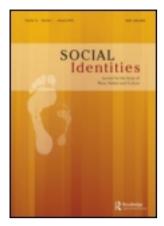
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# A national pride or a colonial construct? Touristic representation and the politics of Fijian identity construction

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### A national pride or a colonial construct? Touristic representation and the politics of Fijian identity construction

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Identity research in the Pacific region has been dominated in the past by discussions of reconstruction and mobilisation of symbols of cultural tradition as a medium of anti-colonial resistance and nationalism. The present article proposes to widen the scope of this literature by exploring mass tourism as a contested field of collective identification. It outlines the historical making of the colonial and post-colonial imagery of indigenous Fijians and its subsequent reification and essentialisation in the context of twentieth-century mass tourism. It further highlights the implication of this process in colonial, anti-colonial and post-independence national politics, in which indigenous Fijians have been variously located: the imagery has been claimed by Western colonialism, transnational corporate capitalism, ethno-nationalism, and counter-hegemony. The article illustrates that collective identity construction is not political in a uni-dimensional manner but constitutes a dynamic arena of ongoing 'cultural battle' where multiple power relations unfold simultaneously.

**Keywords:** touristic representation; Fiji; colonialism; counter-hegemony

#### Introduction

In the Pacific region, identity research has historically developed around questions of tradition and culture rather than class, gender or other dimensions of self-definition, due, amongst other things, to the significance of cultural renaissance as the primary context for the re-construction of post-colonial Pacific island identities (Linnekin, 2004; van Meijl, 2004). Social scientists have for the last three decades or so studied the various ways in which Pacific peoples have re-constructed and mobilised representations of cultural tradition and ethnicity to distinguish themselves from others and to cultivate a collective sense of self (see, e.g., Foster, 1995; Linnekin & Poyer, 1990; Mageo, 2001; Strathern, et al., 2002; van Meijl & Miedema, 2004). The almost exclusive focus on such questions, however, has resulted in a scarcity of research on other significant dimensions and contexts of contemporary identity construction in the Pacific. The purpose of this article is to contribute to widening the scope of identity research in the region by investigating touristic representation as a contested field of collective identification.

In an overview of the identity literature in the Pacific, Norton (1993) identified three related themes underlying the previous research: (1) the oppositional character

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of cultural identity in the context of inter-group conflict; (2) the validation of cultural identity in terms of the '(re-)invention of tradition'; and (3) the objectification and reification of cultural symbols and practices as signifiers of identity that are distinct and even detached from the routine everyday life of contemporary Pacific islanders. This body of literature developed against the historical backdrop of the decolonisation of the Pacific islands in the 1970s/1980s, the associated rise of nationalism and struggle for self-determination, and the challenges of post-colonial nation- and identity-making. Researchers hence focused their attention on how cultural tradition was re-interpreted and re-constructed and how this process played a central role in fashioning Pacific peoples' self-definition in the post-colonial era. Here, identity was studied primarily in relation to Western colonialism – as a product of, and a response to, Western colonial representations and stereotypes. Researchers such as Keesing (1978; 1982) highlighted cultural practices and artefacts as a symbolic vehicle and expression of anti-colonial resistance and indigenous nationalism. At the same time, Pacific island cultural identities were shown to be deeply embedded in Western colonial representations and stereotypes. In particular, a great deal of interest and debate was stimulated by the '(re-)invention of tradition' thesis (Hanson, 1989; Keesing, 1989; Keesing & Tonkinson, 1982; Lindstrom, 1990; Linnekin, 1990).

More recently, there has been an increasing awareness that colonial encounters, far from having a one-way 'fatal impact' (Moorehead, 1966) on colonised societies and peoples, encompassed 'distance and collision, connection and rejection, proximity and distance' (Thomas, 1999, p. 15). As Hall (1990, p. 224) pointed out in his discussion of black Caribbean identities, even as post-colonial peoples 'resurrect' cultural identity as a medium of resistance to dominant discourses, they engage in 'not the rediscovery but the *production* of identity' (emphasis in original). Furthermore, in the Pacific, as elsewhere, the continuing urbanisation, integration into global capitalism, migration, tourism, and rise of electronic communication in the last few decades have created ever-changing contexts for the negotiation of collective identities (Flinn, 1990). Consequently, the focal point of the Pacific identity literature appears to be shifting today from a preoccupation with a binary opposition between the pre-colonial/indigenous and the (post-)colonial/Western to an exploration into identity construction as an ongoing, dynamic and multi-faceted process, mediated not only by ethnicity, cultural tradition and colonialism but also by other previously unexplored dimensions such as gender (Dominy, 1990) and transnationalism (Macpherson, 1999; Macpherson, Spoonley & Anae, 2001; Perez, 2002).

In view of the trajectory of the Pacific identity studies to date, van Meijl (2004) outlined key challenges for future research. Following Norton (1993), he observed that, whilst the politics, (re-)invention and reification of culture and identity continue to bear critical relevance, greater attention is required to scrutinise their empirical dynamics and complexities. Amongst these are questions such as the extent to which cultural identity is constructed oppositionally; the authorship of the prevailing discourse of culture and identity; and the political interests of these authors implicated in its essentialisation. In addition, these questions need to be situated in transnational contexts of emerging importance, such as international tourism, diaspora and the Fourth World, where local identities are reconstituted in response to, and engagement with, changing global circumstances. In recent years, contributions have been made to a greater understanding of identity construction in diasporic communities (see, e.g. Bedford, Macpherson, Spoonley, & Anae, 2001; Macpherson,

1999; Macpherson, Spoonley, & Anae, 2001; Morton Lee, 2003; Perez, 2002) and in the Fourth World (see, e.g. Dominy, 1990; Flores, 2004; Tonkinson, 1990). By comparison, tourism as a context for Pacific island identity construction has received scant research attention.

The findings of a few existing tourism studies of relevance correspond to (the objectivist strand of) the 'invention of tradition' thesis, highlighting the profound impact of externally (and especially colonially) derived touristic representations of culture and tradition on contemporary Pacific island identities. Cohen (1982) traced the incorporation of European philosophical/religious traditions of quest for terrestrial paradise into institutionalised tourism, which resulted in constructed authenticity conforming to the vulgarised imagery of the region. Douglas and Douglas (1996, pp. 23, 32–33) similarly discussed the touristic appropriation of paradisiac imagery of Hawai'i, which became 'a thoroughly shop-worn cliché' and 'infuses the work of many contemporary native Hawaiian artists, in their own representations of the 'real' Hawai'i'. In the case of Fiji tourism, Hashimoto (1999) observed that, by accepting to act in accordance with paradisiac imagery, Fijians unknowingly participate in the tailoring of their cultural heritage for touristic consumption. Thus the Pacific tourism literature, at least until recently, has been preoccupied with the question of 'constructed authenticity' and its considerable power to shape Pacific islanders' self-expression and self-conception. This is perhaps because mass tourism is an area in which the objectification, commoditisation and reification of cultural practices and symbols have been particularly prominent. Nevertheless, van Meijl's (2004) suggestion is pertinent here. In line with the conceptions of culture and identity as an ongoing and dynamic process of social construction and post-colonial peoples and communities as active agents contesting and negotiating this process, tourism should not only be studied as a monolithic power relationship: greater attention should be paid to local agency and strategies that redirect touristic forces in pursuit of a variety of interests.

In response to the research agenda outlined by van Meijl, this article seeks to contribute to the Pacific identity research with a sociological analysis of collective identity construction in the context of Fiji's mass tourism. The article examines the salience of the notion of amiability in pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and touristic representations of indigenous Fijians, and the historical process by which it has come to mesh with contemporary indigenous Fijian collective identity. It also seeks to illuminate the multiplicity of the power relations that intersect this process: rather than assuming the process to be an expression of all-encompassing colonial power, the article explores the complexity and dynamics of the politics shaping this process by showing that the notion of 'amiable Fijians' constitutes a site of multiple relations of domination and resistance in which indigenous Fijians are variously located. Representations of culture and identity encompass colonial, anti-colonial, and furthermore, post-independence national, politics. In short, this article seeks to show that collective identity construction is not political in a uni-dimensional manner but constitutes a dynamic arena of ongoing 'cultural battle' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 348) where multiple power relations unfold simultaneously. There is no single author or set of interests tied to such an identity.

This analysis is informed by Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony, which illuminates the manner in which relations of power are both maintained and contested through the medium of ideological and cultural struggle. Key amongst the

advantages of the Gramscian approach is its capacity to transcend the reductionism of some of the conventional theoretical perspectives that equate dominant discourses with uncontested power, as well as their assumption of inherent authorship of such discourses, for it facilitates investigation into the dynamic interplay between forces of domination and resistance.

In the following, I will give a brief account of the historical making of the colonial and post-colonial imagery of 'amiable Fijians' to show its essential fluidity and plasticity as well as its continuity, followed by an examination of the subsequent process of its reification and essentialisation in the context of twentieth-century mass tourism. In doing so, I will highlight the implication of this process in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial relations of power.

#### The historical making of the 'amiable Fijian'

'Fiji, the Way the World Should Be,' a slogan launched in 1980 by the Fiji Visitors Bureau (1982), represented the Pacific island nation in the international tourism market for decades and continues to circulate widely today as something of a local axiom. The phrase is typically combined with images of palm-fringed beaches, hibiscus flowers, and most importantly, smiling faces of indigenous Fijians (henceforth Fijians), who comprise 56.8% of the national population and are widely associated with such qualities as amiability, hospitality and affability. They are often described as 'the world's friendliest people' (Fiji Visitors Bureau, 2003), their smiles reputed to be the key competitive advantage of the tourism industry. Curiously, however, Fiji was first introduced to the Western world in the eighteenth century as the 'Cannibal Isles' inhabited by savage and cruel cannibals. The early contact between Fijians and Westerners was often marked by open conflicts, whereby Fijians defied Western attempts to exploit their natural and human resources, refused to accept the terms of trade dictated by Westerners, refused to surrender to the Western god, and moreover, struck back with formidable force by physically fighting back or manipulating Western interests (Routledge, 1985; Spate, 1988). The eventual Western control was won only by violent suppression of defiant islanders. In the context of such domination, resistance, attacks and counterattacks, Fijians were associated with antagonistic images of Ignoble Savages, who 'stood unrivalled as a disgrace to [hu]mankind' in the words of an early missionary (Calvert, 1858/1985, pp. 1–2).

In less than 100 years, these Ignoble Savages came to represent quite the opposite. The process of the 'transformation' of Fijians in pre-colonial and colonial representations was gradual and marked by a peculiar coexistence of notions of nobility and ignobility (Kanemasu, 2005). The early representations of Fijians in Western missionary, explorer and beachcomber narratives from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century were dominated by the ignobility of cannibalism, violence and defiance of Westerners; yet they also paradoxically coexisted with elements of what may be seen as nobility such as intelligence and kindness, albeit suppressed by an emphasis on the allegedly contradictory and incoherent nature of 'the Fijian character'. In addition, the threat evoked by ignoble hard savagery was at times negated by contrasting representations of Fijians as primitive inferiors in awe of Western technological, military or moral superiority. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the elements of nobility began to surface while those of ignobility were gradually submerged and relegated to the periphery, in parallel with Fijians'

perceived submission to Christianity and to Western commercial and political interests (culminating in the cession of the islands to the British Crown in 1874). As the Ignoble Savage was perceived to accept surrender, he<sup>2</sup> began to take on the look of a Good Savage rather akin to the Noble Savage of the eastern Pacific, although the two savages often coexisted until the latter finally became dominant. The soft primitivistic imagery that came to be celebrated by colonial writers highlighted friendliness, good nature, hospitality and other virtues of Fijians, while it also continued to assert the ignobility of their self-subordination and, at times, of their persistent and potential defiance. The two contrasting images of Ignoble and Good Savages thus emerged from an intricate mixture and intertwining of elements of ignobility and nobility. The hostile cannibal and the smiling soft savage, hostility and amiability, defiance and self-subordination, overlapped and coexisted with varying degrees of emphasis. As Fijians were increasingly brought under colonial rule, such shifting emphasis was eventually shaped into the basis of the imagery with which they are widely associated today. At the turn of the century, the prominent travel writer Beatrice Grimshaw gushed (1907, p. 22): 'Nothing can be more amiable and good-natured than the Fijian of to-day.' By the 1940s, they had become, in the words of the popular novelist James A. Michener (1946, p. 126), 'the most completely lovable people on earth.' Thus, by the mid-twentieth 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 process of the early construction of the imagery of the amiable Fijian, which, like other colonial discourses, was deeply embedded in relations of power. The initial antagonistic imagery of the hostile cannibal legitimised the Western evangelical enterprise and often violent subjugation of defiant local populations imperative for the profitable commercial exploitation of the islands. As the rule by coercion shifted towards more hegemonic rule by Western and local allies, the imagery became increasingly laudatory and came to assume characteristics of a persuasive ideological rhetoric that contributed to eliciting and sustaining, in the manner discussed by Gramsci (1971), the consent of Fijians to the rule. Indirect rule by the colonial regime in alliance with the eastern<sup>3</sup> Fijian chiefly/elite establishment (as well as the non-indigenous elite and foreign corporate interests) rested primarily on the politicisation of ethnicity and championing of indigenous interests vis-à-vis those of Indian immigrants<sup>4</sup> (Durutalo, 1986; Lawson, 1990; 1991; Norton, 1990; van Fossen, 1987). In this context, the gratifying and complimentary imagery was accentuated by contrastingly stigmatising representations of Indo-Fijians, who were typically described as the 'antithesis' of amiable Fijians (Foster, 1928, p. 244), providing normative endorsement and further encouragement for indigenous allegiance to the colonial order. Nicole (2001) offers a relevant observation in the case of Tahiti, where the seemingly privileging imagery of the islanders served to define any oppositional action as 'uncharacteristic' and 'unTahitian.' The celebration of Fijian amiability as a precious virtue to be upheld had the similar effects of normalising political accommodation and, by implication, invalidating oppositional politics and actions. Hence when an oil company workers' strike in the capital turned into mass protests and riots against Western rule in 1959, the protesting crowd that had defied the batons and tear gas grenades of the police riot units dispersed voluntarily following the admonitions and reiterations by leading chiefs of the shame they had brought to their honourable reputation: the invocation of the affable and congenial Fijian proved to be 'a potent weapon' in suppressing the potential mass rebellion (Hempenstall & Rutherford, 1984, p. 85).

#### Rise to the pride of the nation: re-invention and reification

The imagery of the amiable Fijian that took shape during the colonial era underwent further consolidation and differentiation in subsequent decades. With the rise of mass tourism, the imagery, much like the paradisiac imagery of the eastern Pacific, began to acquire economic value as a tourism marketing tool. This, together with the advancement of communication technology, led to the systematic reproduction and circulation of the imagery. The FVB (rebranded as Tourism Fiji in 2009), a largely state-funded body, played a critical role by vigorously and consistently disseminating the imagery from the late 1960s onwards (Kanemasu, 2005). In addition, with the growth of tourism into the largest foreign exchange earner, the state and the media positions on the industry became visibly supportive in the early 1990s. Accordingly, the touristic imagery of the smiling Fijian came to be commended and promoted not only by the industry and the FVB but by the state and the local media.

During this process, the ambiguity and tension that had characterised the earlier imagery were largely (though not entirely) removed. Unlike other Western Pacific islanders whose touristic representations remained persistently linked to hard savagery (Douglas, 1996), Fiji's tourism depended increasingly on soft primitivism which centred upon the amiable Fijian and the tropical idyll of 'sun, sand and sea.' Representations of the ignoble hard savagery of the past, such as souvenir war clubs and cannibal forks and war dance performances, remained only to accentuate this soft primitivistic emphasis. Another significant development during this period is an increasing articulation of the imagery with Fijian cultural tradition, illustrated, for instance, by the former President Ratu Kamisese Mara's comment: 'We Fijians have a natural and traditional advantage in work of this kind [i.e., hospitality] ... I do want to emphasise that by history, tradition and culture we are uniquely equipped to welcome and entertain visitors' (Fiji Tourism Convention proceedings, 1968, pp. 2– 3). Elements of what were perceived to be traditional values, such as accommodation and generosity, were increasingly integrated into the touristic representation of amiability, which was thereby validated and even elevated to a 'natural and traditional' trait of Fijians. By the 1990s, along with cultural practices such as firewalking, meke<sup>5</sup> and the yaqona<sup>6</sup> ceremony, a smile had become a traditional theme in tourism promotion, and many advertisements solely featured it as Fiji's attraction (Figure 1). By 2000, a smile had become synonymous with Fiji's tourism, so that an industry representative described it as nothing less than 'the icon of Fiji' ('The Free-Fall of Tourism,' The Fiji Times, 18 June 2000).

Indeed, amiability became more than an effective tourism marketing tool; it gained the status of a widely celebrated national image. The friendly Fijian came to be exalted both as a bread winner of the country and as a matter of national pride. This is illustrated most clearly by the famous slogan 'Fiji, the Way the World Should Be,' which portrays Fiji not only as a good holiday destination but indeed as the envy of the world. That the imagery became much more than an externally-imposed tourism propaganda and indeed came to resonate deeply with Fijian people's sense of collective identity is illustrated by a letter that appeared in the national newspaper *The Fiji Times* during the 2000 coup d'état. The writer lamented the damage of the

# MILES OF ISLES.

ISLANDS

Figure 1. Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB) poster *Isles of smiles, miles of isles, Fiji Islands*. Source: Fiji Visitors Bureau, 1990.

coup not just to an effective tourism marketing tool but to a treasured symbol of the nation by saying: 'Never in our lives will we say "Fiji – The Way the World Should Be" ('This Is Our Fiji,' *The Fiji Times*, 28 May 2000). Thus the imagery, initially constructed in pre-colonial and colonial representations, was 're-invented' as a symbol of Fijian cultural identity. One may even speak of 'reification' here in light of the power that the imagery commands today to shape the expected behaviour of the people of Fiji in general and Fijian tourism workers in particular. Not only is the imagery routinely reproduced in advertisements and other media contents, it dictates to Fijians the distinctive role within the industry of providing necessary labour at the same time as embodying the famed amiability, thereby supplying the industry's crucial competitive advantage: 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) consisting of direct service work and display of amiability became the taken-for-granted role of Fijian tourism workers (Britton, 1983; Samy, 1980).

#### The 'amiable Fijian' as a site of politicisation of ethnicity in post-independence Fiji

Cultural constructions of identity take place within a field of concrete social relations that shape their complexities and specificities (Norton, 1993). Like its antecedent, the touristic imagery of Fijians is mediated by the dynamics of the prevailing political order, in particular, the national politics of the post-1970 independence era. Whilst it has come to command the status of a celebrated national icon, this 'national' image is an almost exclusively indigenous Fijian one. Indo-Fijians, who make up close to 40% of the population, along with other non-indigenous Fijians, are a marginal presence in this imagery, in marked correspondence to their earlier colonial definition as the 'antithesis' of amiable Fijians. The colonial political order was in large part carried into the post-independence era and continued to rely on the politicisation of ethnicity for indigenous Fijian mass support (Durutalo, 1986; Lawson, 1990; 1991; Norton, 1990; van Fossen, 1987). This entailed, especially after

the ethno-nationalist military coups of 1987, the political marginalisation of Indo-Fijians, which was codified in state policies and the national constitution (until its amendment in 1997),7 and resurfaced at the time of the 2000 coup (Lal, 2002; Ratuva, 2007). This also involved the social marginalisation of Indo-Fijians, whereby 'Fijian' cultural traditions and virtues were officially championed and upheld over those of Indo-Fijians (and other minority communities). The touristic imagery of Fijians constituted a site of such marginalisation, paralleling the polarised ethnic stereotyping of the colonial era, which associated indigenous Fijians with 'integrity, loyalty and generosity' and Indo-Fijians with 'crafty, acquisitive and exploiting' qualities (Norton, 1990, p. 39). Indigenous Fijians continued to be granted gratifying, privileging imagery that proudly represented the nation, in contrast to Indo-Fijians who were until recently systematically and almost entirely excluded from touristic promotion/advertising. The consistent celebration of amiability and other 'Fijian' virtues served to facilitate something of indigenous supremacy in the realm of the national image and identity as well as in the distribution of political power.

The latest coup, in 2006, was staged by the military, which drastically moved away from its former role as 'a guardian of indigenous communal interests' (Ratuva, 2007, p. 30) to that of sanctioning multi-ethnic statehood. Subsequently, the interim government declared to eradicate 'racial division' (National Council for Better Fiji, 2008, p. 11) with such measures as the denouncement of the conventional, ethnically-based demonyms (e.g. 'Fijian' and 'Indian'). With state control over the media and the freedom of expression in place, it is not clear how successful such state measures have been in countering the long history of ethnic identification. In the meantime, tourism marketing continues 'business as usual' with its primary focus on indigenous Fijians and their smiles, and non-indigenous Fijians remain a supplementary presence promoted only so far as to add to variety.

#### The 'amiable Fijian' as a site of post-colonial domination of indigenous Fijians

The political effect of this imagery, however, is not monopolised by any one specific social group. Indeed, gratifying as it seems, the imagery has also been implicated in the subordination of Fijians on a number of levels. On a symbolic level, the soft primitivistic imagery, if without apparent pejorative tones, has continued to present Fijians in pre-modern, 'traditional' settings and define them as 'savages' whose supposedly simple existence closer to the state of nature appeals to Western romanticism. Moreover, the imagery has retained its latent emphasis on selfsubordination. Fijians are celebrated as a people who represent 'the way the world should be' yet also often portrayed as willing subordinates anxious to please Western visitors, eagerly smiling or meekly poling the canoe for their enjoyment (Figures 2– 4). Amiability, in other words, has remained infused with self-subordination, a double-edged notion containing elements of both nobility and ignobility. In the context of mass tourism, self-subordination is embodied in highly institutionalised face-to-face interaction between visitors and Fijian tourism workers, in which the latter literally play serving roles while displaying the expected amiability (Fong, 1973; Samy, 1980).

On a political level, I have earlier discussed how the imagery was mobilised as a legitimating ideology to induce Fijian consent to the colonial order. The years since



Figure 2. Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB) advertisement By now, You've earned a holiday in Fiji. Source: Fiji Visitors Bureau, 1968.

the 1970 independence have seen continued deployment of the imagery in securing Fijians' accommodation of the existing socio-political arrangements, but more specifically, the existing structure of the tourism industry and their place in it. The principal form of Fiji's tourism is mass tourism, which is dominated by foreign capital and local elite interests, with limited Indo-Fijian and marginal Fijian ownership (Britton, 1983). For the majority of Fijians, the only avenues of accessing the economic benefits of the industry are hotel employment and land leases. However, while numerically Fijians are the largest beneficiaries of hotel employment, they are, as noted above, concentrated in under-paid direct service positions. That is,

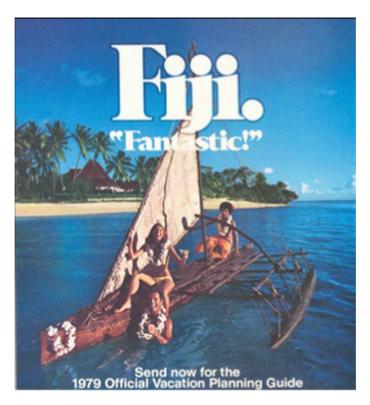


Figure 3. FVB advertisement *Fiji Fantastic!* Source: *Pacific Travel News* March 1979.

despite playing the 'icon of Fiji' and providing the necessary labour, their economic gains from and control over the industry have been marginal.

In establishing and sustaining this structure of the industry, the touristic imagery of Fijians has served as an effective persuasive ideology. The imagery suggested that it was 'natural', and perhaps even honourable, for Fijians to be placed in the 'frontline' service roles and display their prized amiability to visitors: the imagery allowed a matter-of-course definition of Fijians as ideal direct service workers, and the laudatory connotation of the imagery rendered their role desirable rather than inevitable. Placing Fijians in direct service jobs with low rates of pay thus became less a matter of economic subordination and took on an aspect of celebration of indigenous virtues. The industry's public relations campaigns have frequently relied on such persuasive effects of the imagery to ensure the receptiveness of the tourism labour force and wider communities. When the 2001 FVB television advertisement called on the public to 'show them [i.e., tourists] that Bula<sup>9</sup> Smile' to counter the damaging effect of the coup of the previous year, it not only emphasised the economic value of amiability but also appealed to the viewers' pride in their honoured reputation (Kanemasu, 2005).

Thus the notion of Fijian amiability, elevated to the status of a treasured national pride, has served the sustenance of the existing structure of Fiji's tourism by fostering the assent of Fijian workers and wider communities to the status it assigns to them.

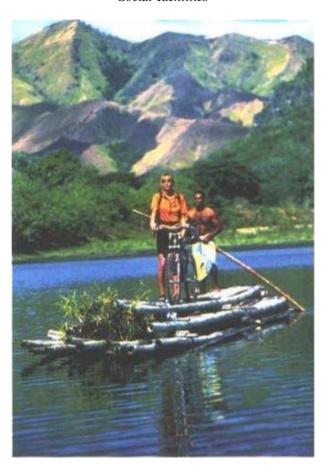


Figure 4. Fiji Visitors Bureau (FVB) promotional image. Source: Fiji Visitors Bureau, 1999.

Fiji's tourism has faced occasional expressions of local discontent in the past, notably in the form of landowners' protests over their share of its economic returns (Kanemasu, 2005). The touristic imagery of Fijians, together with the industry's public relations campaigns and official measures, counters the development of such potentially oppositional actions and ideas by defining amiability as their prized virtue and attaching positive normative value to their touristic role. My own previous research suggested that the allocation of direct service work to Fijians is often enthusiastically endorsed by Fijian tourism workers themselves on the grounds that Fijians have 'the natural flair' for it (Kanemasu, 2008, p. 223): the workers often see their role not merely as a job but as a proud display of their culture. Whilst their accommodation may also be pragmatically motivated by material interests and economic pressures, the significance of the imagery lies in its persuasive effects of inducing the workers' active consent to their role.

This indeed appears to have played an important role in the sustenance of the industry in the turbulent years of the late 1960s to the 1980s, when Caribbean destinations and to some extent Hawai'i experienced overt and sometimes violent

resentment and antagonism of local populations towards mass tourism (see e.g., Turner & Ash, 1975; Young, 1973). Although scholars and officials feared that Fiji might follow the same path (Belt, Collins & Associates, 1973; Britton, 1983; Central Planning Office, 1975; Fong, 1973; Samy, 1980), the industry continued to secure more or less 'spontaneous' consent of the workers to their touristic positions and roles.

#### The 'amiable Fijian' as a site of counter-hegemonic resistance and agency

The amiable Fijian may thus be seen as a colonial and post-colonial construct mobilised to uphold colonial, multinational corporate and local elite interests. However, to assume the totality of the power exercised by any of these social groups or institutions would be empirically unfounded as well as analytically problematic. In his study of Western visions of the Pacific, Connell (2003) presents an important observation that, whilst there is a significant connection between Western imaginings and indigenous self-representation, Western constructs are not internalised in any simple manner but re-created by the islanders in their attempts to challenge colonialism/racism and to assert their cultural identities and traditions. The case of Fiji similarly shows that Fijians, far from being helpless victims of colonial/post-colonial ideological manipulation, have actively appropriated the Western/touristic definition of themselves and reconstituted it as a counter-hegemonic strategy.

I have elsewhere argued that Fijian tourism workers' 'consent' to the touristic imagery and the role it dictates to them encompasses an array of responses that form the basis of not only the stability of, but a possible challenge to, the hegemonic order (Kanemasu, 2008). Underneath the conspicuous valorisation of the imagery, workers often attach to the notion of amiability alternative meanings that allow them to cultivate counter-hegemonic self-definitions. In contrast with the colonial/touristic definition of amiability as a manifestation of voluntary subjection, amiability for many tourism workers is the basis of a positive self-definition – i.e., self-affirmation rather than self-subordination. Amiability is not an 'offering of an inferior' (Goffman, 2001, p. 48) but an empowering asset: not only is it an indispensable resource on which the whole industry depends, it is an ability to interact actively and meaningfully with the tourist 'other' and even to produce a profound emotional effect on them. Most tourism workers can recount instances of establishing genuine and lasting friendships with tourists and making them laugh and happy by utilising their congeniality as a powerful resource. The meanings of amiability derived in such contexts are grounded in an alternative self-evaluation that challenges the meek obedience of the colonial Good Savage.

Furthermore, despite their active affirmation of amiability, workers often refuse to accept as their own the notions of self-subordination and primitivism underlying the touristic imagery (Kanemasu, 2008). Workers also respond variously to the aspects of their work role that they find contradictory to their self-definition, especially the institutionalisation (i.e., standardisation and enforcement) of amiability and asymmetrical power relations with tourists. Workers' response to these ranges from active and passive accommodation to covert acts of resistance, while overt resistance is uncommon. Notably, amongst the workers who accommodate such aspects are those who embrace their touristic role not as a gesture of submission but as a resource with which to potentially bring about mutual understanding with

tourists. Employing amiability as an effective means, these workers refuse to withdraw from visitors who are offensive towards them and continue to try to engage them in friendly interaction. Here, maintaining amiability in the face of open aggression or disregard by the other becomes not an act of submission but an attempt for dialogue. In other words, even as they apparently embrace their designated role, workers may reverse the logic of touristic amiability and use it to engage the other in dialogic interaction, the exact opposite of what it is designed to produce. Workers use amiability to define themselves as an interacting subject, not an object of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1990).

These ideas and practices illuminate the complexity and potency of Fijian agency: Fijians do not simply adopt the touristic imagery but actively reclaim it as their own and redefine it as a possibly counter-hegemonic strategy by employing options available to them within the limits of existing conditions. In this sense, the imagery is no less 'authentic' or 'oppositional' as a self-definition than those associated more ostensibly with representations of the pre-colonial past. As attested by a wealth of ethnographic research, Pacific islanders have over generations creatively reformulated foreign technology, practices and ideas in negotiating and asserting their collective identities (see e.g. Hereniko, 1999; Mageo, 2001). Fijian tourism workers' responses indicate that, even under enormous corporate pressure and control, people continue to exercise their agency in a creative, if not immediately apparent, manner. Along with other instances, these hold out the possibilities of fostering and embodying Hereniko's (1999, p. 153) 'model for the new Pacific Islander', who creatively harnesses 'European or American culture and what it has to offer – its methods, perspectives, and technology ... to suit changing circumstances even as the individual remains firmly grounded in a cultural centre and is not afraid to criticise and resist institutions or ideologies that perpetuate oppression.'

#### **Conclusions**

This article has examined the notion of Fijian amiability constructed and reconstructed in colonial, post-colonial and touristic representations and the historical process by which it has amalgamated into Fijian collective identity. Following van Meijl's (2004) call for investigation of tourism as a key context for contemporary cultural identity construction and closer examination of the oppositionality of cultural identity, the article has illuminated the significance of touristic representation in collective identification as well as its underlying historical and power dynamics.

The historical evolution of the touristic imagery of Fijians indicates that it is not a case of an already-constituted Western definition internalised by Fijians. If the imagery was initially constructed in Western writings and imaginings as a primarily external definition, it thereafter continued to develop, purging itself of overtly antagonistic elements of hard savagery, placing greater emphasis on gratifying notions, and incorporating elements of what is perceived to be indigenous cultural tradition, into a national symbol with solid hegemonic status. Mass tourism and its institutional resources have contributed to some degree of fixity – and possibly even reification – of the imagery today, yet this does not nullify the inherent malleability of the process of cultural identification. The alternative meanings that Fijian tourism workers attach, if privately, to the imagery attest that it is essentially open to

negotiation, contestation and change, even in the face of powerful corporate standardisation, dissemination and commoditisation.

The political function of this imagery is similarly contested: it has been deployed in the sustenance of, and opposition to, multiple relations of domination. Whilst some previous studies tended to highlight the re-construction of cultural symbols either as a product of far-reaching colonial power or as an oppositional strategy for the assertion of indigenous pride and autonomy, this article has analysed the process of collective identification as a site of both domination and resistance, an arena of ongoing 'cultural battle', where multiple struggles between opposing social groups and interests are fought out. The laudatory imagery of amiable Fijians has been mobilised by a variety of social groups – by the colonial regime as a persuasive, hegemonic ideology to bolster the prevailing political arrangements; by the ethnonationalist interests as a symbolic means of assertion of Fijian supremacy; by the post-independence governments and foreign/local business interests to legitimate the prevailing structure of the tourism industry; and by Fijians as a counter-hegemonic strategy to assert an alternative, affirmative vision of themselves. A multiplicity of power relations thus intersects the imagery and, accordingly, there is no single authorship or political interest bound to it: the imagery has been claimed by Western colonialism, transnational corporate capitalism, ethno-nationalism, anti-colonial resistance, and may be deployed by yet other political interests and agendas in the future. In short, the imagery of Fijian amiability is not a monolithic, 'oppositional' or 'repressive' construct: it is a site of a plurality of relations of power in which Fijians have been variously located. Representations of cultural identity, while their origins may be traced to specific social relations, are subject to a constant process of flux and hence not inherently bound to any particular social group or interest.

This does not mean that the political function of cultural identification is entirely 'up for grabs' or is too dispersed to be captured by a particular social group at a given historical time. Far from an undifferentiated mass of power struggles, social groups have differential access to economic and political resources to reconstitute and mobilise representations of cultural identity. While essentially dynamic and changing, the imagery of the amiable Fijian has been subject to pressures from competing social, political, and economic interests and agendas and over time crystallised into its current form. The disparity of the power and resources buttressing these agendas gives a shape to this shifting configuration of ideological content and effect. In the post-independence years, this process has been steered most effectively by the mass tourism industry and the state-funded tourism body with interests in sustaining the existing socio-economic order. The counterhegemonic claim made by Fijian tourism workers, by contrast, has been mostly private, hidden from view and does not immediately endanger the dominant interests. The continuing entrenchment of the ethnic division of labour within the industry is indicative of the successful capture of the imagery by the post-colonial hegemonic interests. Nevertheless, taking account of the whole array of political forces and agendas at play is important, as it illuminates the inherent dynamism and open-endedness of this 'cultural battle' as well as its transformative potential.

Indeed, the imagery of the amiable Fijian may be employed by new, transformative political forces in the future. It is worthy of note that the imagery has been invoked in the past, though not systematically or on an institutional scale, in advocacy of multiculturalism. For instance, commentators (e.g. Lal, n.d.) have made

references to Pope John Paul II's description of Fiji in 1985 as 'the way the world should be' on account of the harmonious ethnic relations that he observed during his visit. Another example can be found in *My Fiji*, a 2000 song by the local popular music band Rosiloa, which invokes the amiability, the smile, and 'the way the world should be' to uphold a vision of multicultural nationhood:

My Fiji is your Fiji Come let's live in harmony We're here for each other That's the way the world should be We will tell the world around us Fiji is the place to be So come and follow me to my people Share the laughter that we have In our Fiji Islands of different races Your unforgettable smiling faces They ain't got nothing to hide 'Cause we have the same Bula brands Come share the spirit of joy and laughter and of races We are one people so join us as we sing Our Fiji

It remains to be seen whether grassroots advocacy of multiculturalism outside of state control and initiatives will be successfully articulated with the imagery in the future. However, it is instances like this and the local strategies highlighted above that allow us a glimpse of the transformative potency of the celebrated 'national' image.

The imagery of the amiable Fijian is a historical construct whose subtle variation and differentiation over the years is intertwined with the changing patterns of social relations and conditions in colonial and post-colonial Fiji. Its evolving content and deployment by multiple political interests shows that the imagery is a constantly shifting constellation rather than a mere reflection of a fixed state of domination or resistance. Pacific peoples have variously reconstructed their collective sense of self in the wake of colonial suppression of their cultures and self-definitions and continue to do so today in the face of new challenges of globalisation and global capitalism. Sociological attention to the interface between this ongoing process and the contestation, negotiation and articulation between social groups, interests and agendas helps shed light upon the complexities of collective identification. In other words, the politics of identity construction needs to be empirically investigated in its many forms and dimensions, and the present article was intended as a contribution towards this end.

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#### **Notes**

- 1. Other ethnic groups include Indo-Fijians (37.5%), Rotumans (1.2%), other Pacific Islanders (1.8%), Chinese (0.6%), Part-Europeans (1.3%) and Europeans (0.4%) (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2007).
- Fijian women were given little attention in the early Western texts except as helpless victims of violence and ill treatment or as part of wild and cruel mobs. The Fijian was primarily a masculine image (Thomas, 1994).
- In setting up the structure of colonial rule, the British enlisted the support of prominent chiefs of southeast Viti Levu, the main island, and the eastern islands (Durutalo, 1986; Norton, 1990).
- 4. The majority of today's Indo-Fijians are the descendants of the indentured labourers brought between 1879 and 1916 to work mainly on sugar plantations (Ali, 1979).
- 5. Meke refers to indigenous Fijian dance.
- 6. Yaqona refers to the plant piper methysticum and the drink made from it, which has much ceremonial/spiritual significance.
- 7. The 1987 coups overthrew the elected government and resulted in the introduction of the 1990 Constitution, which reserved majorities for indigenous Fijians in both houses of the legislature. In 1997, a new Constitution was enforced, which decreased the proportion of indigenous Fijian parliamentary seats and opened the office of Prime Minister to all ethnic groups.
- 8. It should be noted that Fiji's colonial/post-colonial order also resorted to coercion when necessary (see Halapua, 2003, for the military's role).
- 9. Bula means 'hello' in Fijian.

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