing costs of tourism businesses especially since the late 1980s when the economy became decidedly dependent on the industry (Kanemasu 2005). The evolution of touristic images has thus been directly and systematically steered by corporate interests with vigorous and consistent state support.

*Touristic Imagery as an Ethno-Nationalist Construct*

Whilst the imagery first emerged as a colonial construct and was subsequently captured and mobilised by transnational corporate interests, its post-independence development was also mediated by the dynamics of national politics. Fiji's national politics was until recently dominated by the politicisation of ethnicity and the championing of indigenous interests vis-à-vis those of other communities, especially Indo-Fijians. In colonial Fiji, a hegemonic alliance developed between the colonial regime, the eastern chiefly/elite Fijian establishment and other groups (local European/Indo-Fijian/Part-European business interests and foreign/multinational corporate interests) with (particularly eastern) Fijian mass support on the one hand and the political marginalisation of Indo-Fijian and dissident indigenous Fijian masses on the other (see, e.g., Durutalo, 1986). This was accompanied by polarising stereotyping of the two communities, which associated indigenous Fijians with ''integrity, loyalty and generosity'' and Indo-Fijians with ''crafty, acquisitive and exploiting'' qualities (Norton, 1990, p. 39). This ethnic politics escalated in the years after the 1970 independence into three ethno-nationalist coups (two in 1987 and one in 2000). The marginalisation of Indo-Fijians remained a prominent aspect of Fiji's political and social life (Lal, 1992) at least until the latest coup of 2006 that drastically changed the political landscape of the nation.

The consolidation of the touristic imagery of Fijians took place in this political context. In the 1960/70s, a small number of official tourism reports recommended the inclusion of diverse cultures in tourist attractions (see e.g. Legislative Council of Fiji, 1970; Belt, Collins & Associates, 1973), and promotional materials occasionally featured Indo-Fijian cultural practices and/or the country's cultural diversity. But the years following the 1987 coups were characterised by an entrenchment of the centring and valorisation of images of indigenous Fijians and a further decline in the visibility of Indo-Fijian and other communities. Indeed, the FVB's 1990 and 1992 *Market Research Report* explicitly recommended against the promotion of Indo-Fijian culture, which ''was perceived as being 'negative' and certainly 'not an attraction' (Stollznow Research, 1992, p. 103).

Significantly, the period of Indo-Fijians' near-absence in tourism promotion/advertising (roughly from the late 1980s to 1998) more or less coincides with the terms of the post-1987-coup governments that publicly pledged to champion indigenous interests (Kanemasu, 2005). Indo-Fijians, who had constituted about half of the population prior

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to the 1987 coups, were almost completely excluded from the ''national'' image during this period. Whilst the consolidation of the imagery of Fijian amiability was clearly linked to the corporate necessity to establish a distinctive destination image, its apparently exclusionary nature was effectively sanctioned and normalised by the wider political ideology of indigenous supremacy.

The late 1990s saw a shift, when FVB materials started to include Indo-Fijian cultural symbols (especially Hindu temples) in an attempt to diversify tourist attractions. This approach continues today. In addition, the latest coup of 2006 brought fundamental changes to the wider political context. The coup was staged by the military, which, in contrast to its former role in spearheading ethno-nationalism, declared to embrace multicultural statehood (Fraenkel, Firth, & Lal, 2009) and introduced measures to eradicate ethnic division, such as the enforced public use of the term ''Fijian'' to refer to all citizens (National Council for Building a Better Fiji, 2008).

However, the slight shift notwithstanding, today's tourism promotion/advertising continues to under-represent, if not entirely exclude, Indo-Fijian and other communities. It remains to be seen if the state-enforced multiculturalism induces a qualitative change in future tourism marketing, or if the imagery of the amiable Fijian has become so entrenched, and perhaps reified, as to exert control over what and who should represent the nation to the world even in the face of considerable state/military pressure against ethnic identification.

## REIFICATION OF THE AMABLE FIJIAN

Such potency of the imagery shows that touristic representations are not a mere reflection of wider societal conditions but a tangible, material force in that they shape concrete social practices and institutions. This is also illustrated by the ways in which the imagery has shaped Fijians' role in the industry. Since about the 1960s tourist plants have placed indigenous Fijians predominantly in positions involving direct contact with tourists and Indo-Fijians ''behind the scenes'' in accounts, maintenance, gardens and kitchens (Britton, 1983; Samy, 1980). This practice is today regarded by many as a ''natural'' state of affairs, a logical consequence of indigenous Fijians' suitability for service roles. Yet importantly, direct service work was not always reserved for them in the early phase of tourism. Prominent hotels like the Grand Pacific Hotel listed ''attentive service by trained Indian waiters and servants'' as a key attraction in the 1930s (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, April 1939, p. 55).

With the increasing prominence of their touristic imagery, however, indigenous Fijians came to be defined as a people especially suited to serving tourists. They were allocated a distinctive and almost exclusive ''frontline'' role, both as appealing marketing images and as direct service workers. While the relative lack of formal qualifications and technical skills among them may partly explain this ethnic division of labour, their role of acting out the imagery—an important part of

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the commodity package and indeed the industry's crucial competitive advantage—plays a major part (Samy, 1980).

The imagery has thus shaped not only the representation of Fijians in tourism promotion/advertising but also their role as tourism workers. In many tourist plants today, the presentation of workers to tourists, including their personal appearance and bodily gestures, is carefully scrutinised and institutionalised. Above all, the emphasis is placed on smiling, which is enforced with corporate rules and in some cases practised and perfected through training (Kanemasu, 2008; Samy, 1980). The well-known greeting of ''*Bula*! (hello)'' with a smile is a primary guest-relations routine, the observance of which is strictly enforced by most hotels and resorts. The imagery is, then, ''lived'' by thousands of Fijian tourism workers in their everyday practices and interaction with tourists.

Furthermore, similar expectations have come to be extended to the wider (especially indigenous) communities. In fact, from its formative years, the industry regarded securing Fijians' accommodation of their touristic role as a priority. The cases of the Caribbean destinations and Hawaii in the 1970s (Turner & Ash, 1975; Young, 1973) warned that a

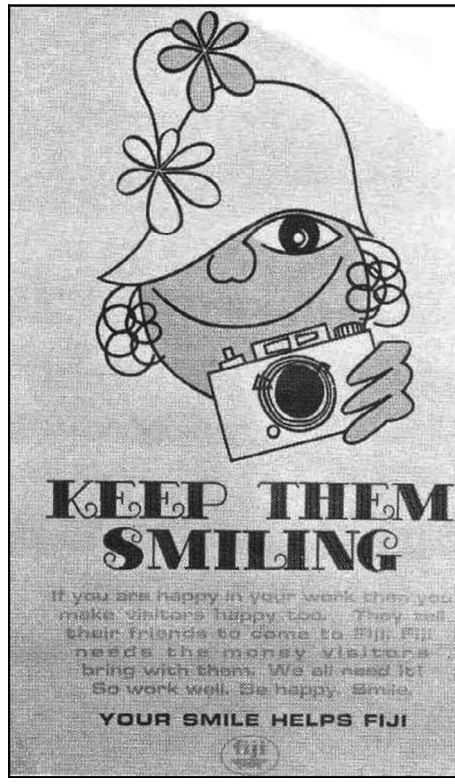


**Figure 9. FVB Poster (Source: Legislative Council of Fiji, 1970)**

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lack of local consent could pose a serious threat to tourism businesses. In Fiji, public and state perceptions of tourism were ambivalent or critical until the mid-1980s (Kanemasu, 2005), which was compounded by the fact that the touristic role allocated to Fijians offered limited economic rewards. Whilst they were (and continue to be) the largest beneficiaries of hotel employment, they were (/are) concentrated in lower-paid front-line positions, virtually at the bottom of the industry's job hierarchy (Britton, 1983). These circumstances made it all the more urgent to win Fijian consent to the industry and their designated place in it.

At least as early as in 1961 the FVB organised a weekly radio programme on tourism (Checchi & Company, 1961). In 1969, the Bureau launched a major public relations campaign with a poster *Keep Them Smiling* (Figure 9) and a booklet (in English, Fijian and Hindustani) that appealed for public cooperation: ''One of the main reasons they [tourists] come is because they have heard that Fiji is one of the FRIENDLIEST places in the world. ... Let us keep this reputation'' (FVB, 1969, p. 6, bracket added). The FVB produced another similar booklet in the 1970s (FVB, n.d.), which became part of the Form Two Social Science study book when tourism was introduced into the school syllabus (Fiji Social Science Committee, 1978). The FVB supplemented these with vigorous school talks, keenly aware of ''the potential danger that any change in [local] attitude may bring'' (FVB, 1984, p. 13, bracket added).

As tourism increased its economic significance, the media joined in the effort to induce local people's accommodation of their expected role. The national newspaper *The Fiji Times* editorial wrote in 1994:

> We have an edge over many...competitors because of our special culture and lifestyle. These give us the identity of a friendly, smiling group of people. We should capitalise on this smile as an important selling point...*Fiji, the Way the World Should Be*—that slogan we used to be proud of can still be very much relevant here. But it is really up to every one of us to play their part, collectively or individually (''Looking Closely at Tourism,'' FT, 28 October 1994, emphasis original).

Amiability had been elevated to a national ''identity'' that made the people ''proud'' and promised many economic benefits. By this time, the national government had become equally supportive, with increased grants to the FVB, foreign investment-friendly policies, and the creation in 1997 of the post of *Roko Tui Saravanua* in the Ministry of Fijian Affairs, which was (until its removal in 2005) responsible for visiting indigenous communities to encourage their cooperation with the industry (FVB, 1999).

Such measures were necessary not least because there were sporadic yet persistent indications of discontent amongst the local population. A series of disputes took place between indigenous landowners and resort/tour operators/owners in the late 1980s, throughout the 1990s and in the early 2000s, whereby landowners took drastic measures to demand greater financial returns or compensation for the use of their

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land or other resources (Kanemasu, 2005). The 2000 coup created further urgency. Following the crisis, *The Fiji Times* lamented the damage it had done to the cherished imagery with a caricature (Figure 10), and the FVB launched a campaign ''aimed at the local indigenous community for their help, assurance and hard work to rebuild the friendly Fiji Islands atmosphere'' with television advertisements (''Efforts to Revive Tourism,'' FT, 12 August 2000). In the following year, the FVB launched another television advertisement in which a colourful animated bird sang a song:

> Some visitors come to swim our oceans
>
> Some also come to share our smiles
>
> And when they come they bring what we need
>
> [An animation image of a tourist handing money to a local person appears here.]
>
> To help our lovely isles
>
> Show them that Bula Spirit
>
> Show them that Bula Smile
>
> Put your heart into it
>
> Show them that Bula Spirit...

For the duration of the campaign, this advertisement appeared almost daily on local television and radio to hammer the message home. It was


**Figure 10. Newspaper Cartoon (Source: FT 31 May 2000)**

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broadcast in English and Fijian but not in Hindustani, reflecting the industry's preoccupation with indigenous cooperation.

Thus, there have been concerted efforts by the industry, FVB, government and mass media to ensure that the people of Fiji—especially indigenous Fijians—live up to their role of amiable direct service workers and host population by enforcing and institutionalising workers' display of amiability, publicising their ''natural'' amiability as the nation's pride and economic hope, and undertaking a series of public relations campaigns. The touristic imagery of Fijians has come a long way: it has come to shape the economic and social lives of masses of Fiji Islanders.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has outlined the historical process by which the imagery of amiable Fijians emerged as a colonial construct and subsequently underwent continuous differentiation and consolidation through tourism promotion/advertising, rising eventually to the status of the principal image representing the country to the world. Whilst the imagery commands the status of a taken-for-granted and cherished national icon today, the preceding discussion has shown that Fiji's tourism marketing began with almost no relation to the local population or the now-familiar emphasis on their amiability. When the early touristic images did occasionally include Fijians, they were a peculiar juxtaposition of ignoble hard savagery of the past and ''Polynesian'' soft savagery.

Over the subsequent decades the touristic imagery of Fijians remained embedded in somewhat contrasting Western imaginings about ''soft'' and ''hard'' savagery. Even as the imagery became decidedly soft primitivistic and laudatory, representations of ignoble hard savagery (war dances, cannibal forks, etc.) remained, serving as a symbolic negation of the threat that Fijians had once represented and accentuating the wonder of their transformation. Negation of the threat of hard savagery is also found in the latent emphasis on self-subordination in representations of smiling Fijians, in which affability and good will at times border upon acquiescence and self-subjection. Complexities of Western constructions of savagery have thus been projected onto Fijians as a people who signify both hard and soft, ignoble and noble savagery. Whilst touristic images of ''Melanesia'' and ''Polynesia'' have historically polarised between those of ignoble hard savagery and romanticised, Arcadian soft savagery, the case of Fiji represents a complex entanglement of elements of both, a product of shifting emphasis on attraction and threat of savagery, negation and fear of the rebel of Fiji.

At the same time, the imagery is by no means a simple reflection of colonial discourses: it is a historical construct intertwined with changing social relations and conditions in post-independence Fiji. Most evidently, the consolidation and dissemination of the imagery was a result of vigorous and systematic corporate marketing drives, and thus tied directly to the material interests of (largely transnational) tourism

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businesses and indirectly to those of the post-colonial state, which depends on the sustenance of the industry for foreign exchange and employment generation and accordingly provides policy and financial support, most importantly through the largely state-funded Fiji Visitor Bureau (rebranded as Tourism Fiji in 2009). The rise of the amiable Fijian to the hegemonic status was hence steered by the needs of the industry, which, having experimented with alternative images (e.g. the policeman as the original, and ''Fiji Man'' as an experimental and failed, tourism icon), embraced the imagery not just as an effective marketing tool but indeed as its only significant competitive advantage.

Furthermore, the entrenchment of this imagery, and especially its increasing valorisation of Fijian amiability, took place in the context of intensifying ethnic politics of the late 1980s and 1990s, paralleling the marginalisation of Indo-Fijians in wider socio-political arenas. Smiling indigenous Fijians took centre stage, commended and celebrated as the country's economic hope and cultural pride, in a conspicuous contrast to the exclusion of Indo-Fijians (and Fijians of other ethnicities) in tourism promotion/advertising and the frontline of tourism work. The exclusionary nature of this ''national'' icon was sanctioned by the ideology of indigenous supremacy championed by the post 1987-coup governments.

The imagery is, then, not just a reflection of monolithic power but intersected by multiple and changing social relations and conditions: its latent emphasis on savagery and self-subordination continues to embody and reproduce the colonial discourse of the Good Savage, whereas its manifest celebration of amiable Fijians, accentuated by the conspicuous absence of Indo-Fijians, apparently privileges them, especially in the context of the post-independence ethnic politics. Underlying both are the material interests of the industry that appropriated the imagery to maximise its appeal to tourist romanticism/primitivism.

The imagery is today enshrined in touristic and media discourses and has become reified to the extent that it continues to dominate tourism marketing/advertising even as the military state enforces multiculturalism. Such potency of the imagery has manifested itself in other ways as well. The centrality of the imagery and the normalisation of amiability as a cherished Fijian virtue have entailed systematic tailoring of the touristic role and behaviour expected of Fijians. The FVB and the industry have sought to induce Fijian accommodation of these expectations with relentless public relations campaigns in the face of persisting, if sporadic, outbursts of local discontent and repeated political unrests. In this regard, the imagery is not a mere conceptual existence but constitutes a tangible part of daily practices, interactions and institutions: the people of Fiji and especially Fijian tourism workers have come to be encouraged and even instructed to align their behaviour with it.

Herein then lies the dynamic interplay between touristic representation and wider social conditions. Whilst the changing social relations have shaped and steered the constant evolution of the touristic imagery, the imagery has also played a tangible part in the shaping of

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aspects of tourism in Fiji: touristic images are both an outcome and a medium of concrete social relations and institutions. Furthermore, like all other social processes, the trajectory of touristic representation is essentially open-ended: despite the considerable degree of reification observable in the imagery today, it is open to further differentiation. Since the late 1990s there has been a slight shift in Fiji's touristic images, and it is to be seen whether the drastic changes in the political circumstances brought on by the 2006 coup will lead to qualitative change in the way the country and its people are represented by tourism.

Sociological inquiry contributes to illuminating the complexities of often taken-for-granted and seemingly ''natural'' touristic images. This is not to argue that touristic representations of Fijians are ''false'' in the sense that they distort an objective social ''reality.'' Neither is it to argue that Fijians are helpless victims of corporate advertising devoid of agency for self-expression. Indeed, as highlighted elsewhere (Kanemasu, 2008), Fijian tourism workers have appropriated this imagery in creative ways that enable them to cultivate an affirmative and empowering self-definition. As noted at the outset, the purpose of this article was a specific one to illuminate the dynamics of the process by which the dominant definition of a people is constructed and reified by tourism, by showing that such a definition is not necessarily inevitable and is inextricably tied to historically specific conditions, as well as by illustrating the considerable power that it exercises over the way Fiji and Fijians (of diverse cultural heritage) are represented to the world today. In other words, this article was intended as a contribution to the study of touristic images as a dynamic and complex social phenomenon. A

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