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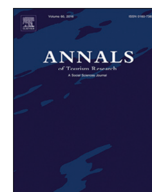
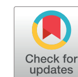


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Selling Authentic Happiness: Indigenous wellbeing and romanticised inequality in tourism advertising



Tarryn Phillips [a,*], John Taylor [a], Edward Narain [a], Philippa Chandler [b]

[a] Department of Social Inquiry, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia
[b] Department of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne, Australia

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ABSTRACT

An international campaign launched in 2019 encourages tourists to visit Fiji, where the locals may not be wealthy yet are 'rich in happiness.' Drawing on critical discourse analysis, this paper investigates the history and implications of commodifying economic assumptions about indigenous happiness and wellbeing. Invoking contemporary neoliberal approaches to 'positive psychology', the campaign repackages historically-entrenched colonial stereotypes about the 'happy native' while ostensibly inviting reflexivity about the negative impacts of Western capitalism on human wellbeing. In doing so, it problematically romanticises poverty and rationalises continued labour exploitation in tourism. We argue that commodifying anti-monetary logics about subjective wellbeing in the Global South paradoxically serves to justify and further entrench objective economic inequalities.

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Introduction

International tourism campaigns seek to capture the perceived essence of what makes a country special in order to attract visitors. In doing so, they often harness and perpetuate alluring popular images of 'those *being branded*' (Kerrigan et al., 2012). Critical tourism scholars have long argued that such branding tends to overemphasise and essentialise cultural difference (Winter & Gallon, 2008). Typically designed for the Western tourist gaze, campaigns about non-Western countries especially exoticise the 'other' by drawing on problematic, if not overtly racist, cultural stereotypes, which are often historically linked to orientalist discourses of empire and colonialism (Edwards & Ramamurthy, 2017). Despite the intention to emphasise cultural 'authenticity' and 'uniqueness', there is often a vague *placelessness* in the way indigenous cultures and 'developing' destinations are marketed (Silverman and Hallett, 2015, p.80). In the national branding videos for India and Peru, for example, many of the tropes were virtually interchangeable despite being about different continents (Silverman & Hallett, 2015). Likewise, for the Pacific - the locale of this paper - national branding campaigns for Vanuatu, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea all equally draw on images of native peoples as culturally diverse, colourfully exotic, and as living somehow 'closer to nature' than those who might wish to travel to visit them (Taylor, 2019). Pacific cultures are depicted as titillatingly savage, and yet conveniently subservient, always willing to perform and serve with a smile (Alexeyeff & Taylor, 2016; Alexeyeff & McDonnell, 2018). More than simply symbolic,

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: tarryn.phillips@latrobe.edu.au, (T. Phillips), john.taylor@latrobe.edu.au, (J. Taylor), e.narain@latrobe.edu.au, (E. Narain), philippa.chandler@unimelb.edu.au. (P. Chandler).

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the privileging of a stylised version of indigeneity in tourism campaigns can shape the collective construction of a national identity, foster local ethno-nationalist politics, and influence institutional processes, especially employment in the tourism sector (Kanemasu, 2013b).

With the above scholarly critique as our point of departure, this article turns its attention to a 2019 campaign by Tourism Fiji called *Bulanaires* - a wordplay on the term 'billionaires' and the Fijian greeting 'bula' (literally meaning 'life', and when used as a greeting implying wishes of good health). In sum, the *Bulanaires* campaign exhorts international tourists to visit Fiji, where the locals may not be wealthy in monetary terms but are nonetheless 'rich in happiness'. Unlike the tourism campaigns that came before it, it *explicitly* references economic assumptions about Fijian wellbeing, and articulates it in the fashionable lexicon of positive psychology. This seemingly novel marketing angle is therefore a critical site for analysis. Research into wellbeing is in its infancy in tourism studies (Smith & Diekmann, 2017) and the little that does exist tends to uncritically engage with wellbeing as a valuable aspiration to strive for. In this paper we use critical discourse analysis to address the underresearched question: what are the historical origins and discursive implications of using wellbeing rhetoric to brand a low-income destination? Our aim is not to question whether Fijians *feel* happy or self-report as such, but rather to question the implications of globally broadcasting the message that they are 'rich in happiness'. We argue that commodifying the message that Fijians are content with humble economic needs can have harmful effects. It perpetuates the notions that Indigenous people are somehow detached from global contexts of capitalist production and consumption – yet are simultaneously happy to be subservient within it. It thereby acts as a commodity fetish that obscures and justifies the realities of economic inequality that facilitate tourism to the Pacific and elsewhere.

Fiji tourism: the origins of the *Bulanaires* campaign

Fiji is an archipelago of the South Pacific Region with a population of just over 900,000. The Fijian demographic is mostly iTaukei (Indigenous Fijians, literally meaning owner of the land - 57%) and Indo-Fijians (38%), most of whom are descended from Indian indentured labourers mobilised by the British colonial administration to work on the sugar cane plantations during the 1800s (FBoS, 2010). Ethnic tensions between the two groups have been periodically ignited after the ethnonationalist military coups of 1987 and 2000 and unresolved tensions over indigenous land rights (Lal, 2006). These divisions remain muted but present under the current *FijiFirst* Government, whose rhetoric promotes multi-ethnic statehood.

Classified by the World Bank as a middle-income country, Fiji nonetheless has an official poverty rate of 34% (FBoS, 2013) with local experts estimating the actual figure is significantly higher (Phillips & Keen, 2017). However, as recognised and exploited by the *Bulanaires* campaign, recently popularised alternative wellbeing metrics suggest that despite being considered relatively poor on monetary terms, many Melanesian communities maintain affluent lifestyles when measured against other important criteria, such as widespread engagement in subsistence agriculture and strong extended family networks (Tanguay, 2015).

As with many small island developing states, Fiji has sought to bolster its tourism industry as a tool to promote economic development, increase employment and alleviate poverty. Within this model, cheap local labour is considered their main competitive advantage in the global free market (Scheyvens, 2007). On one level, Fijian tourism has been incredibly successful in achieving its aims – the Fijian Bureau of statistics reported almost 900,000 visitors to Fiji for the 2018–2019 period, the industry contributes over a third of the country's GDP (Kida et al., 2017) and over 1 in 3 Fijians are employed in the sector (South Pacific Tourism Organisation, 2018). As a result, Fiji has become reliant on tourism to compete in the global capitalist arena (Harrison & Prasad, 2013), a reliance that is problematic in the context of global economic shocks like COVID-19, as we later address. Critical scholars are concerned about countries like Fiji becoming overly dependent on tourism because it directs government resources away from self-determining productivity, mobilises a disproportionate number of workers into service jobs as opposed to more highly paid and empowering labour, and disincentivises raising local wages (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019). Moreover, as has been demonstrated in Fiji and elsewhere, profits from tourism do not necessarily 'trickle-down' to the majority of people in poorer locations. The tourism industry does not automatically promote upward socio-economic mobility, particularly for the poorest of the poor (Llorca-Rodriguez, 2017) and can negatively impact subjective wellbeing amongst its employees (Pratt et al., 2016). Thus, as we go on to explore in this article, tourism can be a double-edged sword in developing contexts, simultaneously acting as a much-needed economic opportunity while also encouraging reliance on an industry that often locks small island developing states - and indigenous hosts– into exploitative relationships.

As a destination, Fiji has historically been branded similarly to other Pacific Islands, as a remote and untouched 'Island Paradise' (Alexeyeff & McDonnell, 2018; Taylor, 2019). Rather than being marketed as an adventure destination like the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu or Papua New Guinea, it is typically represented as an ideal place for young families to relax. This emphasis on relaxation is underpinned by two historically entrenched cultural stereotypes, both of which centre on iTaukei. The first is the notion of the 'amiable Fijian' (Kanemasu, 2013b). Colonial discourses about iTaukei as cannibals and ignoble savages were gradually replaced by a softer image of a smiling, friendly people (Kanemasu, 2013b). What this shift made space for, importantly, was the development of an image of iTaukei as 'naturally' self-subordinate, friendly, and willing to please. This image has a long history in tourism advertising stretching at least as far back as the 1960s, reified in the 1990 global campaign that dubbed Fiji the 'The Isle of Smiles.'

The second enduring stereotype is the notion of time standing still. iTaukei in particular are depicted as having an endearing disregard for 'clock time'. As Eräsaari (2018) points out, 'Fiji time' – vernacular for relaxed or non-existent punctuality – has become a commodity, sold to tourists as an opportunity to escape the pressures of 'modern' society, which is figured as rigorously – and unhealthily – dependant on clock time.

Indo-Fijians, by contrast, have historically been erased in the country's tourism materials in order to cater to the international tourist's presumed desire for *authentic* Fijianness (White, 2007). While time and financial limitations understandably restrict marketing campaigns from capturing all facets of a country's culture, the decision to disproportionately focus on the Indigenous inhabitants at the expense of a large and historically marginalised Indo-Fijian population is inherently political. In essence, as Kanemasu (2013a, 2013b) notes, Fiji's tourism materials are the site of an ongoing 'cultural battle' over the collective construction of the Fijian identity, reflecting multiple power dynamics related to colonialism, transnational corporate capitalism, and ethnonationalism. As outlined below, these tensions are salient in the *Bulanaires* campaign, but take on a different flavour.

For the 2019 campaign, Tourism Fiji aimed to communicate the country's brand in a 'fresh' way in order to 'break through the clutter of tropical holiday paradises' (Tourism Fiji, 2019). Officially launched in March 2019, the *Bulanaires* advertising campaign was designed by the global marketing company, M&C Saatchi, in partnership with Arianna Huffington's wellness organisation *Thrive Global* and Australia's Nine media network (Kelly, 2019). The campaign comprised of a website, print media advertisements and 20 video advertisements linked to YouTube. In line with *Thrive Global's* mandate of 'ending the stress and burnout epidemic', inspiration for the campaign reportedly came from the 2017 Gallup International poll, in which, out of 55 countries surveyed, Fijians were declared the 'happiest people on Earth' after self-reporting the highest levels of 'happiness, hope and economic optimism'. (The survey method was to ask a representative sample of 'around 1000 men and women in 55 countries' either by face-to-face, telephone or online, to self-report their level of happiness on a scale of 1–10.)

The campaign also consulted with Professor Lea Waters, a specialist in positive psychology. With Waters' input, a '*Bulanaires* list' was developed, celebrating 'people who are rich in happiness, not in money'. These personalities included: a Fijian International Rugby player; the American director of the *Survivor* series filmed in Fiji; a resort general manager; a German Jew who survived the Holocaust; a blogger for Thrive Global; a motivational speaker and life coach; and a nutritional advocate for poor populations in New Zealand. The campaign declared that, like these people, 'anyone can be a bulanaire,' and recommended strategies to create a calmer and happier life, including 'unplugging and uncharging' and 'cultivating relationships with the people around you' (Kelly, 2019).

Intended for TV and social media, the first *Bulanaires* video advertisement lasts for just over a minute, and features an iTaukei man speaking directly to the camera. The advertisement opens with him on a jetty and continues with him walking through a coastal village:

> Bula! I've been thinking – there are not many billionaires around here. But there are plenty of Bulanaires! [Montage of Fijian people smiling and saying 'bula!']A bulanaire is a person rich with happiness. [Montage of Fijian people laughing] Here in Fiji, 'Bula' is more than just a greeting. It is a wish for happiness, good health and energy for life that you want to share with the whole world. After all, why have the last laugh when you can have the first?

In a related video advertisement, a stressed white businessman arrives at a resort and steps onto the beach. He hears a shout down at the water's edge and turns to see a barefoot iTaukei man carrying hand-caught fish and shouting 'Bula!'. The businessman relaxes, and is greeted by other locals selling fruit at the markets, drumming a *lali* (Fijian drum) in a traditional grass skirt, or climbing coconut trees. Another video sports a montage of iTaukei people singing in harmony, including a grandmotherly woman holding a sleeping white child. There are Indo-Fijians who appear in the materials, yet the dominant presence is still iTaukei.

The message of the *Bulanaires* campaign is that (especially Western) tourists can learn from iTaukei to prioritise 'the simple things in life' by withdrawing from the cash economy and routine rigours of working life, and instead embracing spontaneity, the natural environment and community. It implores us to 'measure rich in a new way' and brands iTaukei culture as appealingly anti-neoliberal. And yet, paradoxically, it starts from a distinctly Western and neoliberal subject position. It is this complex rhetorical connection between happiness and economic status in the neoliberal economy that requires a brief introduction.

Happiness, wealth and the neoliberal economy

There is an ambivalent relationship between happiness and wealth in Western discourse. On the one hand, consumer culture relentlessly promotes the message that happiness relies on economic prosperity, a discourse that is emphasised under neoliberalisation. We define neoliberalisation as a process that values the pursuit of economic growth, prioritises privatisation and free markets under capitalism, and fosters the assumption that individuals are 'free', 'equal,' and responsible for their own welfare (Wacquant, 2009). This focus on the individual has led to the rise of a billion-dollar 'happiness industry', in which self-help products offer advice about how to be happy or 'well'. Like happiness, wellbeing is a slippery concept that is applied broadly in popular culture, research and policy-making. It can encompass anything related to physical or mental health – hence its appeal - yet the coherence of the concept is often taken for granted. Drawing on the field of positive psychology, and '(usually orientalist)' readings of Eastern concepts like mindfulness (Ahmed, 2010) discourses about happiness and wellbeing are increasingly wrapped up in corporate-friendly packages and commodified globally (Healey, 2015). Indeed, as Sarah White (2017) notes, the ubiquity of references to happiness and wellbeing indicates a broader anxiety that 'all may not be well, reflecting the erosion of the social in late capitalist modernity'.

Concomitantly, in apparent opposition to the rise of capitalist culture, the notion that 'money cannot buy happiness' is idiomatic in Western discourse and is also a central tenet in positive psychology. It promotes the idea that wellbeing arises out of simple, authentic, non-material pleasures. Ironically, this too has long been commodified, particularly in the tourism industry. From the development of health spas in the nineteenth century to the contemporary fascination with yoga-related travel to

India, many tourism trends have links to wellness and back-to-nature fads (Inglis, 1999; Lehto et al., 2006). Thus money *is* needed to buy happiness-related tourism products.

The science of happiness presumes that it is something that is 'out there' and can be objectively measured (Ahmed, 2010). Yet, the questions of which determinants of wellbeing should be measured, how to measure them, and how they relate to economic security, are hotly contested (Strotmann & Volkert, 2018). The main site of contestation is the relative weight given to subjective indicators of wellbeing (i.e. people's personal overall *feelings* of happiness) versus objective indicators of wellbeing, such as income, health and living standards. Critics of objective wellbeing measures argue that there has been an overemphasis on income, which does not necessarily capture the complexity of community living, emotions and the meaning people attach to their lives (Strotmann & Volkert, 2018). By contrast, critics of subjective wellbeing metrics have argued that results can be highly contingent on what people expect and are used to, which Gasper (2005) refers to as 'framing effects'. Moreover 'happiness' is largely individualised in a Western context, which does not necessarily measure what may be critical to 'being well' in other cultural contexts. For example, in a 2012 report on 'alternative indicators of wellbeing' in Melanesia, Indigenous variables included 'strength of select Christian values' while a factor that was considered to detract from wellbeing included 'fear of demons, black magic and poison' (Tanguay, 2015) none of which feature in international happiness polls.

There have, however, been a number of initiatives that have sought to measure wellbeing in more holistic and nuanced ways. Bhutan famously developed the 'gross happiness index' which was designed to move away from the neoliberal directive to measure national success in purely economic (GDP) terms, but also go beyond the largely Western focus on subjective wellbeing (Ura et al., 2012). On a global scale, the United Nations Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed in 2007 sought to include determinants that are often missing from happiness polls, including one's *quality* of work – not just their employment status – and 'the ability to go about without shame.' Overall, there is a growing consensus that wellbeing is relational and complex, and there is a clear need to measure it both objectively and subjectively (although few empirical studies do so) (Strotmann & Volkert, 2018; White, 2017).

Despite the ongoing contestation over the measurement of wellbeing and its relationship to economic security, simplified metrics continue to be mobilised for political and commercial ends. Critical scholars have emphasised how discourses about wellbeing often justify and reproduce the politico-economic status quo. Policies based on individualised formations of 'wellbeing' can be neoliberal code for cutting back collectivised social services (Carlisle et al., 2009; Taylor, 2011). Oversimplified subjective measures of wellbeing may be used as a smokescreen to justify continued deprivation from an objective point of view (Davies, 2015; Strotmann & Volkert, 2018). Moreover, positive psychology discourses can act as a form of neoliberal governmentality, in which subjects are induced to 'work upon' their emotional states as 'open-ended problems of self-government' (Binkley, 2011). These discourses encourage relentless optimism, which tends to privatise suffering and suppress collective action against the system (which, in turn, often conveniently reinforces a conservative neoliberal and corporate agenda – Ehrenreich, 2009).

The *Bulanaires* campaign offers a unique site from which to engage with the above debates. Targeted at a predominantly Western audience, the campaign deliberately uses the language of positive psychology, references the Gallup International happiness poll, and echoes the cliché that wealth is not pivotal to wellbeing. Our aim in this article is to critically examine the implications of employing wellbeing logics in the branding of indigenous culture in tourism advertising. We argue that the campaign offers an insidious new twist on previous representations. By making explicit connections between Fijians' subjective happiness and their relatively humble economic status, the campaign glosses over and rationalises the objective determinants of economic deprivation. Further, it seemingly encourages reflexivity about the unhealthy elements of capitalism in Western societies, while simultaneously promoting an industry that capitalises on low-paid Fijian labour; rhetorically questioning the priority given to the economy in the West, precisely in order to facilitate economic growth in Fiji. Thus, the advertising campaign justifies and reinforces the same systemic problems it purports to question, and in doing so further essentialises and disadvantages Fijians in the context of global inequalities.

Methods and materials

This project draws on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the *Bulanaires* campaign. CDA is based on the understanding that discourses, or flows of ideas, have the power to shape thoughts, behaviour and relationships. CDA is a tool to analyse patterns in discourse – be it talk, text or images – in order to illuminate how language can create, maintain and disrupt power dynamics (Lupton, 1992). Tourism materials are a particularly rich site for deploying CDA (Silverman & Hallett, 2015) because they function both as a form of economic discourse (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) and enact a discursive construction of culture and heritage (Smith, 2006), thus reflecting and maintaining hegemonic social and ideological orders.

The positionality of the research team bears mention, as it is made up of a Fijian political analyst currently living in Australia and three Australian anthropologists and critical tourism scholars, two of whom have conducted long-term ethnographic research alongside Indigenous communities in Fiji and Vanuatu. We therefore analysed the material from varying layers of emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives, while also acknowledging that our perspectives are situated in relations of power. We drew on the principles outlined by Akbar and Higgins-Desbiolles' (2017) who argue that it is necessary to critically examine place-branding in a way that promotes 'effective, ethical and empowered' approaches to tourism for Indigenous communities.

We analysed a total of 48 advertising items that were linked to the *Bulanaires* campaign across multiple platforms and targeted at local and international audiences. These included branded video, text and still photographs on the official Tourism Fiji website, the Bulanaires.com website, and youtube.com ($n = 20$); online travel and wellness blogs about the campaign in Australia and

New Zealand ($n = 5$); Fijian print newspaper articles or advertisements ($n = 15$); Online advertisements through Fijian news websites (n = 2); and international print newspaper advertisements about the campaign ($n = 6$).

The internet has profoundly transformed destination marketing by widening the reach of advertising campaigns, increasingly enabling consumers to co-create and circulate marketing materials. Tourists and locals can position themselves as knowledgeable critics of tourism products and their representation in marketing (Li et al., 2017) and as such are a key part of image and value production. In order to include this important aspect of destination image production, we expanded the scope of our dataset to include public online responses to the *Bulanaires* campaign in our CDA, in the form of 44 comments posted underneath the advertising materials outlined above. These included comments underneath the sponsored *Bulanaires* Youtube videos ($n = 23$) and the Fiji One News Facebook post regarding the campaign ($n = 21$). These represent a small section of engagement with the campaign, and those motivated to write a comment under the campaign videos are presumably those with the strongest feelings about it, leading towards an exaggerated polarisation of views. However, they nonetheless provide an important snapshot of how the campaign has been received. As explored here, this is especially the case for those people whom the campaign purports to represent, that is, Fijians themselves.

Results: commodifying Fijian happiness

The *Bulanaires* campaign portrays iTaukei as carefree, unburdened by the trappings of modern life, and, thus, *happy*. Indeed one of the sponsored online articles declares that Fijians embody what the campaign's consultant Professor Waters calls the ‘seven guiding principles of happiness’:

> ‘giving back, connection with family and community, nurturing fun and adventure, experiencing humour and positive emotions, developing acceptance for the simple things in life, living in the moment, and disconnecting from the world to ensure meaning and purpose.’ (Thrive Global, 2019)

.

In many ways, these principles *are* resonant with the predominant ethos of everyday iTaukei life, which is characterised by family, communitarian reciprocity, and respect. Moreover, iTaukei *do* exude a genuine warmth and generosity, as do Indo-Fijians and indeed many other communities around the world. Therefore, and as often recognised and celebrated by iTaukei themselves (see below), the positive portrayal of Fijians in this campaign is neither inaccurate nor ‘inauthentic’ in and of itself. However, there are many other equally ‘authentic’ depictions of Fijian life that could be portrayed while not reproducing the kinds of problematic stereotypes examined here. Happiness manifested in four key tropes in the *Bulanaires* campaign, which overlapped and reinforced each other: the happy native, the smiling servant, romanticised poverty, and happiness as a mindset. Each of these is addressed below.

The ‘happy native’ and the smiling servant

Throughout the *Bulanaires* campaign, Fijians are cast as the epitome of authentic happiness, that is, happiness that is pre-existing, pervasive and spontaneously felt and expressed (see Figs. 1 & 2). In one video advertisement, an iTaukei woman says, ‘it's funny, the whole world is searching for happiness. Here, it finds you.’ One travel blog reflexively acknowledges the potential

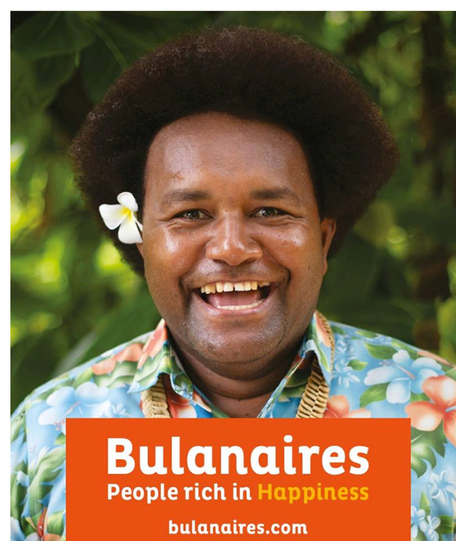

Fig. 1. Eroni, a resort worker and ‘Bulanaire’ featured in two-page advertisement in *The Australian* newspaper.

Fig. 2. 'It is nigh on impossible to defy Fiji's infectious happy vibe': Fijian woman and child featured in travel blog about *Bulanaires* Campaign.

for contradiction in co-opting such an embodied sociality to sell a tourism product, by stating that happiness in Fiji 'is not spin, it IS the real deal' [*Emphasis in original*]. Though deemed to exist inherently in iTaukei, happiness is also importantly characterised as being a 'mindset' that may be attained as outlined below. This happiness, or more specifically its attainment by individual prospective travelers, is transformed from a feature of Fijjian life - especially of iTaukei people – into something that can be purchased and delivered through the commodity chain of travel and cultural encounter.

The characterisation of iTaukei as authentically happy despite their humble circumstances stems from, and reinforces, longstanding colonial tropes of the 'happy native.' Such fantasies are widely applied beyond the Pacific region and include:

> …a nostalgic and naïve view of the "traditional" life found outside the West, untouched by modernity but now rapidly disappearing; and the simple, "happy" native who gets by with very little and appears not to mind living in poverty—a corollary being that their culture or religious beliefs somehow inure them to suffering, which is a particularly popular belief amongst travelers in India, and to a somewhat lesser extent, Africa.
>
> [(O'Reilly, 2006, p. 1003)]

In the *Bulanaires* campaign, iTaukei contentment with humility is cast in the secular language of positive psychology. It is not their religious beliefs that are seen to inure them against suffering, but rather a natural tendency to mindfully 'live in the moment'.

The contradistinction that is drawn between the 'happy native' and the overworked, stressed, 'modern tourist' suggests an important narrative connection. The 'other' that is being sold here is not only distant and remote in space, but also in time, suggesting that a few hours on a plane – followed by social and cultural communion with authentically happy natives – can cure modern nostalgia and help unravel the coils of technological progress, allowing the tourist to reconnect with a lost primitive self (Taylor, 2001, p.10). This happy native 'other' is also represented in an infantalised way that suggests they are an earlier example of evolutionary 'progress' - in other words, they are 'the past, of which the white man is the future' (Bhabha, 1994, p.238; Taylor, 2016, p. 372). According to this narrative fantasy, the authentically happy, childlike self is buried deep 'down' there in the repressed, disconnected psyche of the wealthy, 'modern' adult Westerner. Connecting to people both 'out there' and 'back there' in the timescape of modernity brings opportunities for spontaneous experience, emotional connection, and authentic happiness, all quintessential features of the native other.

As with the tourism campaigns before it, the *Bulanaires* campaign depicts iTaukei wellbeing as being strongly correlated with their relaxed attitudes towards time. One image displays an iTaukei man lying in a hammock (see Fig. 3), a classic image of relaxation in a tropical location, while other images depict groups engaged in leisure activities such as laughing, singing and playful swimming. Yet by contrast, 'Fiji time' is often used locally in a derogatory sense to refer to iTaukei - particularly villagers and informal settlers - as lazy, time-wasting and not adequately contributing to the economy (see also Eräsaari, 2018; Presterudstuen,

Fig. 3. 'Fiji was deemed the Happiest Country in the World' Image embedded in travel blog about *Bulanaires* campaign.

2014). Thus, while Western tourists are being encouraged to take inspiration from the presumed relaxed and unhurried lifestyles of iTaukei, the latter are being pressured to be more hardworking and entrepreneurial; to 'get with the times'.

The image of the authentically happy native 'other' provides a narrative basis for the location and commodification of subjective wellbeing and extends to the promise of willing service on the part of iTaukei. This especially relates to those working in the tourism industry, but also – according to the *Bulanaires* campaign – applies to the Fijian population more generally. While all iTaukei people featured in the *Bulanaires* campaign appear happy, many of them also appear in smiley servitude to tourists. The CEO of Tourism Fiji encapsulates this theme when, in one *Bulanaires* video, he references Fiji's 'authentic, heartfelt hospitality'. Throughout the campaign, non-Fijians consistently mention the caring nature of the Fijian people, and how this generosity spreads. For example, the director of the Fiji series of the internationally popular television reality game show *Survivor* – described as a 'Bulanaire' – is quoted as saying:

> 'The Bula spirit of Fiji has impacted our entire crew in the most amazing way. We love shooting *Survivor* in Fiji and a large part of our crew are local Fijians. […] It's one big happy *Survivor* family.

There is, however, a tension between the 'happy native' and the 'smiling servant'. While the former stereotype of iTaukei is blissfully ignorant of time pressures and endearingly late for everything, the latter is a prompt and efficient employee, swiftly serving guests whenever required. In the campaign videos, cocktails are quickly delivered, and children have all of their needs met immediately - all with a smile.

Yet to further smooth over the uncomfortable dynamics of this power imbalance, iTaukei explicitly refer to the happiness they derive from providing service. A senior flight attendant for Fiji Airways (presented as a 'Bulanaire'), says to the camera, 'For me, happiness is joy. I get joy from receiving my passengers on board'. Another 'Bulanaire' says to the camera, 'what makes me happy? It makes me happy to see you happy.'

iTaukei servility is particularly notable in the *Bulanaires* campaign when it comes to looking after children (see Fig. 4). A *Bulanaires*-related travel advertorial in the *Herald Sun* refers to the country's 'perfection' in providing "plenty of supervised amusement for the kids while the parents get some 'me time'". In one of the videos, a resort employee – also named a 'Bulanaire' – says:

> 'Bula, I'm Tom, and I love making kids on Malolo Island smile.' [footage of Tom surrounded by white children at a resort Kids Club, trying their hand at a traditional craft activity].

Fittingly, a former resort guest left a comment under this video: 'Congrats Tom! A well-deserved title. Little Charlie says Bula and misses hanging out with you.' The continually reinscribed discourse that iTaukei people are family-oriented and 'love children' – while perhaps predominantly true - reinforces the stereotype of the playful native. Stereotypes gain so much traction precisely because they are often grounded in elements of truth. Yet when iTaukei are disproportionately and repetitively represented in the light of 'playful' and 'loves children', it means that many other equally 'authentic' Fijian qualities (such as 'good at business') are ignored, which limits the ways others interact with them. Moreover, it reframes childcare as something they *inherently* enjoy, thus making tourists feel better about outsourcing the care of their children at a fraction of the price they pay at home. Here, ostensibly representing a subversion of colonial stereotypes and missionary-inspired gender roles, the pointed focus on men as hotel 'kids club' childcare workers represents an extension of the longer process of 'softening' Indigenous Fijian masculinity in tourism

Fig. 4. Tom (left), a 'Bulanaire', leading the Kids Club at Malolo Resort: photograph embedded in resort website linked to Bulanaires campaign.

advertising (Kanemasu, 2013a, 2013b). Far from the 'fearsome warrior' or 'dangerous savage' evidently problematic to destination marketing, here masculinity is explicitly domestic, amiably servile, and explicitly non-threatening.

Overall, the blending of the authentic 'happy native' and 'smiling servant' in the Fijian context serves to create an attractive image that adds double value. It suggests a positive psychological state that might be attained through travel, packaged in with the promise of willing service in the interests of child-free relaxation. Unsurprisingly, the potential for contradiction between these two constructed subject positions – that by looking after the children of tourists, hotel workers are not able to spend time with their own families – is hidden. To the tourist, the interaction with the 'happy native' and 'smiling servant' is sold as a proxy for the 'social' that is lacking in late capitalist modernity (White, 2017). However, the need to contribute to and earn an income within the neoliberal economy results in a parallel erosion of the 'social' for Fijian tourism workers. Similarly erased by the campaign is the fact that the subject position of the employee who is 'rich in happiness' is based in colonial relations of domination and subordination, ongoing in Pacific tourism industry inequalities (Alexeyeff & McDonnell, 2018; Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019).

Romanticised poverty and happiness as a 'mindset'

iTaukei are frequently represented in the *Bulanaires* campaign as unburdened by the trappings of Western modernity. However, in many cases, this 'freedom' may not be due to a deliberate prioritisation of 'the important things in life' on the part of those depicted, but rather a lack of economic access or privilege. Indeed, as a counterpart to its romanticised depiction of wellbeing, the campaign stylises the gritty realities of economic deprivation in Fiji, where the minimum wage is 2.68 FJD an hour (1.12USD), the cost of living is relatively high, and as noted above, at least a third of Fijians live below the poverty line (FBoS, 2013).

In much of the campaign's imagery, iTaukei villagers appear barefoot, which is used to symbolise being at leisure, carefree, closer to nature and less concerned with appearances (see Fig. 5). In reality, many simply cannot afford shoes, and indeed whenever the first and third authors return to Fiji after international travel, iTaukei friends often request pairs of shoes. Further, several smiling people in the *Bulanaires* campaign have missing teeth, which ostensibly adds a cheeky charm. On the flipside, it is symptomatic of a society-wide crisis in nutrition and affordable dental care (Morse & Takau, 2004). It is somewhat ironic that the advertisements feature plentiful, freshly-sourced fruit, vegetables and fish (see Fig. 6) symbolic of natural health and wellness and reflective of longstanding colonial imagery of the Pacific islands representing a kind of bounteous Garden of Eden, or "Paradise" (Connell, 2003; Smith, 1992). This does not capture the dire state of nutrition in Fiji, particularly for the country's poor. Fiji is a net importer of food, subsistence agriculture is declining, and access to affordable and nutritious fresh food is limited (Morgan et al., 2016). The average life expectancy in Fiji remains at a low of 69 years due to premature deaths, the majority of which are from nutrition-related non-communicable diseases such as diabetes (Gouda et al., 2015).

In keeping with the Paradise theme, The *Bulanaires* imagery also depicts iTaukei in pristine natural environments, in which space is abundant. In fact, Fiji is the most urbanised country in Melanesia, with over half of Fijian residents living in its cities. Over 20% of Fijians live in peri-urban informal settlements. Far from the sprawling space portrayed in the advertising, these areas are characterised by overcrowding and uneven access to water, electricity and waste collection services (Phillips & Keen, 2017).

Yet the campaign reinforces a romantic image through its language and photographic accompaniments by applauding iTaukei people for having 'found the formula' to happiness, which includes the ability to 'disconnect from the everyday' and 'unplug' from

Fig. 5. Village depicted in the *Bulanaires* campaign.

Fig. 6. 'Happiness is what Fiji is all about! #fijihappy': Photograph of resort staff carrying traditional woven baskets of fresh food on Bulanaires website gallery.

the pressures caused by constant reliance on devices such as mobile phones and laptops. The irony is that many Fijians want more connectivity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that those iTaukei who can afford a phone spend a significant portion of their low incomes on mobile phone credit. Pacific Islanders are part of the global 'digital divide' where lower income people have less access to the internet, which is an increasing disadvantage in the digital era (Dunn, 2010). Indeed, consumer groups in Fiji are advocating for more affordable connectivity as a 'human right' (Foster & Horst, 2018). Unlike a tourist encouraged to refrain from checking their work emails on their laptops for the length of their stay at a resort, being 'unplugged' is a very different experience when it is due to lack of access.

In these images of 'photogenic poverty' (Hutnyk, 2004) we witness a dovetailing of the historically entrenched image of the 'amiable Fijian' in a tropical island paradise, with the kinds of romantic imagery of poverty often employed by aid organisations and charities. As Hutnyk (2004, p.81) suggests, there is a fetishistic quality to 'souvenirs' of poverty, particularly those that feature children. Such images can be seen to obscure the realities of inequality and exclusion both directly and indirectly related to the tourism industry. This includes the poverty that keeps iTaukei and Indo-Fijiians locked into exploitative wage-labour within the tourism industry, the pseudo-apartheid that characterises that industry across the Pacific, and its relation to ongoing land alientation (Slatter, 2006) despite recent movements towards 'ethical' and 'eco' forms of tourism. To recognise this does not mean to undermine or disavow the importance of tourism economies to Pacific island nations and communities, but to understand the extent to which these remain rooted in and continually uphold centuries of longstanding inequalities.

Related to this romanticisation of poverty is a stylisation of global disparities in wealth. Alongside the Fijian tourism workers who are profiled as 'Bulanaires' we see the director of *Survivor,* who is comparatively wealthy on an international scale. Two of the other profiled international 'Bulanaires' left 'comfortable jobs' or 'corporate careers' in order to start highly successful social enterprises which now enable them to jet around the world. Suggesting that their circumstances are humble – that they are only rich *in happiness* like every day Fijians - is disingenuous. There is a disconnect between the selective *Bulanaires* 'list' and the underlying philosophy of humble Fijian 'Bulanaires' that adds a layer of insincerity to the campaign.

A significant theme in the advertising campaign is that being rich in happiness is a state of mind that needs to be fostered. A dichotomy is established between 'native' iTaukei, who are 'still' living amongst nature and are naturally happy, and 'modern' tourists, who have to work to release happiness from where it is buried in the psyche. This discourse suggests that those who do not feel happy with their circumstances need to work at positive thinking. One *Thrive Global* blog post about *Bulanaires* encourages readers to engage in 'some of the practices used by our 'Bulanaires' to create a calmer and happier life'. These include:

- Jot it down. Use your pen as an outlet. Research shows that writing your issues on the page increases happiness and eliminates the stress of unfulfilled goals.[…]
- Practice mantras like "I am enough" instead of falling into negative self-talk.
- Be grateful for what you have. It can be hard to feel grateful in a stressful moment. But practicing gratitude [..] can bolster happiness and hope for the future, as well as enhance self-esteem

Here, mindfulness techniques are proffered as a solution to life's challenges, which are reframed as 'stressful moments' or 'unfulfilled goals.' In line with the critical wellbeing literature above, encouraging people to be grateful with however much (or little) they have – and imploring them to refrain from 'falling into' negativity – is a kind of forced optimism, which situates the responsibility of wellbeing on the shoulders of individuals and silences protest (Ahmed, 2010; Ehrenreich, 2009). Going further, when it is linked to poverty in developing contexts as it is here, it discursively removes any duty of care from governments, corporations and the international tourist community to alleviate any structural injustice.

This gap between the representation of Indigenous wellbeing in tourism and the objective realities lends itself to a comparison with Australia, where we also see dazzling incongruities. On the one hand, there is the romantic imagery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australian tourism materials, usually portrayed using stereotypes such as the 'noble savage' and 'eco-angel'

(Waitt, 1999). On the other hand, there is the harsh economic realities of Indigenous living standards, persistently low life expectancy, high rates of incarceration and deaths in custody, and the often racist portrayal of first nations people in media and political representations. This dissonance is a telling sign that 'postcolonial Australia has failed to resolve historical tensions' and that tourism has failed to fulfil its potential as a site for enriching community wellbeing and lifting individual livelihoods (Akbar & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017). Moreover, these campaigns impose a kind of 'repressive authenticity' (Wolfe, 1999) on first nations people; a hall of mirrors in which marketing discourses frame what indigeneity should look like for tourists, which many Indigenous people may not be able to – or may not want to – live up to (Akbar & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2017). Notwithstanding the disempowering effects this may have on Indigenous communities, this unrealistic portrayal may also make tourism campaigns less effective if tourists experience a dissonance between the rhetoric and reality (Pomering, 2010).

As described above, although the power imbalance in Fiji has different dynamics to the settler colonial context of Australia, similar contradictions arise from the romantic representation of Indigenous social life in the *Bulanaires* campaign. There is, moreover, an added layer to *Bulanaires*: inequalities are rendered even more invisible by the *explicit* reference to iTaukei wellbeing and the language of positive psychology. The message that Fijians are happy despite limited wealth justifies the colonial and neoliberal forces that have placed – and continue to place – limitations on their capacity to earn an adequate income. Further, viewers are led to believe that this disadvantage is in fact not a disadvantage at all, because iTaukei have 'developed acceptance' and enjoy 'giving back.' The campaign thus imposes a novel kind of 'repressive authenticity' on iTaukei; in which Western neoliberal wellbeing discourses frame what Fijianness – and particularly Fijian indigeneity – should look like.

Fijian viewers' engagement with the campaign

As with the campaigns that have come before it, Fijians engage with these essentialised representations in tourism materials as part of the ongoing process of nation-building and personal identity construction (Kanemasu, 2013b). For some Fijians, the *Bulanaires* image is accurate and empowering, for others, disempowering or exaggerated. Some believed the materials captured their essence and were grateful that it was being appreciated on a global scale:

> I'm so glad this captures everything about Fiji. Commend those who were part of making this video so beautiful but honestly the 'Marau' video gave me the chills [love heart emoji] Keep up the dream and vision Tourism Fiji [grateful hands emoji] Can't wait for more videos that captures everything about Fiji.

For others, the campaign resonated with their subjective experiences, and they enjoyed having it reflected back at them:

> I love this. Bula means life in Fijian. In Fiji, we live the life.

Several members of the iTaukei diaspora had similarly positive reactions, and expressed feeling homesick after viewing the content. This is, perhaps, an indication of first generation migrants' tendency to be nostalgic about - and essentialise - their home countries:

> Warms my heart [sad face emoji] I miss home [loveheart emoji, Fijian flag emoji] [6].

For these iTaukei, the campaign reinforced aspects of Fijian identity that they subscribe to, of which they are proud.

By contrast, about a quarter of iTaukei consumers viewed the campaign with a critical lens, echoing some of the critique we presented above. Some were discerning about the campaign's messaging with respect to docile servility:

> Love the spirit of this video. I just don't understand why we have to appear as servants in all of the tourism videos. I get that it's the relationship most foreigners will have with locals, but I'd love to make something for Fiji tourism where locals are presented as equals. This was close. Is there not a way to attract visitors without making them the central figures in these short stories we put out into the world?

Others raised incisive economic critiques not unlike the discourse analysis we outlined above. One commented, 'Inventing meaningless words to suit a corporate agenda$$$$' while another wrote simply, 'Would be kinda helpful if there was a liveable minimum wage…'.

Online iTaukei responses to the *Bulanaires* campaign have, therefore, been polarised, from the glowing to the condemnatory. Yet it is also crucial to examine how tropes of 'happiness' and 'paradise' that are used in Western tourism campaigns can be repossessed and mobilised by indigenous populations in the Pacific (Alexeyeff & McDonnell, 2018). This is relevant in Fiji, where social commentators and artists draw on stereotypes of paradise and smiling servitude for powerful satire. While the *Bulanaires* campaign is only a year old at the time of writing, a key site for future research is the ways in which economic tropes might come to figure in the Fijian popular imaginary and be used to reinforce or challenge the discourse of iTaukei as being 'rich in happiness'.

Discussion and conclusion

As with earlier international campaigns about Fiji, the *Bulanaires* campaign uncritically reinforces the colonially entrenched notion of the amiable native and echoes ethno-nationalist discourses that understate the cultural significance of the Indo-Fijian community. Yet it also adds a further layer of complexity which has been underexplored in tourism literature: the commodification of romanticised poverty as a form of wellbeing.

The idea that money does not equate to happiness is not new in Western discourse, but it is increasingly visible. We see it in the billion dollar self-help book industry, the proliferation of mindfulness products, the political release of national 'wellbeing budgets' and the rise of global happiness indexes. On one level, anti-monetary definitions of wellbeing are a cultural backlash against the relentless neoliberal prioritisation of economic growth as the sole measurement of prosperity. On the other, they are - ironically - being commodified, marketed and used in public policy in ways that are precisely about maximising economic output, and are therefore an important ideological component of the neoliberal agenda. This paper contributes to this conversation by researching a new phenomenon; the commodification of these powerful discourses in national tourism campaigns, their relationship to longer-standing tropes relating to both tourism and colonialism in the Pacific region, and their consequences.

Tourism Fiji's *Bulanaires* campaign explicitly celebrates non-economic, subjective measures of happiness and portrays iTaukei as authentically embodying these values. The campaign exploits the lexicon of wellbeing and mindfulness in order to repackage colonial stereotypes about 'native' primitivity. This can be discursively harmful in multiple ways. Referring to iTaukei as 'rich in happiness' and explicitly tying it to their lack of wealth logically extends to the notion that they are faring well despite economic marginalisation, or even that happiness *compensates* for economic inequality. Irrespective of whether Fijians feel happy (or self-report as such), this message stylises the realities of economic deprivation in a developing context, disregards critical objective indicators of wellbeing, and silences debate about continually low wages in the tourism sector and beyond. In some ways, the commodification of happiness in this campaign represents yet another resource extracted from iTaukei; simply another opportunity to exploit them.

We acknowledge that tourism is important to Fiji's economy and there is a need to develop novel marketing angles that will be competitive in the global tourism market. We also recognise that all marketing is necessarily selective and that depictions of the gritty realities of poverty will not attract tourists, at least not in most "mainstream" tourism contexts. However, we argue that there is scope for equally 'authentic' touristic representations of culture that are less top-down, not so reliant on harmful stereotypes and do not perpetuate dangerous economic assumptions. One example is that Tourism Fiji has more recently used the refrain, 'Welcome to the Bula Spirit – where happiness finds you.' This slogan draws more on the serenity of the natural landscape and is less reliant on images of happy-looking locals in service roles, which makes the representation more empowering.

Although the impact of COVID-19 is beyond the scope of this article (and too early for reliable data) it is important to note that the Fijian tourism industry has been badly affected, which will inevitably have long-term effects on the economy and drastically impact income for a large proportion of households. This emphasises the country's precarious reliance on the vagaries of tourism, which makes it extra vulnerable to global economic shocks. In response, the Fijian government consequently approached *literal* billionaires to help the battered economy. Prime Minister Banaimarama tweeted:

> So, say you're a billionaire looking to fly your own jet, rent your own island, and invest millions of dollars in Fiji in the process […] you may have a new home to escape the pandemic in paradise.
>
> [(Doherty, 2020)]

This shifts the discursive connection between wellbeing and wealth to be less euphemistic about Fijians being 'rich in happiness' and more transparently admitting their objective need for and reliance on privileged international consumers.

Ultimately, emphasising indigenous wellbeing in tourism campaigns further veils the problems inherent in the tourism-poverty nexus. Once believed to be a panacea for alleviating poverty amongst the world's poorest, persistent inequalities in the global tourism trade show a different picture (Scheyvens, 2007; UNWTO, 2018). In this way, the *Bulanaires* campaign is yet another example of the contradictions of third world tourism, so eloquently described by Scheyvens and Hughes (2019, p.1061):

> 'Poor people in poor locations with poor labour rights [put] on smiling faces to serve rich guests of former colonial powers and to clean up their messes.'

What makes the Bulanaire's campaign message even more pernicious is its explicit suggestion that this servitude comes naturally to iTaukei, and that servitude is intrinsic to their subjective wellbeing. All of this serves to further reassure Western tourists that the *objective* gap between their rights, privileges and opportunities compared to that of their hosts is not morally significant nor their responsibility to alleviate. This analysis illustrates that economic logics about indigenous happiness can be commodified in ways that reinforce the neoliberal status quo and further forge colonially entrenched global inequalities.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no affiliations with or involvement in any organisation or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Tarryn Phillips is an anthropologist and senior lecturer in the Department of Social Inquiry at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. Using a range of qualitative research methods, her work examines health, wellbeing and structures of inequality in Australia and the Pacific.
John Taylor is an anthropologist and senior lecturer in the Department of Social Inquiry at La Trobe University, Melbourne Australia. His work is influenced by critical theory and guided by the capacity of ethnography to directly engage the struggles of everyday life. He researches and writes on human mobility, religion, photography and tourism in the Pacific.
Edward Narain is a Fijian political researcher and economic analyst who works as a research assistant in the Department of Social Inquiry at La Trobe University. Using a combination of economic modelling and qualitative research methods, his work examines colonial history, race relations, and the implications of international involvement in Fiji.
Philippa Chandler is a cultural geographer, critical tourism scholar and research fellow in the Department of Architecture, Building and Planning at University of Melbourne, Australia. Her work explores place-attachment, environmental conflict and the performance of community.