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TOURISM, CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Whose Culture? Whose Development?

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Introduction

Tourism has been promoted as the economic saviour of developing countries. Following the example of Spain in the 1960s many countries developed tourism because it was seen as a 'smokeless' industry that provided foreign exchange, jobs and regional development without threatening the industries of other countries. Initially tourists were happy to visit places that provided sunshine, a beach and accommodation of a reasonable standard. In recent years, however, the market has become more sophisticated. Tourists have started demanding more individualised activities with much greater variety. This is not to say that the traditional beach holiday has been abandoned. Rather it is now only one part of the tourist experience.

The development of different forms of the tourism product has resulted in a wide range of experiences available to tourists. These include environmental, cultural and heritage tourism. This paper is concerned with the promotion of tourism in a destination where confusion exists between cultural and heritage tourism and how the notions of economic development within the local community are affected. If heritage is used as a tool for development questions need to be asked about the interpretation and ownership of that heritage. How does the commodification of heritage affect the social, political and economic development of a destination? The exemplar is Levuka, the old capital of Fiji. The town is a relic of nineteenth century colonialism and has a lot of appeal to visiting Western tourists.

Political Economy of Tourism

Ostensibly governments promote tourism for economic reasons. Tourism can provide work and development in areas of high unemployment, as many tourists prefer to

visit areas with little industrial activity. International tourism also benefits the macro economy of a destination.

There are, however, other factors that both influence and are influenced by tourism. These include:

- 1) The political and economic relationship between the host nation and the tourist generating nations.
- 2) The relationships between the various strata of society including both class or caste, and race.
- 3) The cultural politics of status and status generation within both the host nation and region.

These three points can be paraphrased in terms of the distribution of power (Hall 1994). The distribution of the costs and benefits of tourism are not evenly spread. Those who hold the power are the ones that are likely to gain from any tourist development. The strength of local power will allow for greater control in who benefits from tourist development (Peck and Lepie 1977). Similarly, the power structures will also dictate what benefits are desired.

Levuka

Levuka is situated on the island of Ovalau to the east of the largest Fijian island of Viti Levu. The Town was founded in the middle of the nineteenth century by David Whippy, an American sailor, and because of a good harbour and a friendly local chief it developed into a European town built in European traditions and populated by Europeans. It is credited with a number of firsts in the South Pacific, such as the place where the first formal schools were built, where the first newspaper in the South Pacific, the *Fiji Times* was published, and

where the first banks in the South Pacific were established. It was also the *de jure* capital of Fiji from 1870 until 1882. The capital was moved to Suva because there was (and still is) little room for expansion in Levuka. The land rises steeply to an extinct volcano less than 1km inland. The town went into a slow decline once the administration of the colony shifted.

The island of Ovalau has no beaches so the main attraction of Levuka, to tourists, is the architecture and the sedate pace of life. Most of the buildings in Levuka Town are at least 100 years old. The fact that few new buildings have been erected in this period has been due to an uncertain economic future for the town, and a lack of space. The buildings have been maintained to a fashion but not updated to any great extent, more due to inertia than anything else (described by Design Aid Architects as "benign neglect" (Samudio 1996)). This attitude is changing in some quarters. Levuka has been 'discovered' by sections of the tourist industry and a move from functional maintenance to conservational maintenance is being encouraged. The former is concerned with maintaining a building so that it can be used to carry out the activity required of it in the most cost efficient way. Repairs and changes are not concerned with the historical integrity of the building. This is in contrast to conservational maintenance, which is wholly concerned with the preserving the building in a particular form.

The Economics of Tourism Development in Levuka

The primary employer in Levuka since the mid 1960s has been the fish processing and canning factory. This was initially set up with Japanese aid to provide employment in a town that was slowly dying due to a lack of industry. The last of the copra processing plants had disappeared in 1958 ending the final commercial link with Levuka's heyday. There was no longer any reason for people to stay in the town. Shops were closing and the economy was collapsing. However, the factors that were working against the copra industries also worked against the fish factory. The location was remote and the harbour had limited facilities. While 1000 people were employed at one stage by the

late 1990s the factory regularly closed due to a lack of supplies of fish or markets to sell the fish to. It was obvious that another means of employment had to be found. This was tourism.

Levuka has one thing that is unique to Fiji, and probably the south Pacific, a townscape that "represents an important stage in the history of the Pacific in its manifestation of nineteenth century western architecture (PATA 1985 p39). As a result various tourism plans have been produced based on the heritage appeal of the Town.

Nevertheless tourism in Levuka has developed in a haphazard way with no real planning. The main recipients of income from tourists are the hoteliers and the restaurateurs. None of whom are indigenous Fijians. The result has been that the returns from tourism have remained firmly with those people fully working in the monetary sector. Most local people, particularly the Fijians, believe that tourism is of no significance to them and certainly not the opportunity for income generation. Added to this is the low level of spending by tourists who, in 1996/7, spent an average of \$35 (Fisher 2000). This is partly because there is little to buy. The only high expenditure activity is diving which is organised by a German couple.

Tourism has also failed to create many jobs. In 1997, 25 people worked in businesses, such as the accommodation and activities sector, that cater predominantly to tourists. Another ten worked in the restaurant sector that caters for both tourists and locals. These numbers compare with 100 people in the education sector, 98 in local government and about 600 for the fish processing plant when it is operating (Fisher 2000). There are few indirect jobs created as most of the goods provided for tourists come from the mainland and not Ovalau. The exceptions are a few crops, which are bought intermittently by the restaurateurs. For tourism to be significant numbers of tourists would have to increase dramatically.

International Relationships

Tourism has been described as a form of imperialism (Britton 1982, 1991, Crick 1989,

English 1986, Nash 1977, Turner and Ash 1975). For tourism to succeed in third world countries it has to be in a form that is acceptable to the tourists of the first world. In other words tourism development is dictated by the first world irrespective of how the host population would like their society to develop.

In Levuka there are elements of cultural imperialism involved. None of the reports that have been written by outside experts has considered the possibility that local people confer different meanings to built structures. There has been no attempt to discover whether local people want the buildings to remain. No division has been made between culture and heritage, or how heritage is constructed out of culture. Without an understanding of the different worldviews it is feasible that conflict will occur and, more importantly, not be understood when it does occur.

The first of a number of reports was part of the Tourism Development Programme for Fiji prepared by Belt, Collins and Associates for the UNDP in 1973. In 1977 the Fiji Visitors' Bureau wrote a preparation report for plans to preserve and restore Levuka based on the UNDP programme. The Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) prepared another report in 1985 on the development of tourism in Levuka and Ovalau. A conservation study was produced in 1994 by HJM consultants, and the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, the Lomaiviti Provincial Council and the Native Land Trust Board all carried out their own studies on the viability of tourism projects on Ovalau in 1995.

The desire to promote tourism in Levuka has also been prompted by ex-patriots, foreign visitors and holiday-home owners who have urged the preservation and renovation of the architecture in the Town. At the same time the perilous state of the local economy has focused the need to diversify into other areas of activity. It is believed that tourists will visit the town because of its historic appeal. This will bring additional income into the town, which, in turn, will pay for the renovation of the historic buildings. Preservation will be justified, as it will provide income.

Internal Social Relationships

Economic development, and tourism development in particular, can result in alterations to social structures. Changes in local power structures as a result of modernisation and tourism have been noted elsewhere (see, for example, Kousis 1989; Bonnemaïson 1978; Brown 1998). The ethnic and social relationships in Levuka are complex even by Fijian standards. This is because of the long association with European culture and the even longer animosity between two different *mataqali* tribal groups on the island of Ovalau. In addition the attitudes to change of the Indian and Chinese shopkeepers have to be considered.

These problems have a major effect on the way that the conservation of the architecture of the town is perceived. The buildings are seen as a means by which tourists can be attracted. However, to date, the numbers have been low. Nevertheless, the Fijian government is in the process of applying for UNESCO world heritage status for Levuka. Heritage, and built heritage in particular, has different meanings for each group in Levuka. It would be simplistic to state that these differences are only due to cultural difference because the commerce of the Town is also ethnically divided. There are, however, clear divisions in the way that the buildings of the town are conceptualised.

To the tourists and the recent 'European' arrivals, the townscape shows history, character, and quaintness. Many tourists like the ambience that the buildings create combined with the fact that it is still a working town. The buildings have not been created to appeal to tourists. Similarly, 'Europeans' who have moved to Levuka (from Australia, Canada, USA, New Zealand, Germany and UK) have done so because they like the way that the town was when they arrived. This has helped to create a very Eurocentric view of the town that does not consider that other conceptualisations may exist. The promotion of the European view is helped by the part-European 'old' families of the town who have lived there for generations and who are the last of the original European population. These two groups have encouraged the government to help promote

Levuka as a heritage attraction and in doing so have brought in experts from outside Fiji who also have similar views on the benefits of saving manifestations of European colonial heritage.

The costs of preserving the architecture of Levuka, however, have fallen on the owners of the buildings and in most cases these are people who are not of European descent. The regulations that are being increasingly imposed by central and local government are not allowing owners of buildings to change them in the way that they would like but are also forcing them to use expensive materials for any repairs that are required.

The building owners fall into two categories, shopkeepers and householders. The shops in Beach Street are owned mainly by Indians. Their primary goal is commercial and the bulk of their market comes from local people. Any aesthetic value that the building have is tempered by the need to run a successful business in a town with a very insecure economic base. In addition, there is also no particular reason why they should feel an emotional need to maintain someone else's heritage. The promise of increased tourism numbers may increase the value of the buildings if tourists do start visiting but otherwise any demands by outside organisations to spend money in what is seen as an unproductive way is likely to be met with resistance. Nevertheless, leading members of the Indian community are members of the Levuka Historical Society while no ethnic Fijians are involved in the society.

The owners of private houses have similar problems without any chance of a return from the cost of maintaining buildings in the prescribed way. For them some of the restrictions are onerous and culturally insensitive. The buildings were built by Europeans with European cultural parameters in mind. However, these designs are not always appropriate for Fijians.

Most of the people who live in other types of accommodation are ethnic Fijian and for them the colonial buildings hold no special meaning. Most people want to improve their standard of living and how they perceive

their community well being. Attitudes to the buildings fall into two distinct groups. The first is made up of people who want Levuka to appear a modern town with modern buildings. They believe that the nineteenth century architecture gives the impression that the Town is backward. Some of this group argue that any impression of backwardness hinders attempts to attract businesses and work to the area. The second group is made up of people who believe that the buildings should remain so long as they bring income and work to the Town. If they do not do this then there is no reason to keep them. Only one Fijian interviewed believed that the buildings should be kept for their own sake and for the history embedded in them. He was the dentist at the hospital on a two-year contract and not from Levuka.

One of the reasons for the ethnic Fijian attitude towards the buildings is the Fijian concept of heritage. Heritage comes from the land, the *vanua*, and is not to be found in the buildings. If the buildings go the spirit of the buildings is still to be found in the land. As one respondent explained: if the buildings go the history is still there. There is no need for the buildings to exist for the colonial history of Levuka to remain. This concept of heritage is in marked contrast to the European and tourist idea of heritage; heritage is to be found in built structures which should, therefore, be preserved.

Politics and Economics of Status

Change will be initiated by the more powerful sectors in the economy. Obviously the only people who *can* instigate change are those with the power *to* instigate change. There are two means to attaining power. It may be inherited, as in chieftainships in Fiji, or achieved as in parts of Melanesia. Achieved power can, of course, be lost (de Burlo 1984). In highly structured collective societies the general population is likely to follow the lead of those with power. The antithesis of this sort of power is held by those who are outside these forms of power structures and are therefore not bound by the same rules and conventions (Watters 1969). Again Fiji is a good illustration of this. Chiefs in Fiji only have control over ethnic Fijians. Any power over other ethnic groups is indirect through

control of land and latterly the political system. This is an important distinction because the motivation for change is different as a result.

Similarly, it has been argued that the commercial development of Fiji was undertaken by non-ethnic Fijians because of the different social structures in the different communities and national political structures (Harre 1975, Naidu 1992, Rika 1975). Therefore, the motivation for tourism development may not have been direct. It may not have resulted from a desire to make money but as a result of a desire to consolidate power and influence. Within the Levuka Town council tourism development became a political football where individual control was more important than effective development.

In addition Butler's (1980) destination lifecycle model shows that at a certain point control moves away from local people to outsiders. Levuka is at the point where the worldview of the local people is being superseded by that of the tourists and those promoting tourism development. There are outside groups who wish to create a town for tourists in which local people live rather than a town for the local people that tourists visit.

Whose Culture?

Most visitors come to Levuka to see aspects of the colonial heritage of Fiji. They have heard of Levuka from other tourists or from guidebooks such as Lonely Planet. They are aware that Levuka is a European construction. This was particularly true of those tourists who visited ethnic Fijian villages. The result is a tourist destination that is being preserved for 'European' tourists to observe an aspect of their colonial past. The question arises as to how this equates with the desires of the local population? What is tourism to them and what are the ramifications of attempting to develop a tourism product? Do they feel that they are being forced to maintain someone else's cultural heritage at a cost to themselves? As has been shown in other studies (Haralambopoulos and Pizam 1996, Simmons and Fairweather 1998) local people will accept tourism generated change provided they see a benefit to themselves. In Levuka, at present, the numbers of

tourists is low and any financial benefit goes to a few individuals, very few of whom are ethnic Fijians. The culturally specific concept of heritage preservation is being forced on them without any explanation or acknowledgement that these are very different from their own. At present there is no antagonism towards tourists and tourism but unless the sensibilities of all the ethnic groups are considered opposition to a European style of heritage preservation may increase.

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