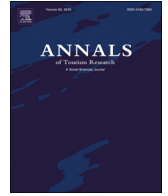


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“Managed evils” of hedonistic tourism in the Maldives: Islamic social representations and their mediation of local social exchange



Aishath Shakeela*, David Weaver

Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management, Griffith University, Parklands Drive, Southport, QLD 4222, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores resident attitudes toward tourism development in the Maldives. Findings from 50 semi-structured interviews and 200 household surveys collected in two island communities provide insights into the reconciliation of deeply held Islamic social representations with proximate hedonistic tourism. In the less tourism-affiliated island, religious affinity and social exchange were central as to how residents viewed tourism as an ‘evil’ from which their community should be insulated. In the more tourism-affiliated case, social exchange and social representations influenced how tourism is rationalised as a ‘managed evil’.

Introduction

High quality of life and resident satisfaction are recognised as core outcomes of sustainable destination development that serves the actual needs and demands of the local community (Ndivo & Cantoni, 2016; Zuo, Gursoy, & Wall, 2017) while sustaining local tourism itself through political support, cultures of hospitality, and enthused and effective employee participation (Weaver & Lawton, 2013). The inevitability of such desirable reciprocity, however, is challenged by tourism’s association with a complex of potential economic, socio-cultural and environmental costs and benefits. There is ongoing debate on the feasibility of tourism-led economic growth as a strategy for achieving development goals (Bojanic & Lo, 2016; Cárdenas-García, Sánchez-Rivero, & Pulido-Fernández, 2015), but economic outcomes such as revenue, employment and affiliated multiplier effects (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Pratt, 2015) are often posited by advocates as the primary rationale for pursuing tourism-centric development strategies. Collateral social benefits such as increased inter-cultural harmony and improved prospects for world peace are also often claimed (D’Amore, 1988; Kim, Prideaux, & Prideaux, 2007). Yet, because economic imperatives are usually prioritised (Weaver & Lawton, 2014), socio-cultural aspirations may be marginalised, and manifest ultimately as socio-cultural discord. Associated processes include cultural liminality, acculturation and cultural commodification (Cole, 2007; Kirtsoğlu & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Park, 2016).

Opportunities for such discord, and consequent resident disaffection, are amplified by the presence of potentially destabilising factors such as cultural and linguistic disconformity, external control, host–guest living standard discrepancies, rapid place change, elevated guest-to-host ratios, and reliance on expatriate labour (Davidson & Sahli, 2015; McKercher, Wang, & Park, 2015; Shakeela & Cooper, 2009; Wortman, Donaldson, & Westen, 2016; Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017). Additional complexity is introduced when ‘religiosity’ and religious differences are brought into this equation, given religion’s ingrained and privileged status within diverse socio-cultural contexts (Bloch, 2017; Brown & Osman, 2017). Religion and tourism are strongly and integrally connected in the host–guest nexus, yet despite recommendations for religion and other personal values to be integrated into resident perceptions and other tourism-related research (Wong, McIntosh, & Ryan, 2013), this faith dimension is still only marginally engaged.

Inclusion of religious beliefs is a major contribution of this paper, which identifies resident perceptions of and support for tourism

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: a.shakeela@griffith.edu.au (A. Shakeela), d.weaver@griffith.edu.au (D. Weaver).

in two communities of contrasting tourism intensity in the Maldives, an Islamic country dependent on tourists with hedonistic motivations. As such, the Maldives can be situated within an emergent “Islamic pleasure periphery” where attendant social exchanges are mediated by deeply held faith-based social representations as well as economic pragmatism. Following a literature review that examines resident perceptions of local tourism and affiliated social theories, the case study communities and mixed methods research approaches are described. Discussion of theoretical and practical implications follows presentation of the findings.

Literature review

Solicitations of resident perceptions and attitudes about local tourism impacts indicate ambivalent relationships between tourism and host communities (McKercher, 1993). Diverse tourism, tourist and resident contexts, often associated with specific destination ‘life cycle’ stages, yield various findings with regard to factors that generate satisfaction or disaffection. Disapproval has been associated for example with place attachment, sense of place identity connected to long-term residency (Huh & Vogt, 2008; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004), and perceived tourism-related cost-of-living increases (Del Chiappa & Abbate, 2016; McKercher et al., 2015). Income erosion induced by shifts from high wage manufacturing to lower wage hospitality employment has also created negative perceptions of tourism employment (Casado-Diaz & Simon, 2016; Lacher & Oh, 2012), leading to low and/or non-participation (Tosun, 2002). Tourism’s facilitation of heritage conservation is recognised, but concerns about heritage loss (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Tucker & Carnegie, 2014), diminishing social capital (Diedrich & Aswani, 2016; Okazaki, 2008), negative environmental impacts (Kaltenborn, Andersen, Nellemann, Bjerke, & Thrane, 2008; Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009), and tourism’s interference in daily life and crowding effects (Teye, Sonmez, & Sirakaya, 2002) all foster negative sentiments. Emotional solidarity with tourists, however, affiliates with positive perceptions (Hasani, Moghavvemi, & Hamzah, 2016; Li & Wan, 2017; Woosnam, 2011).

Spatial, temporal and psychological dimensions also affect perceptions. Geographically, Belisle and Hoy (1980) allege that negative perceptions tend to increase with distance from high impact tourism spaces, while McKercher et al. (2015) invoke a historical perspective, similar to the tourism area life cycle (Butler, 1980), to implicate the transition of ‘non-tourism’ places into ‘shared’ or ‘tourism’ places as a factor underlying disaffection. Psychologically, studies on place attachment and sense of place further indicate long-term residents as more negatively inclined towards tourism development (Almeida-Garcia, Pelaez-Fernandez, Balbuena-Vazquez, & Cortes-Macias, 2016), key reasons being the creation of contested spaces and decreased local enjoyment of available resources (Buckley, Guitart, & Shakeela, 2017; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Peel & Steen, 2007).

Tourism planning and development, moreover, are political processes (Hall, 1994) which spawn conflict among groups with differing interests and agendas. Destinations with a colonial past are especially implicated (Park, 2016), with World War II Japanese atrocity sites in China, for example, helping to mobilise patriotic sentiments and antagonism toward an ‘unapologetic’ and resurgent Japan (Weaver et al., 2017). Selected elements of colonial history here and elsewhere are manipulated for both political and economic purposes (Wong, 2013). In Nazareth, Israel, Muslim residents feeling alienated and disenfranchised were less supportive of religious/heritage tourism development and less likely to value associated economic contributions (Uriely, Israeli, & Reichel, 2003). An overt racial element is apparent in regions of colonisation such as the Caribbean where a “plantation” mode of resort tourism displaces export agriculture but retains similar white/black, master/slave relationships in a neo-colonial context (Weaver, 1988). Sex tourism in such contexts also reflects highly racialised interactions between host and guest and influences respective perceptions of the ‘Other’ (Herold, Garcia, & DeMoya, 2001).

As with Caribbean beach resorts, type of tourism development (Pérez & Nadal, 2005; Wan, 2012) is influential, (Freitag, 1994, p. 551) alleging that the “enclave resort is not designed to promote economic linkages at the community level”, while Naidoo and Sharpley (2016) ascribe fewer positive outcomes for local communities from same due to the privileging of élites. Tourist type (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Stoeckl, Greiner, & Mayocchi, 2006) and behaviour (Monterrubio, 2016) are also implicated, with perceived sexual permissiveness of foreign tourists spawning resident discontent in Ghana (Teye et al., 2002). Unconstrained and disruptive revelry among partying high school graduates during the annual Schoolies Week, similarly, was criticised by residents of Australia’s Gold Coast (Weaver & Lawton, 2013).

One conclusion from this diverse body of research is rejection of simplistic assertions, apparent in models such as the Irridex (Doxey, 1976), that increased tourism development associates neatly with increased resident dissatisfaction. Rather, communities in any type or stage of tourism development seemingly recognise affiliated costs *and* benefits, arraying along a bell curve where, beyond small groups clearly demarcated as supporters or opponents, most residents broadly support tourism but acknowledge costs. This ambivalence typically entails recognition of economic benefits but also accompanying socio-cultural costs that collectively are outweighed by the former (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Ap, 1992; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). This is significant in that recent research has established a positive correlation between perceived net benefits of tourism development, satisfaction and quality of life (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015), and a direct connection to support for the industry (Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Sharma & Gursoy, 2015; Styliadis & Terzidou, 2014).

These assessments resonate in social exchange theory, wherein “interaction between persons is an exchange of goods, material and nonmaterial” (Homans, 1962, p. 279), driven by desire to effect trade-offs between perceived benefits and costs (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). The literature is replete with illustrations of the affiliated dynamics. Faulkner and Tidswell (1997), in one variant, applied altruistic surplus concepts to the Gold Coast and found that individuals tolerated negative tourism impacts because they concurrently recognised wider community benefits. Weaver and Lawton (2013) observed the same in Gold Coast resident perceptions of Schoolies Week. Despite recognition of high-risk anti-social participant behaviour, most tolerated the event as a matter of revenue generation and social forbearance over short-term and highly localised social disruption (Weaver & Lawton, 2013). Tourist excesses were similarly justified as “necessary evils” in an English tourist-historic city (Bahaire & Elliott-White, 1999, p. 272). In the insular

pleasure periphery, Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996) identified positive resident attitudes toward tourism and its expansion, based on personal economic benefits derived, while Naidoo and Sharpley (2016) found in Mauritius a correlation between tourism support and perceptions of the sector's capacity to generate economic benefits and community well-being.

Although not widely interrogated in tourism research (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003), religion critically influences culture (Hollenbach, 1993). Indeed, Cohen and Hill (2007) assert that religious differences are also cultural differences that shape personal and social aspects of motivation, judgement and other behavioural processes. Analysing tourism in Islamic destinations, Din (1989) identified polarised *laissez-faire* (e.g. Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey) and preclusive (e.g. Saudi Arabia) responses to tourism, but also compromise strategies that insulate host communities from tourism (e.g. Maldives) and thereby embody classic social exchange dynamics. The latter options are preferred by some religious scholars fearful that community-proximate tourism production and consumption will dilute Islamic values and culture (Sanad, Kassem, & Scott, 2010). Specifics of attendant social exchanges, however, are unclear because relevant empirical data is lacking. One exception, and an important indication, is provided by Zamani-Farahani and Musa (2012), who surveyed 500 Iranians in two small town destinations and found that devotion to religion and piety negatively influenced perceptions of tourism impact, but overall support remained positive.

The religious dimension implicates a second conceptual foundation – social representations theory – which posits people to be influenced by mental constructs (social representations) that define reality and function as basic cognitive units for organising, understanding and mediating the world around them (Moscovici, 1984). They “allow groups to construct and share a common social reality and provide guidelines to individuals for how to react to the [relevant] phenomenon” (Moscardo, 2011, p. 426). Supporters of Schoolies Week, accordingly, tend to obtain their event knowledge from former participants, while opponents rely on conventional media that sensationalise anti-social incidents (Weaver & Lawton, 2013). “Hegemonic” representations backed by authority and broadly accepted within a community, such as those projected against Japan in Chinese World War Two atrocity sites (Weaver et al., 2017), are especially relevant to faith contexts, although it also pertains that direct experience of a phenomenon, including social interaction with tourists, can modify these representations by reconciling apparent contradictions (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). The Maldives, with its juxtaposition of Islam and hedonistically inclined tourism, provides an excellent opportunity to explore these dynamics, and thus to better understand the host–guest relationship in the Islamic pleasure periphery.

Study background

The Republic of Maldives, an archipelagic Islamic nation of 402,000 residents (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015), is noted for its highly tourism-dependent economy. Initiated in 1972, international tourism by 2015 accounted for 24% of GDP, 32% of direct employment, and 41% of government revenue (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016), propelled by 1.2 million international tourist arrivals attracted by sea, sand and sun endowments (Ministry of Tourism, 2017). Geographic idiosyncrasies and government regulations, however, have conspired to create an enclave tourism model that ensures most Maldivians not employed in the luxury resorts of remote atolls have little direct contact with these visitors. Underlying this strategy has been ongoing concern over the implications of exposing the ‘100%’ Sunni Muslim population to proximate hedonistic leisure tourism. Such concerns have also informed policies that invest all land ownership with the government, which leases islands through a bidding process favouring Maldivian élites (Buckley et al., 2017). Ironically, this undermines resident interests by sustaining a power bloc that among other things has blocked minimum wage increases (Shakeela, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2012).

These policies and machinations have also ensured that Maldivian tourism development has been both unequal and uneven, and local involvement in successive Tourism Master Plans tokenistic (Shakeela et al., 2012). Limited community tourism was permitted in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, with inhabited islands only in the central tourism hub of Malé atoll and the capital island Malé allowed to develop guesthouses (Shakeela & Weaver, 2017). Enclave-based tourists were allowed permits for day-trip excursions to inhabited islands to experience community-based tourism, though with strict conditions of appropriate dress and behaviour.

Perceptions that this has generated discontent and suboptimal outcomes for residents, including low multiplier effects, have resulted in relaxation of enclave policies to allow increased tourism entrepreneurship within inhabited islands. Residents have recently been permitted to establish guesthouses (essentially, small hotels separate from the resident household, owned and usually operated by a resident) to increase revenues and employment from recrudescing community-based tourism. This is embodied in the Third Tourism Master Plan (2007–2011), which advocated a parallel strategy of guesthouse tourism “to bring in greater economic opportunities to inhabited islands” (Ministry of Tourism & Civil Aviation, 2007, p. 58) while avoiding the perceived negative socio-cultural impacts of élite-controlled enclave resort tourism. This policy shift however has sparked resistance to change, triggering ongoing national debate on socio-cultural and economic benefits or otherwise of enclave tourism (Bowen, Zubair, & Altinay, 2016). The Fourth Tourism Master Plan (2013–2017) continued this approach, encouraging also the pursuit of market-driven opportunities and decentralised decision-making in the community-based sector while concurrently supporting enclave tourism (Ministry of Tourism & Arts & Culture, 2013).

Very little, however, is known about resident perceptions of these sequential initiatives. The only relevant identified study is Shakeela and Weaver (2012), who revealed a Maldivian online community in emotional solidarity with a foreign tourist couple subjected to covert verbal abuse by local resort employees, as revealed on YouTube; demands for compensation and apologies were accompanied by calls to condemn and punish the implicated “un-Maldivian” and “un-Islamic” employees. Commentary analysis revealed these sentiments to be underpinned by explicit appreciation of tourism's economic benefits for the nation and to individual Maldivians, as well as, implicitly, a concomitant lack of personal exposure to the challenging working conditions contributing to this subversive employee behaviour.

Notwithstanding the overall “hyper-dependency” of the Maldives on international tourism, the latter is not equally distributed.

The two inhabited islands selected as comparative case studies exhibit contrasting tourism articulations as well as distinctive geographical and historical contexts offering prospects of divergent tourism-related social exchanges and social representations despite common Islamic affiliations. Huraa (25.1 ha), 20.3 km from the international airport in a tourism-intensive region of 42 resorts with 8976 beds, houses 992 residents (52% males; 48% females) and 286 expatriates employed mainly in tourism. Fifty-six percent of residents were born on the island and most have lived there long-term (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). While fishing remains important, Huraa has a long history of tourism engagement, with backpackers allowed in local houses during the 1970s and early 1980s (Shakeela & Weaver, 2017). To minimise negative socio-cultural impacts (Jamal & Lagiewski, 2006), the community tourism permit of Huraa and sister islands was revoked in 1979 following accusations from elite enclave resort developers that low prices threatened their high investments (Shakeela & Weaver, 2017).

However, interest in community-based tourism was rekindled in tandem with the Third Tourism Master Plan, and seven guesthouses (58 beds) were available in 2017. Concurrently, residents have continued to maintain close relationships with the surrounding enclave resort operators, directly benefiting as resort employees, and by selling day-trip excursions to resort tourists, displaying community life, and selling crafts and souvenirs. With recent fluctuations in arrivals from enclave resorts and to local guesthouses, Huraa at least superficially represents the consolidation phase of the destination life cycle.

Fuvahmulah (491.7 ha), 497 km south of the international airport, has 11,215 residents (50/50 male/female) and 526 expatriates working mainly in agriculture and fishing. Ninety-four percent of residents were born on the island and almost all have lived there long-term (National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Other than using a distinct dialect of *Dhivehi*, residents share the cultural and religious views of Huraa. Until 2011, when a domestic airport was established, island access was only by sea, which partially explains the single guesthouse with eight beds in 2017. There are no nearby enclave resorts, the closest being in Addu Atoll 48 km away. A parallel factor has been larger community resistance to tourism development, illustrated by protests which postponed construction of a city hotel on leased government land (Hamdhoon, 2005a; Saeed & Zahir, 2005). This is the first time in Maldivian history where locals opposed a tourism development project (Jamal & Lagiewski, 2006). Fears that tourism will introduce alcohol underlie this resistance and have inspired continued vigilance (Ahmed, 2011; Hamdhoon, 2005b).

Fuvahmulah, accordingly, resembles the exploration or early involvement stage of the destination life cycle, modified with a pattern of induced stagnation. Structurally, it is a “double periphery” given its remoteness and rudimentary tourism development, while Huraa resembles a “double core”, being near the capital city and international airport while displaying high tourism participation in nearby enclave resorts and internally. An interesting pattern on both islands is that high population density and small land base render guesthouse tourists and resort excursionists as a highly visible if ephemeral element of the human landscape even if their actual numbers are low relative to the resident population.

Methodology

The adopted research stance entails concurrent use of qualitative and quantitative approaches whose respective inherent weaknesses justify a mixed methodology (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Additional advantages pertaining especially to exploratory empirical research include emphasis on experimentation (Creswell, 2014) to focus on ‘what works’ regarding the associated issues (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). An explanatory sequential research technique (Creswell, 2014) was applied to assure rigour and validity of the mixed methods design. To ensure content clarity and to test and refine the research instruments, the questionnaire and interview questions were piloted among a convenience sample of 20 Maldivians living in Brisbane, Australia. Informed by existing literature, the quantitative surveys and interviews focused on obtaining insight into resident perceptions of tourism impacts, visiting tourists, and tourism development on their home islands; that is, the ‘raw material’ that informs social exchange analysis. The post-positivist approach (Guba, 1990) adopted for the quantitative surveys subsequently informed the semi-structured interviews, the constructivist perspective of which provided data enrichment (Guba, 1990). Amalgamation of contrasting positivist and constructivist worldviews is a recommendation (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007) requiring continual cross-comparison of the inferences emerging from multiple worldviews and realities (Denzin, 2010; Greene, 2007).

Due to the smallness and resource-scarcity of inhabited Maldivian islands, there is extensive inter-island temporary mobility that challenges the concept of “residency”. Thus, ‘residents’ are defined in this study as those born on the island and resident there for most of the year; domestic migrants and resident expatriates are thus excluded. To obtain a random sample, the first author approached every third household on Huraa and Fuvahmulah between December 2013 and January 2014. If the occupant met the criteria and was willing to participate, either an interview was conducted or a survey initiated, as selected by the participant. No obstacles were faced in recruiting participants. The Maldivian language *Dhivehi* was used in all contact, and no material inducements for participation were offered. Ultimately, data were collected via 200 self-administered household surveys (one per household; 50 in Huraa, 150 in Fuvahmulah) and 50 in-depth face-to-face interviews (20 in Huraa, 30 in Fuvahmulah). Despite the equal proportions of men and women born and living on both islands, a higher percentage of females completed the household surveys at Fuvahmulah. This is because women were more likely to be at home during recruitment times, as only males and just a few females are employed respectively in the core fishing and agricultural sectors. The proportion working in enclave resort tourism is also low due to long-term absences from home (Shakeela, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2010). Nevertheless, Maldivian women are among the most emancipated in the Islamic world (Dayal & Didi, 2001), and were happy to share their opinions.

The survey and interview guides used statements from previous tourism-related social exchange literature to solicit resident perceptions of local tourism-related economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts as well as attitudes toward tourism and tourists. The religious dimension captured Islamic social representations through statements about the consumption of alcohol and pork, mosque visits, and the permissibility of allowing women to work in tourism. Forty-three relevant statements in the

Table 1
Participant Profiles.

	Huraa		Fuvahmulah	
	Surveys N = 50 (%)	Interviews N = 20 (%)	Surveys N = 150 (%)	Interviews N = 30 (%)
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	64	95	30	73.3
Female	36	5	70	26.7
<i>Age (years)</i>				
18–30	62	65	45.3	43.3
31–45	16	25	40.7	30
46–60	16	10	10	16.7
> 60	6	–	3.3	10
<i>Highest Qualification</i>				
Primary	66	30	42	10
Secondary	16	30	30.7	53.3
Vocational	14	35	3.3	23.3
Undergraduate	2	5	6	10
Postgraduate	–	–	0.7	3.3
Previous/Current Tourism Employment	66	90	17.3	56.7

questionnaire accommodated agreement on a 5-point Likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree, with the respective agreement (1, 2) and disagreement (4, 5) responses each combined to facilitate analysis through SPSS v24. Internal consistency was measured at 0.795, well above the recommended Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.7 (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Chi-squared (Pearson) tests identified statistically significant item differences between the two islands.

Face-to-face in-depth interviews, using semi-structured open-ended questions and conducted at participant homes, clarified and elaborated questionnaire responses. Reliability, in addition, was increased by the rapport established between residents and researcher, and the latter’s ability to identify verbal and non-verbal nuances. All interviews were recorded with participant permission, translated and transcribed by a bi-lingual researcher, and cross-checked by the primary author. Average interview time was 15 min, with a 12–27 min range. Qualitative content analysis was assisted by text analytical software Leximancer 4.5 which served to store and organise data. Rather than relying on this program’s automatic coding features, data were coded manually, thus allowing the latter to “speak for itself”. Using inductive reasoning, emergent ideas were identified from comments during the first coding stage and clustered into themes. Deductive reasoning, through subsequent comments and interrogations, then corroborated or recalibrated those themes. Continual alternation between inductive and deductive reasoning facilitated successively deeper understandings of respondent perspectives through conversion of emergent themes into tentative “final” themes (Reichert, 2014). Through integrated quantitative and qualitative results, *meta*-inferences were made (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Following ethics protocols, quoted interviewees are assigned anonymous numeric identifiers based on home island affiliation ($H_{1\dots n}$ or $F_{1\dots n}$).

Findings

Major differences between the island samples pertained to tourism employment, gender, age, and education level (Table 1). The higher proportion of Huraa respondents who have had employment in tourism is unsurprising given its economic prominence on that island and the parent atoll. Conversely, Fuvahmulah residents rely on fishing and agriculture and have low exposure to international tourists. They also tend to be older than Huraa respondents, who also are more likely to claim primary or vocational education as their highest qualification.

There is similarly high agreement that tourism creates local employment while increased tourist numbers improve the local economy (Table 2). However, Huraa residents are significantly more likely to claim personal tourism-related benefits and to disagree that tourism benefits only a few or that there are few economic linkages with nearby resorts. Ambivalence pertained as to whether tourism increased local cost of living. Representative expressions of economic benefit included: “I make all my money from the resort. I built my house from the money I made in the resort” (H16); and “Tourism is the easiest way we can benefit financially because we can sell our beautiful small islands and benefit economically easily” (F18). Potential benefits for Fuvahmulah were expressed as follows:

“It would benefit the economy greatly and open a lot of job opportunities. And that would reduce unemployment which would then again solve a lot of social problems as people can work on this island close to their families without having to go far away to a resort” (F22).

Regarding negative economic impacts, inequity was intimated by interviewees opining that “the resort management only does what is beneficial to them” (H15); and “millionaires run the resort. I think it will be good to increase the benefits for citizens” (H03). Concerning job insecurity, “there is no guarantee with jobs; there is no job guarantee in the whole of Maldives” (H13). Preferential treatment of expatriate employees by foreign management was also emphasised:

Table 2
Economic impacts.

		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Chi-square tests
Tourism increases my personal income level	Fuvahmulah	48.7	44	7.3	$X^2 = 11.232$ $p \leq .004$
	Huraa	68	18	14	
I personally benefit from tourism	Fuvahmulah	47.3	42	10.7	$X^2 = 9.696$ $p \leq .008$
	Huraa	70	18	12	
Tourism creates employment opportunities for locals	Fuvahmulah	83.3	8	8.7	$X^2 = 5.784$ $p \leq .055$
	Huraa	96	0	4	
Increased number of tourists visiting the island improves the local economy	Fuvahmulah	82	8	9.3	$X^2 = 8.139$ $p \leq .017$
	Huraa	98	0	2	
Other than direct employment in the resorts and souvenir shops, there are no economic linkages with resorts	Fuvahmulah	38	51.3	10.7	$X^2 = 13.753$ $p \leq .001$
	Huraa	10	74	16	
Tourism only benefits a few people on this island community	Fuvahmulah	29.3	57.3	13.3	$X^2 = 9.113$ $p \leq .011$
	Huraa	10	80	10	
Tourism increases the cost of living	Fuvahmulah	32	46	22	$X^2 = 1.166$ $p \leq .558$
	Huraa	34	38	28	

“There is discrimination between the Maldivian and foreign employees. Foreigners run most of Maldivian resorts. So they discriminate against Maldivians a lot. As a result the income we get is less. Even if you work in the same position as them, a Maldivian’s wages would be less than the foreigners. No matter how good you are at your job, there would always be a foreigner who’s in a higher position than the Maldivian” (H03);

“A Maldivian can’t take that position. A Maldivian can do food and beverage work. A food and beverage director has to be a white person. I think the fact that they don’t give Maldivians a chance is a very big problem” (F22).

High reliance on non-managerial expatriates was also a concern: “When a tourist resort first opens up, the employees are 90% foreign” (F25); and

“The numbers of foreigners are increasing greatly in Maldives, enough to get you scared. And it’s started to affect our lifestyle as well. And it’s not just tourism, other industries are employing more foreigners and it’s affecting our children and wives” (H02).

Regarding social impacts, there is strong concurrence that tourism improves standard of living (Table 3). These sentiments, however, are conditional and differentially expressed by the two samples. Specifically, residents disagree overall that tourism disrupts local tranquillity, negatively impact social and family life, or increases crime, but the disagreement is stronger in Huraa. Conversely, on Fuvahmulah there is a stronger association between tourism and increased substance abuse. Regarding alcohol: “I’m most concerned about alcohol since we are Muslims. If you work in a resort you’re going to have to touch it and clean it up. I’m not too happy about it but I can understand that it is necessary” (H04); “[There are] people within this island who would misuse alcohol being available, and I think it would also affect the youth and children that are growing up in the island” (F05); and “not everybody on this island agrees with the prospect, mainly because drugs and alcohol might influence some islanders” (F09).

Moreover, widespread unease over the social repercussions of working in resorts away from home, family and friends was

Table 3
Social impacts.

		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Chi-square tests
Tourism improves the local standard of living	Fuvahmulah	81.3	11.3	7.3	$X^2 = 4.983$ $p \leq .083$
	Huraa	94	2	4	
Tourism increases crime	Fuvahmulah	33.3	44.7	22	$X^2 = 5.849$ $p \leq .054$
	Huraa	16	52	32	
Tourism increases drug abuse among locals	Fuvahmulah	49.3	35.3	15.3	$X^2 = 15.339$ $p \leq .000$
	Huraa	20	46	34	
Tourism increases alcoholism among locals	Fuvahmulah	60.7	26.7	12.7	$X^2 = 4.361$ $p \leq .113$
	Huraa	44	36	20	
Tourists disrupt the peace and tranquillity of this island community	Fuvahmulah	16	72.7	11.3	$X^2 = 10.191$ $p \leq .006$
	Huraa	2	94	4	
Working at a resort has a negative impact on social and family life	Fuvahmulah	33.3	45.3	21.3	$X^2 = 14.469$ $p \leq .001$
	Huraa	12	76	12	

Table 4
Environmental impacts.

		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Chi-square tests
Tourism preserves the natural environment	Fuvahmulah	73.3	17.3	9.3	$X^2 = 2.568$ $p \leq .277$
	Huraa	82	8	10	
Tourism has not contributed to a decline in the ecological environment of this island	Fuvahmulah	77.3	14	8.7	$X^2 = 1.207$ $p \leq .547$
	Huraa	72	14	14	
Tourism contributes to climate change	Fuvahmulah	13.3	68	18.7	$X^2 = 1.011$ $p \leq .603$
	Huraa	8	72	20	
Our historical sites are being spoilt by tourist visitations	Fuvahmulah	13.3	78	8.7	$X^2 = 3.344$ $p \leq .188$
	Huraa	4	86	10	

revealed in interviews, which belies survey results indicating improved standards of living from tourism: “The most satisfying part for an employee is taking a shower after work and to call family and friends” (H15); and

“The biggest problem with working in resorts is that it feels like a luxury jail. You have to leave your family and friends when you go. Even for resorts that are near Malé people can only go to Malé for about four days every month. And you rarely get to meet your family. You can only go back to your island once a year. Apart from that, you have to live in a completely different environment. After finishing work every day, you are met with a very closed environment. That is the biggest difficulty” (F08).

Both samples were enthused that tourism helps to preserve the local natural environment, has not contributed to its decline, does not contribute to climate change, and does not despoil local historical sites (Table 4). Endorsements include statements that “I see good things we can learn from tourists when they visit, like no rubbish on our streets, for our locals to throw rubbish in dustbins” (H14). An example of tangible positive tourism-related impact is the regeneration of mangroves on Huraa, which in the early 1980’s were used as a rubbish tip later converted by residents into a major eco-attraction.

Tourism is positively associated with encouraging cultural activities and exchanges, and fostering cultural pride (Table 5). One interviewee emphasised personal benefits of cross-cultural exposure by stating that “the main benefits are improving English, and to learn about different cultures” (H17). There was also agreement, albeit more salient in Fuvahmulah, that tourism does not change local cultural values and norms, or cause loss of Maldivian culture. Concerns over acculturation, however, were captured in the interviews, with one Huraa resident working in the tourism industry observing that “they copy the tourists that visit. There would be a negative aspect” (H09). Similarly,

“My biggest concern is sometimes the tourists have different attire. I have to say that when some Maldivian girls see how the tourists dress they imitate them and I have to hide my head in shame. With more tourists, there is a big chance that Maldivians would imitate their attire and behaviour” (F20).

Inter-island differentiation is more evident on the religion items, with Fuvahmulah residents more likely to agree that women

Table 5
Cultural/religious impacts.

		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Chi-square tests
Tourism encourages cultural activities	Fuvahmulah	80.7	8.7	10.7	$X^2 = 11.306$ $p \leq .004$
	Huraa	100	0	0	
I believe tourism promotes cultural exchange	Fuvahmulah	82.7	8.7	8.7	$X^2 = .774$ $p \leq .679$
	Huraa	82	6	12	
Tourism has increased our pride in our culture and traditions	Fuvahmulah	79.3	12.7	8	$X^2 = 7.960$ $p \leq .019$
	Huraa	86	0	14	
Visiting tourists cause changes in the cultural values and norms of locals	Fuvahmulah	32	50	18	$X^2 = 1.849$ $p \leq .397$
	Huraa	22	56	22	
Tourism leads to loss of Maldivian culture	Fuvahmulah	20.7	69.3	10	$X^2 = 9.727$ $p \leq .008$
	Huraa	2	86	12	
Women should not work in tourism as it goes against religious beliefs	Fuvahmulah	55.3	26.7	18	$X^2 = 7.364$ $p \leq .025$
	Huraa	34	44	22	
Tourists should visit mosques only for religious reasons	Fuvahmulah	60.7	22	17.3	$X^2 = 40.754$ $p \leq .000$
	Huraa	12	66	22	
Tourism operations in inhabited islands should not sell alcohol or pork to tourists	Fuvahmulah	74	15.3	10.7	$X^2 = 2.629$ $p \leq .269$
	Huraa	84	12	4	

Table 6
Attitude towards tourists.

		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Chi-square tests
I would like to meet tourists to learn more about them	Fuvahmulah	70.7	18.7	10.7	$X^2 = 0.513$ $p \leq .774$
	Huraa	70	16	14	
We should encourage tourists to visit this island	Fuvahmulah	75.3	12	12.7	$X^2 = 8.020$ $p \leq .018$
	Huraa	92	0	8	
Visiting tourists are inconsiderate of locals	Fuvahmulah	16.7	66	17.3	$X^2 = 10.045$ $p \leq .007$
	Huraa	2	88	10	
Tourists are unaware of the local way of life.	Fuvahmulah	61.3	21.3	17.3	$X^2 = 6.198$ $p \leq .045$
	Huraa	48	18	34	

should not work in tourism due to religious reasons, or that tourists visit mosques only for religious purposes. Both samples, however, agreed that tourist operations on inhabited islands should not sell alcohol or pork to tourists. Fuvahmulah residents observed the dynamics of tourism on religion as follows: “There was some discussion to have a plot of land assigned for it [tourist hotel] and some work was started. The biggest issues then were mainly religious. They [locals] did not like the idea of selling alcohol and pork” (F19); and

“The first thing that some people here associate with tourism is alcohol. It’s a common belief that you can’t run tourism without alcohol. They speculate that if you do have a hotel here it would be compulsory to sell alcohol and that is something that is not permitted in our religion. So when there was discussion of introducing tourism here, that was the first thing those individuals were advocating; that they are bringing tourism here just to sell alcohol. So when they create that idea, the non-religious person would not want to bring in alcohol either. Even the person who doesn’t pray every day would retaliate if you mention it. That’s how our religious beliefs are built. Maybe that’s why they have opposing opinions, because alcohol is involved” (F22).

Surveys and interviews both indicate tourism as a platform for inter-cultural social exchange. Tourists are positively perceived, and most respondents wanted to meet and learn about them (Table 6):

“The best about tourism in terms of economy, it is money. And in terms of social, where you can approach many tourists and you get the chance to interact with them and learn from them; different cultures and different knowledge” (F02).

Accordingly, it is widely agreed that tourists should be encouraged to visit the island: “It would be a good experience for the locals to interact with tourists and learn about different cultures and be more aware of the world” (F19). This is telling, since residents of both islands agree that tourists are unaware of local ways of life: “they do not have a lot of information on traveling domestically within the Maldives” (F01). For some, this invites caution: “There are a lot of inhabitants on this island. And as tourists come visit our community, we have to consider our religion and culture” (F18). Potential for inter-cultural conflict is suggested, but residents disagree (Fuvahmulah residents less so) that tourists are inconsiderate of locals.

Strong overall support for tourism development is indicated, especially on Huraa (Table 7). Interviews reveal direct connections to employment: “[tourism] industry has provided the most job opportunities to Maldivians. It also contributes to the development of the Maldives and international recognition” (H14); “If they do construct a hotel here to accommodate tourists it would open a lot of job opportunities” (F07); and “I would really like for a resort to open here because then my younger sibling can work here. It would be a job here and not far away” (F28). Huraa residents were also more likely to agree that tourism is more important than the traditional industry of fishing. Overall, respondents agree that tourism benefits outweigh costs, though Fuvahmulah residents less so and more likely to worry about balancing tourism with religion:

“What I’m most concerned about is the fact that Maldives is a 100% Muslim country. And because people live in the island, there would be a lot of issues in introducing tourism here. For example, the tourists would come from different religions and their culture, attire and attitudes are very different to ours. If that’s the case, it might affect our culture and attitude negatively... That’s what concerns me the most” (F23);

Table 7
Attitude towards tourism development.

		Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Chi-square tests
I support tourism development on this island	Fuvahmulah	85.3	10.7	4	$X^2 = 5.994$ $p \leq .050$
	Huraa	98	2	0	
Tourism is more important than the fishing industry	Fuvahmulah	36	46.7	17.3	$X^2 = 24.758$ $p \leq .000$
	Huraa	68	8	24	
The positive benefits of tourism outweigh negative impacts	Fuvahmulah	60	27.3	12.7	$X^2 = 3.174$ $p \leq .205$
	Huraa	74	18	8	

“Since this is an inhabited island, it should be considered how tourism would be approached here in a manner that does not oppose our religious views. Such as selling alcohol and pork” (F20);

“It might be a bit more difficult developing tourism if the island is inhabited. That would mean alcohol would have to be served within the island and there are people that would misuse it. I think that side is the most concerning” (F05);

and

“Some people take alcohol and pork as an issue. But we can still develop tourism without those things” (F24).

Discussion and conclusion

Interactions with residents of two Maldivian communities in contrasting stages of tourism development but with similar cultural characteristics yielded insights into reconciliations of deeply held Islamic social representations with proximate hedonistic tourism. Such insight has been lacking due to tendencies of government and industry in the Maldives to ‘consult’ with communities only superficially on matters of significant local import. In addition, religion has been neglected as an informant variable in tourism-related perceptual research. An initial insight, in tandem with the literature, is that resident perceptions of tourism in these two communities are complex and diverse, and unamenable to simplistic generalisation despite religious uniformity. Also in conformance is that overall tourism perceptions are positive, notwithstanding the high visibility of visiting tourists, racial differences, or apparent incongruities between hedonistic tourism and local cultural sensitivities. This complements perceptions garnered by [Shakeela and Weaver \(2012\)](#) from the aforementioned online sample of Maldivian “netizens”.

What dynamics, accordingly, are at play within these “Islamic pleasure periphery” destinations? As with other empirical studies, apparent social exchanges compel most residents to position tourism as a desirable actual or aspirational revenue and employment source. These dynamics, however, are influenced by current levels of tourism involvement as well as the perceived dictates of the conservative Islam practised universally within both communities. Reflecting results in other insular tourism-intensive destinations such as Mauritius ([Naidoo & Sharples, 2016](#)), Huraa residents are far more involved with tourism and hence already appreciate the salient benefits of tourism, and are stronger in their overall and targeted support. They are also amenable to further tourism growth and more versatile in identifying strategies whereby the benefits of tourism can continue to be gained without violating attendant Islamic sensibilities.

Other examples of “proactive social exchange” – the purposeful *manipulation* of circumstances so that benefits outweigh costs – include intervention with tourists or their intermediaries to ensure compatible behaviour and appearance in an environment of high tourist visibility. According to Huraa informants, “We’ve informed the tour guides that the tourists have to observe modesty when they visit school areas and etc. Our children would not be accustomed to seeing how tourists dress” (H18), and “We also have to consider educating the guests on their code of conduct when they visit us. Some of them wear their bra and panties. It sends a very bad message” (H02). Scanty clothing, alcohol, and the like, therefore, are still evils according to the dictates of hegemonic Islamic social representations, but “managed evils”.

The situation in Fuvahmulah differs through its minimal engagement with tourism; social exchanges, accordingly, are more speculative and privilege the *prevention* of projected hedonistic evils. Notably, even those employed in fishing or farming perceive tourism positively because of the possibilities for economic linkage, supplementary employment, and job opportunities for other community members. Among the more limited options for accommodating tourism are geographic and temporal segregation. Several residents acknowledged the practicality of the enclave resort approach and opined that variants could be implemented on Fuvahmulah itself despite limited land endowment, thereby attracting direct tourist expenditures without accompanying negative effects of behaviour or appearance. Thus, if “the sandbank is somewhere where everyone goes swimming but if the locals have public access to that area and it has tourists, they might not agree with their attire and mannerisms” (F05), then “we could still visit the sandbank during holidays by arranging an appointment or something like that. I don’t think it would be that difficult” (F26).

Current government plans to introduce tourism in Fuvahmulah (and potentially other similar locations) through an enclave resort hotel must therefore be revisited. Meaningful community participation is imperative, with our results providing an initial understanding of what residents think and want. This and subsequent participation should entail a pragmatic “community-responsive” approach that respects the desire of some residents for no or indirect involvement only, due to their strongly held social representations, in preference to a classic “community-based” model that assumes support for widespread direct participation ([Weaver, 2010](#)). The latter typically assumes the desirability and compatibility of “alternative tourists” allegedly more sensitive to local culture and partial to local products. Whether such tourists are really so sensitive and exist in sufficient volume to stimulate meaningful economic development, or if so would be attracted to the Maldives with its hedonistic reputation, are legitimate concerns that invite investigation of other markets such as Muslim tourists, or Western “mass tourists” educated to behave in a culturally appropriate manner in the company of residents. Also implicated are the rapidly growing Chinese and East Asian markets, whose diverse habits, needs, wants and attitudes are still opaque in a destination traditionally responsive to Western proclivities; how their expanding presence mediates Maldivian tourism-related social exchanges is a worthy topic of follow-up research, given that our informants did not specifically mention engagement with any such markets.

Our results challenge [McKercher et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Butler \(1980\)](#) who suggest that conversion of non-tourism places into shared or tourism places fosters more negative tourism attitudes. In the Maldives, less positive attitudes actually associate with more rudimentary tourism development, but more important may be the accompanying persistence of traditional religious beliefs that position tourism’s acceleration as a potential threat. Both a limitation and strength of this study is that it focuses on two contrasting cases, one at the exploration stage and the other at the consolidation phase of the tourism area life cycle; as such, this study is geography-centric

and does not disclose resident perceptions from similar tourism life cycle perspectives. A larger issue is to ascertain how our case-study islands, and the Maldives in general, are evolving and finding their place among the many “Muslim tourisms” of the contemporary world (Jafari & Scott, 2014). We introduce the “Islamic pleasure periphery” as an emergent region encompassing Muslim-dominated destinations where hedonic tourist motivations are dominant, but the Maldives is only one of its manifestations. Cosmopolitan seaside resorts such as Dubai (UAE), Sharm El Sheikh (Egypt) and Sousse (Tunisia), but also culturally insular destinations such as Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea coastline, will reveal their own diversity of Islamic social representations and equally complex attendant social exchanges. There is great merit in articulating this Islamic pleasure periphery as a geographic context for interrogating an important but contentious type of tourism in the Muslim world.

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Dr Aishath Shakeela is a Senior Lecturer at the Griffith Business School, Griffith University. Her research interests include sustainable tourism, climate change, small island destinations, tourism education, emotion in tourism, and employment issues.

Dr David Weaver is a Professor of Tourism Research at Griffith Business School, Griffith University and has more than 30 years of experience teaching and researching in the areas of ecotourism, sustainable tourism, and destination management.