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Afterword: Ambivalence, Ambiguity and the 'Wicked Problem' of Pacific Tourist Studies

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'The Pacific …'—it is a sweeping term that pulls up a host of images reiterated over and over on tourist brochures: limitless blue sea, swaying palm trees, pristine beaches, warm breezes and warmly welcoming, happy inhabitants. 'Paradise found!'

The reality is quite different and much more complex—co-existing with all of those elements are many languages and many communities, sovereignty movements, under-employment and poverty, and, for some, a dependence on remittances sent home from family members working far away and, for others, elaborate homes of local elites. There are also universities, artists, writers, scholars, sustainable fishing initiatives, factories, labourers, business owners, a continuing US military presence, and rusting planes, Japanese or American, from World War II. There is, in short, a complex history of mobile indigenous peoples, colonial crossings and imperial relations, intensive labour immigration and ex-migration, and post- and neo-colonial realities. Tourism, not simply as a global industry but *as an embodied social practice*, usually writes out this complexity to tell simplified

narratives anchored in a physical place. And, in the Pacific at least, these tourist narratives rarely embrace the complexity and mobilities of the present.

The European cultural imaginaries that form much of the framework for tourism in the Pacific draw on images, ideas, fantasies, and political presumptions that have been circulating widely since the eighteenth century. Lamont Lindstrom's chapter in this book, on early photography in the mid-nineteenth century in what was then known as the New Hebrides (now, Vanuatu), demonstrates the long reach of these ideologies of primitivism (whether celebrated as paradise lost, or condemned as 'heathen' in need of salvation) and their visualisation by Europeans for other Europeans. The islands of the Pacific are still framed to non-residents, to potential tourists, as an 'escape' from modernity for weary moderns.

Unlike the touristic allure of hyper-modernity associated with Abu Dhabi, or Tokyo, or New York, centres of global commerce, home to skyscrapers and financial hubs, Honiara, Rarotonga, and even the large city of Honolulu are painted as 'laid back', a place to get away from it all. That the local inhabitants may also be weary moderns, and wanting to get away from the 'it all' of tourists, and often doing so through their own travel (detailed, for example, in Miriam Kahn, Teana Gooding, and Moenau Holman's chapter on the experiences of two contemporary Tahitian women—Gooding and Holman—touring the city of Seattle in the United States), is a flip of the ideological coin that rarely surfaces, indeed must not, in economically successful touristic frames of encounter.

In this unique book, *Touring Pacific Cultures*, editors Kalissa Alexeyeff and John Taylor foreground these multiple mobilities, and ask us to take a *regional* approach to tourism in the Pacific. The implicit question the book raises is this: What do we gain, as scholars of tourism, as artists responding to tourism, and as residents of Pacific nations engaged with tourism, by taking a regional approach? Why not just study tourism at the community or national level, as is so often the case?

The editors construct their experiment in regionalism by anchoring that breadth in the specificity of case studies from many sites and many nations across the region. This is essential. As these many on-the-

ground studies show, their blend of overarching regional similarities is countered by the historical, geographical and cultural specificity that necessarily marks each of the locations and communities the authors engage with—from Tahiti to Papua New Guinea, from Hawai'i to the Marshall Islands. A regional approach makes explicit the necessity of understanding how historical differences and similarities are played out on the ground. It reminds us that sweeping generalisations are often wrong even when they appear on the surface to be right. Only through engagement with residents, with how they craft meaning and lives in places strikingly marked by tourism, can we begin to grasp the larger contours of this shared phenomenon and its complementary distinctive specificity of lived experience.

For example, in the discussion by Helen Lee of what some might call Tonga's 'failed' tourism industry, we find that some Tongans explicitly reject the service worker role of tending to tourists' needs, or the foreign investments in infrastructure that could lure sightseers, despite the money it could bring to a faltering economy. Such arrangements they say, would be neo-colonial, and they are proud of not having ever been formally colonised. As Tongan scholar Konai Helu-Thaman warned in 1993, tourism can be seen as a form of cultural invasion,[1] as a threat to Tongan ways of life. Hotels sit half empty, and the majority of visitors who do use them are of Tongan descent, visiting family from abroad or tending to business. Taking this instance to heart, should it prod us, as scholars of tourism, to redefine our categories?

Perhaps we should define tourism not by the 'who' but by the 'what'. Many of the hotel-staying Tongan returnees, or their children born off-island, may spend some of their time doing the same things that 'tourists' do—visiting special sites, eating at restaurants to enjoy Tongan specialties they can't get at 'home', and purchasing market handicrafts like woven pandanus mats (kie) that are difficult to find abroad but still used for important gifting occasions. Their frame of reference and interpretation, and indeed their motivation, is different from those without Tongan ties, including a sense of (perhaps) both ownership and estrangement—but some of the actions at least may outwardly be the same.

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1   Konai Helu-Thaman, 1993, 'Beyond hula, hotels, and handicrafts: A Pacific Islander's perspective on tourism development', *The Contemporary Pacific* 5(1): 104–111, cited in Helen Lee, 'The Friendly Islands?', this volume.

Is tourism then not a set of actions but of attitudes towards those actions? Of claims to belonging or not? Can people be both tourists and non-tourists at the same time and in the same places? If so, then we need to consider tourism as a complex matrix of people, place and practices, temporally charged but not spatially determined. As an attitude, a touristic stance elicits attention to and calibrations of (and valuations of) perceived similarities and difference—of landscape, of histories, of beliefs and practices, and of embodied presences in specific time and place.

Frances Steel's intriguing chapter on early cruise ship tourism out of Australia to ports in Samoa and Fiji and Tonga in the 1880s reconstructs accounts of local and visitor encounters on shipboard, revealing the touristic attitude going both ways. Reconstructing these encounters from historical documents, Steel notes how some local residents board the ship from canoes, and physically engage with the new Euro-Australian arrivals—touching their hair, pronouncing them 'good', and expressing an appetite for difference as strong as those of the Europeans who came to see them. This is not to imply that such encounters, then or now, take place on some ahistorical utopian ground of equal political power. It would be foolish to deny that vast differences of wealth and global power underpin such pleasure travel. But it would be equally foolish to deny the agential roles inhabited by all parties to such an encounter. As Steel puts it, early colonial touring was 'an inherently open, negotiated and unstable practice, one of cross-cutting mobilities, improvisations, and multi-sensorial encounters'.

Although heightened through touristic infrastructure and ideologies of difference, such open, unstable, and improvisatory attitudes, or modes of attending to the world around us and calibrating our place in it, can surface, theoretically at least, anywhere and anytime. For instance, this attentiveness might surface when as individuals we cross our home cities to another neighbourhood, just as when we cross thousands of miles to visit another nation. Expanding on Jonathan Urry's foundational notion of the 'tourist gaze',[2] we can think instead of the 'tourist attitude'. This reformulation works against the more static, reified categories of 'host/visitor' or 'exploited/exploitee' that

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2   Jonathan Urry, 1990, *The Tourist Gaze*, New York: Sage Publishers.

earlier formulations imply. It takes up the editors' challenge to put the notion of mobilities—of ideas, of objects and images, of people, and of practices—at the forefront of our analyses.

Yet physical co-presence remains an essential component even within this widened formulation of touristic modes of encountering each other. For all of their geographic and temporal variety of foci, none of the articles in this book imply that tourism as physical displacement through space is dead. Rather, a long but changing history of visual images (from lantern slides by missionaries to photographic 'selfies' by today's teens) creates a visual virtual landscape that engages with, counters and articulates or at least suggests ideological networks of interpretation. Yet the actual bodily act of touring—that is, of moving physically from one place to another with the purpose of encountering the new place for pleasure as opposed to seeking political refuge or labour opportunities, remains a defining criterion for tourism and our study of it.

Therefore, while keeping in mind the editors' call to theorise mobilities more generally, we must hone our abilities to theorise and understand more deeply the defining nature of physical proximity. Documentary films, live streaming 'cams' and skyping have not replaced 'tourism' in the classical sense. Why? What is at stake, what is gained, by whom, and under what conditions, in this consummated urge to *move the physical self* and not just our vision or auditory capacity, to another site? Given all the other modes of vision and connection available now across the world, why do people still engage in tourism—in mobility for pleasure? This is a crucial question for tourism studies now.

Newer takes on tourism have urged us to uncover the affective and sensorial aspects of touring, and this is surely an important part of it. But even so, we need to press more strongly on this aspect of tourism: the 'you are here' component that is the ground not only of sensorial experience (trade winds, gustatory delights, sonic melodies, the grit of sand, the smell of detritus) but also of encounters (speech, hearing, vision, touch, conversation, arguments) with other people in other places. There is no need to adopt the 'reality TV' fiction of unbiased reporting, hoping that the body will somehow be a pre-discursive site of 'authenticity'. Rather we should embrace the ways that these physical and interactive experiences are narrativised and given meaning both by tourists and those who encounter them, as well

as by the infrastructures and businesses that service their needs. The result is often a mix of 'ambivalence and ambiguity' as long-standing ideological frames meet contemporary co-presence. John Taylor deploys this generative phrase in his study of photography and local children in cruise tourism in Vanuatu in the Solomon Islands for this volume. I want to mobilise it more broadly here in the context of ethics, leisure, and the possibilities for social change through tourism.

A 'wicked problems' approach

If ambivalence and ambiguity are at the heart of touristic practices, as so many of the articles in this book reveal, how do we frame them as an object of study? Artists may be somewhat more attuned to this, and better equipped to respond, because aesthetic practices embrace the polysemic elements of sound, image and object. Scholarly work too is just as resonant, but we often try to work against the activation of multiple registers of meaning, honing down to a carefully sharpened point, rather than opening out to those multiple registers of evocation like a poet or a painter. Recognising this, this book brings together a range of responses to tourism in the Pacific, including not only poetry by Audrey Brown-Pereira, but a very good discussion of the complex politics and specific image-based negotiations in the use of and commissioning of Native Hawaiian artists' works as part of the design of Disney's Aulani Resort & Spa on the island of Oahu in Hawai'i. The resort, opened in 2011 with great fanfare, is now the site of the largest collection of visual art by Native Hawaiian artists in the world. Necessarily entailing complex engagements between artist, object and viewer as co-constituents of meaning production, artistic work is not neatly contained in simplistic narratives. There is always an 'excess', and in this excess lies both complexity and the potential for engagement.

For non-artists, for scholars, activists, even policymakers, taking a 'wicked problems' approach can be a productive way to approach the ambivalence and ambiguity of tourism. A concept often used in engineering, or urban planning, a wicked problem approach starts from the assumption that important social issues are necessarily complex and contradictory, with various, often competing stakeholders. Deborah Curran notes that 'wicked' problems, or social challenges, are different

from other types of more easily identifiable problems, 'tame' ones with clear, if difficult to attain, solutions.[3] 'Wicked' challenges, on the other hand, have no one single definition, the definition of the problem often depends on the viewpoint of the definer. Their solutions are not true or false, right or wrong, but better or worse. Solutions may bring about their own unanticipated problems that then need to be addressed in turn. And there is no ending point: 'Wicked' problems evolve and change over long periods of time, demanding new solutions, new interventions as relations among people, resources, ideas and political power change.

The social relations of tourism in the Pacific pose a classic 'wicked problem'. Evolving over long periods of time from complex and multiple histories of interactions, tourism is seen as positive or negative depending on various points of view. Does tourism promise a better life for island populations in the Pacific, as some proponents of 'development' through the growth of tourism imply? Or, as critics suggest, is it merely a neo-liberal form of neo-colonialism that continues the exploitation of local residents while retreading long-enduring tropes of primitivism and paradise as a source of pleasure for residents of former colonial powers? If we take a wicked problem approach, we would acknowledge that rather than an 'either/or' equation we must accept, conceptually, that it is quite possibly a 'both/and'. In this volume, the discussion by Marata Tamaira about the display of artworks by Native Hawaiian artists in the Disney Aulani resort is a perfect example. Some artists embraced the opportunity to reach wide audiences, and others criticised them for 'selling out'. We won't grasp the effects of these artworks in this particular corporate setting for those particular guests without further fieldwork. How does the Disney narrative of 'culture' shape or limit the potential power of the works? What counter-discourses might prevail?

One motivation for research on tourism by scholars, or interventions in a touristic landscape by artists, is to look to a future of less social and economic inequality in the world. If so, how does that shape our future investigations?

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3   Deborah Curran, 2009, 'Wicked', *Alternatives Journal* 35(5): 8–11.

At the very bottom of tourism as a social practice is a physical leaving 'home', wherever home may be, for an experience that (the tourist assumes) cannot be found at home. It comprises an experience of geography, of cultural expression, of urban architecture and rural landscapes, of foods, and of populations, all of which can be experienced as 'different'. This attention to and construction of difference, for pleasure, can take innumerable forms depending on whom the addressee is. My mundane is, perhaps, your exotic, your intriguing.

Are there ways to make this appetite for difference not simply reinscriptions of old inequities—in the case of the Pacific, retreadings of colonial ideologies dressed up in twenty-first-century prose? Is it possible that the juggernaut of tourism as a global social practice, infrastructure, and industry could potentially provide progressive pathways to new more equitable relations?

Is it possible, for example, to conceive of a touristic parallel to the notion of 'fair trade' in commodities like coffee, but here extended to intangible realms of experience?

Given stark and enduring inequalities in the distribution of material resources and political power, such a format may be easily abjured as naïve. Yet, tourists spend billions of dollars each year and invest enormous amounts of intellectual, physical and (as Kalissa Alexeyeff tells us in her chapter) affective work, on tourism. In what ways might it be possible to recapture some of those resources, to make tourism more sustainable in the broadest sense of that term—not just in terms of renewable environmental resources, but in terms of ethically acceptable practices, sustaining health and welfare of the humans and landscapes and animals involved?

We see this in 'alternative tourism' sites, small enterprises, often spearheaded by creative indigenous leaders, that seek to connect progressive visitors with progressive local residents. But, by definition, these remain a marginal part of the larger industry. They depend on building intimate, small-scale opportunities for connection and thus for experiencing and articulating the complexities of ambivalent relations and difficult histories. Small-scale tourism usually attracts elites with high cultural capital and significant expendable income

to customise their experiences. Can this apply to mass tourism with its vertically integrated infrastructures of hotels, airplanes, and tour agencies, owed by foreign corporations? Is this a scalable model?

To start to think about this question, I turn away from tourism to other global infrastructures that commodify not only experience but material goods: behemouths like McDonald's fast food restaurants and Walmart, the largest retailer on the planet. Before turning away in dismay, stay with me for a moment here, for new thinking often requires thinking with and not simply against the previously unthinkable.

A wicked problems approach to tourism assumes several things. First, tourism industries are not going to just go away; capitalism will not just wither on the vine; and social inequality will not disappear just because it is immoral. Second, tourism is comprised of actions by many groups of stakeholders, often with deeply conflicting beliefs and desires; therefore change is possible but may yield unexpected, even negative outcomes, which themselves then need to be addressed. Change is always a process never a completed event. Today, dramatic overhauls in short terms are unlikely, given the enormous numbers of moving parts in complex global social, geographical and financial imbrications. However, the very complexity of these systems means they are always in flux and thus always available for change.

One of the available tools for both tourists and touring infrastructures and populations is the ability to shift interpretive frames. Several years ago, researching Hawaiian hula performances in the tourist context, I was struck by the bold vision of highly respected Native Hawaiian hula master, or 'kumu hula', Frank Kawaikapuokalani Hewitt in designing his troupe's tourist performances at an important hotel complex on the island of Kaua'i. Drawing on the sonic histories of the 1950s US *Hawai'i Calls* radio show, Hewitt staged a spectacle of continental US images of the islands, drawing on historical depictions from stage and screen. Then, in an astute 'bait and switch' move, just when the largely Euro-American audience was swooning into the 1950s memories of 'paradise', he juxtaposed those to the practice of hula in the islands today. Still working within the framework of tourist 'pleasure' and 'cultural shows', he managed to instigate self-reflexivity in his audience and to draw them into the present of Hawaiian politics. He did so by reproducing and revealing the ideological history of

island imaginaries, then pointing out how they came to be. This is just one example, and a small one. Hewitt's troupe was in residence at the time in an upscale hotel, so this did not reach the masses that seaside lu'aus would do, where bus loads of US tourists were driven out from Waikiki to local beaches for doses of 'culture' in large-scale feasts.

When and to what transformative degree might such imputations of self-reflexivity become possible?

Ultimately, ownership of the means of production may give the greatest ideological control. As long as tourism in the Pacific is largely framed by external forces, the power of local residents to determine the terms of interaction and interpretation will be attenuated. But, from a 'wicked problems' point of view, that does not mean that no change is possible. Rather it demands the opposite. Indeed, change is always present, it is a constituent component of living systems of social formations. To the extent that Pacific tourism sells 'the cultures of the Pacific' as part of its distinctive allure, differentiating it from other sun and sand destinations, then the bargaining power for self-representation is at least there in theory. A 'wicked problems' approach calls on participants to make change even when it cannot result in a complete, dramatic political overhaul.

Facilitating the conscious recalibration of power over time in the Pacific tourist industry is one of the goals of progressive scholarship. First, we must endeavour to understand ever more deeply what is going on—a complex wicked problems approach combined with the editors' insistence on the flux of mobilities, and anchored in the physical reality of embodied presence, provide us a map from which to move forward. Then, it is up to the actors to imagine differently, to rearticulate the frames of interpretation.

Taking our cue from large-scale international business in other realms, we might imagine, for example, deploying a notion of 'fair trade tourism'. Bringing morality explicitly into coffee drinking, the notion of 'fair trade' recognises the colonial legacies of extractive agriculture that built the coffee-drinking habit in the richest parts of the world. It keeps that history present for today's consumers, asking (offering?) them to work against a colonial legacy to build a new future. 'Fair trade' coffee, which guarantees a modest yet liveable wage to the suppliers, connects specific coffee drinkers in New York or Sydney, for example,

willing to pay a premium, with specific producers in Colombia or Brazil through a matrix of shared desire for a more equitable world. Is it conceivable that something like 'fair trade' mass tourism could catch hold?

We have seen other massive shifts due to retail giants' change of policy when we consider, for example, the surprising leading role that global McDonald's Restaurant Corporation now plays in requiring increasing vigilance in animal welfare from its producers. Driven by consumers' demands and resulting legislation, such a move nonetheless has positive material effects on the lives of animals and of workers in animal agriculture. When a global giant like McDonald's moves, it shifts the landscape of the possible. Analysing such massive global retail changes may provide one instructive avenue for modelling change in a contemporary global business-scape, and ultimately even suggest modes of rearticulation in a tourism sphere.

In the realms of Pacific tourism, a 'wicked problems' approach suggests that we could investigate the potential for progressive outcomes based on carefully crafted alliances with capitalist enterprises, enterprises, like large multinational hotel chains, that are unlikely to go away in the next decade. The power of moral and ethical claims, when backed by consumer support, could, *could*, be an arena of potential change. This is especially true because the wider political landscape is also always in motion, with ongoing legal battles for land restitution and renegotiations of long-term military treaties just two areas of change. Available discourses of rights, restitution and respect grow stronger, invariably edging into the framing of tourism. A number of years ago in Honolulu I was stunned to watch a poolside hula show at a major multinational hotel chain as part of my fieldwork when an entire section of the show became devoted to issues of Native Hawaiian sovereignty and land claims, and contemporary hulas that harked back to the time of colonial usurpation. A highly regarded kumu hula had been hired by the Sheraton Hotel chain, and (a key point) had negotiated to retain control over the script for her performance. Lulled by the welcoming patter and the sweet strains of ukulele music, suddenly the tenor shifted and tourists lounging by a pool were blindsided by songs about sovereignty politics, stunned into an awareness of co-temporarity with the performers, and forced into an ambivalent state of comfort and discomfort. We might call this a sort of 'stealth politics' of tourism encounters, and it was very effective.

It may be that today's infrastructure and the lingering historical legacies of tourism in the Pacific region call for just this sort of stealth politics, a way to intervene in the 'wicked problem' of the tourist industry which is fundamentally built on ambivalence and ambiguity. Embracing that ambivalence, and seizing that ambiguity, can be a key to progressive change through a continual rethinking and re-doing of tourism in the Pacific.

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