

## 6 On the non-assemblage of a local producer/resort hotel market in Fiji

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### Introduction

While much has been written about how markets that have assembled, and some work has been done on markets under construction and the human and non-human actants critical to such assembling, much less has been written about non-assemblage.<sup>1</sup> While it is possible (with work) to trace the contingencies of the histories of already assembled markets and to explore the processes and practices of markets as they assemble, it is more difficult to examine non-assemblage. The reasons for this are obvious and are both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, of course, because no market was assembled, there is no market to trace and describe, although there may be traces of the labour of the attempt. Theoretically, the problem is to divine the significance of the non-assemblage. Did a possible network simply not assemble because there was no interest (in a Latourian sense), or, were there actants whose active work (intentional or not) thwarted the goals of others working to assemble? Practically, it is more possible to explore the second kind of non-assemblage than the first, and theoretically, we will argue, such incidences of non-assemblage have something to tell about processes of assemblage more generally. Instances of non-assemblage and non-stabilisation of networks into assemblages draw attention to the constant labour of assembling and reassembling that makes it possible to take social orders somewhat for granted and to the critical actants that might be critical for the building of a market (in this case) in a particular place at a particular time.

The non-assembled that we explore here is a market by which local food producers can supply large scale resort hotels in Fiji. As an 'underdeveloped' country, Fiji has been the subject of much development over several decades, with the aim of improving local incomes and making those incomes sustainable. In recent decades, since the advent of the mode of capitalism known as neoliberalism, markets have become *the* development solution. With tourism as the most important economic sector in Fiji and agriculture as the biggest employer, projects that will hopefully become enduring supply chains connecting large resort hotels with local horticultural and agricultural producers appeal, as the materials (human and non-human) necessary for the assembling of such markets, and strong interest in assembling them, are there. Despite repeated attempts to assemble and embed such a market, it has not really

DOI: 10.4324/9780429296260-6

eventuated. We do find Fijian producers who supply resort hotels, but these are most often relationships between two particular people (commonly a chef and an individual farmer) that are actively sustained through the concerted efforts of a chef animated by a belief in the importance of ensuring that some of the economic benefits of tourism flow to the community in which the hotel is located.

In any given locality there are multiple markets and multiple market relations. As a result, we distinguish between what we will call individual supply relationships and market relationships, or markets. Individual supply relationships are arrangements between particular individuals (chefs and either farmers or traders) to buy and sell goods; market relationships, by comparison, are ‘between autonomous and independent agents’ (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010, p. 3) and so the collapse of a relationship between two particular individuals does not mean the collapse of the market – individuals can then sell to or buy from someone else. The aim of this chapter is to explore why individual supply relationships rather than market relations dominate hotel/local producer supply chains.

There are numerous reasons in the literature identified as to why hotel/local producer supply chains have been so difficult to assemble: in this paper we focus on one reason identified by hotels and mobilised as an explanation of the lack of emergence of a market, namely specific local cultural and political histories and the kind of strategic subjects such culture-histories have produced. What this points to is the critical importance of the particularities of people and place in the formation (or not) of markets.

### Theorising non-assemblage

Describing and accounting for a non-assembling market means paying attention to many of the same things and process that analysing an assembled market does – materialities, technical devices and ‘the affective, cognitive and social qualities of human beings’ (Webb & Hawkey, 2017, p. 9) with the intention of divining which of these actants was the obligatory *blockage* point rather than the obligatory *passage* point (to play with Latour). In our case, consider the non-formation of market subjects as the obligatory blockage point, which meant that a resort hotel/local producer market has failed to form.

Subjects, of course, are never purely market subjects, and it is those other subjectivities, formed and practised in other arenas of social life (and other economies) that allow, but in this case impede, the kinds and levels of participation in exchanges with resort hotels that might have led to the emergence of a market. Our analytic orientation to this question is strongly informed by the work of Gullede, Roscoe and Townley (2015), and we draw heavily on their framing of the issue of culture and marketisation. The question as raised by Gullede *et al.* is ‘How do individuals navigate the intersections and contradictions between the economy and elsewhere?’ (2015, p. 638). They thus open up the matter of ‘the tacit judgements and cultural constructions that give rise to modes of calculation beyond the economic’ (p. 638), or the modes of calculation formed in other economies, for there is rarely, perhaps never, just one economy in any given place

(see also Frankel, 2015). Referring to Entwistle and Slater (2014), they argue that much of the Callon-influenced marketisation literature has focused too much on technologies and materialities, and as a result ‘has been too hasty to dismiss culture, together with its values, norms, fashions and aesthetic conceptions, as an inadequate, fuzzy explanation’ (Gulledge *et al.*, 2015, p. 638). Consequently, they argue for more research into how culture shapes calculative practices and what happens when actors constituted by and deploying different calculative rationalities engage.

An assembled market necessarily implies market subjects, i.e. people with the capacities and desire to act in that market, people who have what Bourdieu would call the appropriate habitus, people who have a ‘feel for the game’. The failure of a resort hotel/local producer market to stabilise in Fiji, despite the constant work by seemingly powerful actors (chefs and managers from hotels, staff in government agencies and development specialists and analysts) can basically be explained by the inability of those actors to enrol farmers in this project, that is, by the failure of such projects to cultivate farmers with the appropriate subjectivity.

### **Investigating non-assemblage in Fiji**

The account of the assemblage work and its disappointments described in this chapter is based on the PhD fieldwork of Gabriel Laeis, the aim of which was to investigate why the kinds of local producer/hotel linkages constantly promoted as development solutions so often failed to emerge. Having trained as a chef, his hunch was that there might be something going on in hotel kitchens (which is the point at which local produce is turned into food for hotel guests to eat), that meant that kitchens were a site of previously unexplored blockages that thwarted attempts at creating desired and worked-for linkages. As a result, he undertook a four-month long ethnography, involving participant observation in the kitchen of a large-scale resort, interviews with management, chefs and kitchen staff at the hotel and at similar resorts, and interviews and observations with actors along actual and potential linkages between the hotel and local horticultural producers. He chose the hotel (which we will call The Palm Breeze) for a number of reasons. First, it is a classic example of a large-scale, internationally owned resort, comprising around 250 rooms under an American resort brand that operates 28 such properties globally. The resort provides nine food outlets, from coffee shops and poolside snack bars, to a large restaurant seating 250 people, and a fine-dining restaurant seating 30, so they provide and therefore need a lot of food. Second, it is located close to the Sigatoka valley, a fertile agricultural area known as ‘the salad bowl of Fiji’, so there is potentially a convenient source of local food. Moreover, and very unusually, the Executive Chef at The Palm Breeze is Fijian, meaning that he has the kinds of local connections, knowledge and interests that made him well-placed to source produce from local farmers – something that he was interested in doing and actively pursued. As a result, if, despite the chef’s efforts, The Palm Breeze had not been able to access or assemble a stable supply of local produce, the reasons why would be visible. The Palm Breeze actually does source some of its produce from three local suppliers, but as we will see, this represents a tiny fraction of its expenditure on food and does not exhaust local potential. And these

three supply linkages shine further light on why a perduring hotel/local producer market has not emerged. What follows is an account of one of the local explanations proffered for the failure of supply relationships between local producers and The Palm Breeze to develop into a market. The account we relate draws attention to local understandings of what shapes the actions and strategies of both The Palm Breeze and local producers – an account that is framed in terms of local culture. Theoretically this account points to the way in which not only particular histories and geographies but local understandings of those histories and geographies are critical to instances of market making.

### **The dynamics of non-assemblage**

There are several sites of knowledge that can usefully be drawn on to untangle the seemingly persistent non-assemblage of resort hotel/local producer markets. This includes development literature (as there is a considerable amount known generally about what might thwart the emergence of such markets, and this body of knowledge continues to motivate attempts to discover the ‘Rosetta Stone’ of non-emergence in order to overcome it) and social science and historical writing on the already assembled cultural, social and economic order in Fiji.

### **Tourism and development**

Since the 1950s tourism has been advocated as a development solution for many countries, particularly for small island states like Fiji, which have few other resources with which to grow their economy (e.g. Asiedu & Gbedema, 2011). Despite debate in academic literature about the efficacy of such development, with some authors arguing for its utility (e.g. Sharpley, 2015; Simons-Kaufmann, Kaufmann, Sloan & Legrand, 2012; Torres & Momsen, 2004) and others raising doubts about tourism’s ability to provide value for the poor (e.g. Medina-Muñoz, Medina-Muñoz & Gutiérrez-Pérez, 2016; Oviedo-García, González-Rodríguez & Vega-Vázquez, 2018), development projects focused on advancing tourism remain popular as solutions to local economic problems. The problem faced is leakage – that is, how to keep more of the tourism-generated money locally, as research shows that on average about 50 per cent of such income is lost to non-local actors (Worldwatch Institute, 2003).

One key strategy for dealing with the problem of leakage is the construction of linkages between the tourist industry and other economies along what is conceptualised as the tourism value chain (Sharpley, 2015; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008; Torres & Momsen, 2005). Tourism’s *direct* economic impact on local communities primarily materialises as wages, but the creation of links between tourism enterprises and local food producers has the potential to channel more tourism-derived income into local communities (e.g. Hunt & Rogerson, 2013; Lejarraja & Walkehorst, 2007; Pillay & Rogerson, 2013; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2014; Scheyvens, 2011; Torres & Momsen, 2004, 2005). This solution is based on the fact that some 70 per cent of the world’s rural poor depend on growing food to make their living (World Bank, 2016)

and as such there are local reservoirs of skills, knowledge and resources available to be mobilised (Torres & Momsen, 2004) in the assembling of such linkages.

Though there are good theoretical reasons for assembling tourism /local producer networks, and much advocacy in development circles, in reality the hoped-for benefits from such synergies have rarely come to fruition (Timms & Neill, 2011; Torres & Momsen, 2011). There are a number of reasons for this, as identified by seminal writers in this field, Rogerson (2012) and Torres and Momsen (2004). In terms of production and supply, problems identified include the lack of sufficient quantity and quality of locally produced food because of the seasonality of production and low adoption of formal quality assurance systems by producers; the high prices of locally produced food; the nature of local farming systems which are often plantation based rather than horticultural and geared towards export markets; lack of access of producers to capital, credit and technology; labour availability; and poor infrastructure (roads, electricity, irrigation, processing, storage). In terms of demand, tourist preference for home-country foods which are not grown locally; tourist demand for organic/fair trade certified foods which cannot be readily supplied locally; hotel chef familiarity with and preference for imported foods; chef concern about the health and safety of local food; existing connections between international hotel chains and international suppliers which exclude local producers; hotel aversion to dealing with multiple small growers for logistical reasons; and difficulties in communication and mistrust between producers and hotel purchasers (Rogerson, 2012; Torres & Momsen, 2004) have been identified as things which work against market assemblage. In general, what we see is a context in which a Western-style tourist industry (dominated by ideas of efficiency and standardisation) meets a farming sector not geared to such production, either economically or culturally.

Moreover, there is concern about the potential dependence of agricultural producers on tourism, if supplying the tourist trade becomes their main source of income. Tourism is notorious for its susceptibility to external factors over which destinations have no control (Harrison, 2003; Mowforth & Munt, 2016). Visitor numbers can be dramatically impacted by political instability or environmental disasters, as seen in the aftermath of the 2008–09 global financial crisis, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 terrorist attacks on Bali. Of these last, Tarplee (2008) notes that the most vulnerable people were not those employed directly in tourism, but those on the fringes of the industry, such as suppliers and farmers. This suggests that there could be significant risks for agricultural producers if they come to rely on tourism to make a living. Thus, there are a number of circumstances, dynamics and actors identified which have the potential to thwart the assembling of a tourist hotel/local producer market.

### **Food and tourism in Fiji**

Tourism in Fiji has a leakage rate of 40–60 per cent (Berno, 2011, pp. 91–92; Berno, 2006; South Pacific Tourism Organisation, 2005, cited in Robertson, 2006, p. 24), with a major source of this leakage being imported food: in 2004 the Ministry of

Tourism suggested that some 80 per cent of food sold to tourists was imported (Berno, 2011, p. 92). However, Fiji's horticultural sector does have the potential to substitute food imports, especially with respect to fruit and vegetables (Veit, 2007, 2009), as a number of local products are already used by hotels – fruit in breakfast buffets, as salads and vegetable accompaniments to Western-style meals and in traditional Fijian *lovo* (earth oven) nights (Berno, 2011, p. 92). As a result, growing food to supply the tourist industry seems to present a good opportunity for local producers.

But, this potential has not been realised, largely for the general supply and demand reasons outlined above (see Young & Vinning, 2006, for a Fijian example) with the addition of more local dynamics. Berno (2015) identifies factors inhibiting the formation of local agriculture/tourism linkages in Samoa: namely the poor perception of local cuisine by locals themselves, as well as by international tourists and the subsequent lack of willingness of chefs to serve local food; the incompatibility of some local recipes with the tourist palate; the absence of a recognisable Samoan cuisine beyond *lovo*; the lack of chef knowledge about local food and the absence of training in local food preparation; the failure of previous initiatives; and questions of land tenure. Laeis found the situation in Fiji to be the same.

A range of projects to overcome these problems and assemble agriculture-tourism networks have been tried. The Oloolo Farm Project was initiated by a member of a *mataqali*<sup>2</sup>, who was also a resort manager at the Palm Breeze (Juanahali Holdings Ltd, 2005). The Palm Breeze signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a producer company and with a development non-governmental organisation which was to provide training and guidance to the farmers. After a successful start, however, the project was discontinued owing to internal problems (Berno, *pers comm*, in Laeis, 2019, p. 54). Another project produced a cookbook titled *Cooking the South Pacific Way* (Parkinson, 1989), which aimed to assist chefs in 'knowing when and what to look for in local markets' and assist with 'produce choice and tips on quality to correct storage, preparation and cooking methods' with the hope that the book would become the 'basis for further imaginative development by the chefs of Fiji and the South Pacific' (Parkinson, 1989, p. viii). Despite interest, the project did not result in longer-term changes in food procurement by the tourism industry. Apparently, chefs were dissatisfied with the quality and reliability of local produce and the programme lacked co-ordination among farmers, chefs, purchasing managers and Government departments (Berno, 2006, p. 217). Currently the Government's 'Fijian Tourism 2021' plan dedicates one of its 29 strategies to the support of such linkages (Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, 2017). The Strategy proposes to develop a rewards system for tourism providers who make an effort to promote local food, the provision of grants and capacity building programmes for farmers, and the fostering of synergies between Government, farmers and tourism businesses through stakeholder forums and workshops; and the introduction of 'Fijian Grown' and 'Fijian Organic' brands to market Fijian produce and encourage consumption.

Overall, it seems that in Fiji there is potential for the development of agriculture-tourism linkages and active work by some to assemble such a market. There is a well-established and flourishing tourism industry, fertile agricultural areas that could supply that industry with desirable produce and, because Fiji

retains a sizeable subsistence economy, a significant number of people experienced in horticultural and agricultural work. However, there are a number of local factors beyond those generally identified in the development literature that work to inhibit the assemblage of such a network, namely elements of the already-assembled cultural, social and political order.

### **The Fijian context**

The specificities of the local socio-cultural order have powerful shaping effects on the Fijian economy. Fiji has a population of about 885,000, made up of two main ethnic groups. Indigenous Fijians, *iTaukei*, account for about 57 per cent of the population, with Indo-Fijians making up about 37 per cent. The category of Indo-Fijians includes descendants of Indian labourers who were brought to Fiji as indentured labourers during in the late 1800s to work on sugar cane plantations, as well as more recent migrants from India (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2018). In the past few decades Fiji has experienced political tension and social unrest along this ethnic divide. Conflicts between *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijians as well as inter-*iTaukei* rivalries contributed to four coups d'état – in 1987 (twice), 2000 and 2006 (Naidu, 2013), the first three of which aimed at safeguarding indigenous Fijian interests against rising Indo-Fijian political presence. This history is, as it will emerge, an important one for understanding non-assemblage.

Agriculture remains an important part of Fiji's economy, employing about two-thirds of the workforce (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014, pp. 10–11). However, between 1991 and 2009 the number of farms reduced by 32 per cent to about 65,000 mostly small-scale farms, according to the most recent agricultural census. The average farm size was 3.9 ha in 2009, a reduction of more than a third (2.3 ha) since 1991. Just under one-half of all farms (44 per cent) were subsistence farms of less than one hectare, and another 39 per cent were between one and five hectares (Department of Agriculture, 2009, p. 33; Ministry of Agriculture, 2016a, p. 5, 2016b, p. 20). Meanwhile, the contribution of the agricultural sector to Fiji's gross domestic product declined from about 16 per cent in 1995 to 7.6 per cent in 2014 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2016a, p. 5, 2016b, p. 19). The ration of food sourced domestically compared with total food available was 32 per cent in 2015, and this was expected to increase to 42 per cent by 2021 (Ministry of Economy, 2017, p. 10). Overall, while small-scale agriculture puts the food on the tables of many families in Fiji, and the sale of surplus produce is an important source of income for some, the agriculture sector is in decline, and there are few large-scale, commercial farms. Duncan and Sing describe Fiji's agriculture as divided between a commercial sector and a 'village sector' (2009, p. 169). Major products produced for commercial sale are fruit and vegetables such as papaya, eggplant, chilli, okra and curry leaves for export (Laeis, 2019, p. 73) and pineapple, mango and traditional crops like *yaqona*, ginger, taro and cassava for the local market. (Duncan & Sing, 2009, p. 168; Ministry of Agriculture, 2014, p. 19). Much production is not commercial. Instead, fruit is often causally harvested 'from scattered and poorly maintained plantings' (Ministry of Primary Industries, 2012, p. 21).

Scholars have identified a range of factors inhibiting the development of the agricultural sector in Fiji, including insecure land tenure and a lack of access to formal land titles (particularly an issue for Indo-Fijian farmers) and socio-cultural obligations to share (particularly an issue for iTaukei). Duncan and Sing note that ‘the absence of secure individualised tenure to land and the resulting difficulty in accessing credit without such secure collateral’ (2009, p. 168) are key challenges. The iTaukei collectively own about 88 per cent of Fiji’s land (iTaukeu Land Trust Board, 2018), mostly as shared property of a mataqali. In this context, land is allocated to community members according to custom and not through formalised land titles. However, without such titles, farmers cannot apply for Government grants. Moreover, the strong cultural obligation to share what one has with one’s kin (*kerekere*), which is underpinned by collective ownership of land, is understood to make farmers wary of establishing businesses. Such cultural values are often seen as impediments to development by Westerners; from a local point of view, however, they represent a preference for participation in a different economic network, one infused with and animated by values of reciprocity rather than market exchange. The situation for Indo-Fijian farmers is different but has similar outcomes in terms of supplying hotels. Indo-Fijian farmers lease land from the iTaukei for the most part, but since the time of the coups many indigenous landowners have not renewed those leases (McCarthy, 2007). Loss of access to land obviously makes it impossible to farm, and insecure access to land shapes economic strategies and which markets they are able and willing to engage in assembling. This brief narrative illuminates some of the dynamics which both make assemblage possible, and thwart it. What follows is a tracing of what Laeis discovered as he sought to find out why the Palm Breeze was not supplied by local producers.

### **Provisioning the Palm Breeze**

There are a number of circumstances that make it difficult for local producers to supply the Palm Breeze. Non-human as well as human actants shape market emergence, and while their agency is not the focus of this chapter, here we draw attention to them. The nature of particular products (meat, fish, dairy, fruit, vegetable) make them more or less able to be enrolled in market assemblage.

In a representative month in 2017 the Palm Breeze procured food costing around FJ\$500,000 (US\$236,000), and 65 per cent of that budget was spent on imported food. This means that 35 per cent of food is sourced locally. At first glance this seems to point to significant linkages between local producers and the hotel, but a closer examination suggests that some of those local actors are not in fact very local and that other connections are singular supply relationships rather than elements in a stabilised market.

The greatest share of the food bill is spent on meat products, more than half of which is imported. Prime cuts of beef, lamb and bacon are generally imported, while chicken, pork and minced beef are procured locally. One of the prime restaurants at the Palm Breeze is a steak restaurant, and in the past chefs have reported

that guests found that local beef had an unpleasant taste, so prime cuts of beef are imported from Australia. The Palm Breeze uses about 900 kg of bacon a month, and it is imported, because local supply does not suffice. Some lamb is grown locally, but not in the quantity or quality demanded by the resort. These factors stymie the emergence of a local market. Chicken is sourced locally, from one company, Crest Chicken, as is non-bacon pork. This means that around 15 per cent of the Palm Breeze's expenditure on food is channelled into the local meat economy, although Crest Chicken is in fact a subsidiary of a Australasian food company, Goodman Fielder, which is in turn owned by Wilmar International and First Pacific, meaning that it is unlikely that significant money (aside from wages) goes back into the local economy. Crest Chicken is certainly not the kind of small-scale local producer targeted by development projects.

Fish and seafood are important items on Palm Breeze's menus, and account for 13 per cent of the food bill, half of which (e.g. green-lipped mussels, prawns, oysters, salmon) is imported. Most of the other fish (mahi-mahi, wahoo and tuna, as well as lobster) is caught locally and varies seasonally. Locally sourced items depend on season and availability. For example, according to a manager at the hotel, local fishermen will not dive for lobster in the cooler months between May and October, as they find the water too cold. So the share of the fish budget that is sourced locally varies throughout the year, but significant percentage of imported food in this category is the result of two factors. First, the local fishing economy does not seem to be able to satisfy the resort's requirements for consistent variety and quality of local fish, and second, guests at the hotel demand familiar non-local seafood like mussels, salmon and oysters.

While there are significant limitations to increasing local supply for meat and fish, sourcing more fruit and vegetables locally seems to have greater potential. The category of fruit and vegetables accounts for just over 12 per cent of the resort's food costs, about 55 per cent of which is sourced locally, the highest share of local procurement in any category. This seems at first glance to suggest that a resort/local producer market is well established, but closer investigation shows that this is not the case. What we see is that local procurement focuses on a comparatively limited range of produce, and a very small number of suppliers.

Traditional local foods (banana, bele,<sup>3</sup> breadfruit, cassava, coconut, dalo,<sup>4</sup> ota,<sup>5</sup> heart of palm, jackfruit, rourou,<sup>6</sup> sweet potato and vudi<sup>7</sup>) make up about 23 per cent of locally sourced produce, amounting to only 1.5 per cent of the budget spent on local food. More than half of this expense is for cassava for staff meals rather than for food for resort guests. Many of the other local vegetables are used only in Island-themed buffet nights and are not integrated into the everyday hotel menu, limiting the amount of such produce required. As with fish and seafood, seasonality determines what the resort buys locally. Some fruit, such as papaya and pineapple, are available year round. By comparison, tomatoes, avocado, lettuce, cabbage and mango are seasonal and are imported during the off-season. Other fruits and vegetables are imported – potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, leek, asparagus, parsley, rosemary, thyme, kiwifruit, nashi pears, oranges, apples, pears, strawberries and grapes.

Whether particular fruits or vegetables are imported or not generally depends on availability, quality, reliability of supply and price, but there are a number of cases where produce is imported because of guest preferences. A case in point is the importation of orange-skinned oranges, even during the period when local green-skinned oranges are available. Green-skinned oranges are tasty and juicy, but have a green skin and yellow flesh. They can be used in place of orange-skinned oranges, but according to one of the chefs, 'Our guests don't like this', and so orange-skinned orange-fleshed oranges are for desserts such as fruit platters. And despite the abundance of locally grown tropical fruits, the Palm Breeze imports temperate-climate fruits such as apples, pears and kiwifruit – with most of the apples being used in bircher muesli for breakfasts.

The kitchen at the Palm Breeze used local food in a number of ways. First, they substituted an otherwise imported item with a similar local product (e.g. using roro or dalo leaves in place of spinach), they created a dish that was similar in concept to a Western-style dish but used local products (e.g. using local fruits to make a salsa to serve with fish) or offered local-style dishes made from local produce. Generally the latter took the form of kokoda (a salad of raw fish marinated in coconut milk and lemon with tomatoes, capsicum and cucumber) or the weekly 'Island Night' themed buffet. Here (though we do not delve into this in this chapter) we see the guest palate shaping market potential.

### **Procuring fruit and vegetables**

The Executive Chef at the Palm Breeze expressed a desire to source locally: 'when we have a local supply we use it, otherwise we import', he stated. As noted above, the Executive Chef is Fijian, and he believes that it is because of him that the Palm Breeze sources a higher percentage of local products than many other resorts in Fiji: 'It is because of my decisions. It is because of the produce I use'. Palm Breeze has a list of suppliers who they invite to tender to supply produce on a weekly basis. As well as established suppliers, theoretically any farmer can seek to supply the resort, as long as they are able to deliver the produce and can do so in a closed vehicle. However, while Laeis was working in the resort kitchen only three traders/farmers tended for and delivered fruit and vegetables consistently during that period. Whoever offers the best price or best quality will receive the business on a per-item basis. For example, one supplier might provide papaya and pineapple and another might just be chosen for herbs and root crops. The aim of the tender system is to inhibit monopolies, to 'keep things fair, to keep things above water', in the words of the Executive Chef, and to drive competitive pressure on price and quality. The Palm Breeze acts as if there is an established, competitive market, but acting in this way may in fact work to inhibit the development of the very market they claim they want, as it makes it difficult for small-scale farmers to engage.

The Palm Breeze, then, imports most of the food it feeds to its guests, but sources more local food than other large resorts. The Executive Chef, who ultimately makes the decisions about what is on the hotel menus and therefore decides what food is needed and where to source it, would like to use more local food,

but finds this difficult. What follows is his explanation of why he has been unable to establish and stabilise a local market to supply the resort.

### **The view of the Palm Breeze on non-assemblage**

The Palm Breeze needs reliable sources of fruit and vegetables of consistent variety, quantity and quality, and achieving this requires the establishment of relationships with growers or traders. The Executive Chef (and chefs from other resorts) explained why. The Chef has tried to establish direct relationships with local farmers in the past: 'We want more of this... I'd love to have them here', he said. But he also said, 'we have tried, but it didn't work'. The Chef had tried to explain to farmers the varieties of produce he wanted and the kind of quality required. If they could produce it, he told them, they could sell directly to the resort. That way, they could evade intermediary traders and obtain a higher price. He found, however, that even though he is a local and comes from a farming background, he could not manage to convince the farmers to produce for him because, he intimated, they did not have the capacities necessary for dealing with a hotel:

I was so much trying to entice the farmers, talking to them – I know most of them – encourage them, 'come, come come!'. I talk to them in their own language, but no [it did not work]. ... I'm talking about your original Fiji people. We go to Valley Road, these guys are typical farmers. You see them any time of the day: their shirts are a little torn and dirty. For them, to come to a hotel to talk to a purchasing manager – *a manager!* – you need to be properly dressed. These farmers, they don't have the time to dress up and present them[selves]. They know their stuff, they are proud of what they do. But they are not sales people.

(Executive Chef)

Although the Chef noted that lack of education was an important reason for farmer unwillingness or inability to supply the hotel, the key problem that he identified was to do with local culture. 'It's the mind-set!', he often claimed. This was the dominant explanation for why efforts to co-operate with local farmers constantly failed. The General Manager of the Palm Breeze also supplied a cultural explanation. Under his predecessor's management the Palm Breeze had attempted to set up its own beef production on part of the resort's 350 acres of freehold land. The local mataqali participated in the venture, with the aim of creating a local food supply as well as creating jobs for local people. However, this venture failed: 'They gave it a go, but unfortunately, once again with Fijian custom, when their Paramount Chief passed away, it was requested that they slaughter half of the herd to give for the feast that was associated with that particular celebration', the General Manager explained. Despite these setbacks, the Chef was hopeful about the future, as 'farmers are getting educated, facilities are coming in, so maybe down the road you will get more of them', meaning educated farmers who are willing and able to supply hotels.

Chefs and managers from other hotels had had similar experiences and reiterated the view of the Palm Breeze Executive Chef. Several had made attempts to establish direct links with farmers and to support the development of a hotel-focused market. As one chef said, 'I think as a big company it's our duty to support the community ...', and as such, another stated, he aims 'to support the locals to get their product right', to grow what the hotels need, not what the farmers want to grow or are used to growing. One had established a small horticultural farm at the resort he worked at to grow herbs and salad vegetables for the kitchen, and another had established a farm nearby to produce similar kinds of highly perishable produce.

One chef seemed to have a lot of local connections and claimed that he could source almost anything locally:

I think it is how you make friends with everybody and how your reputation is with them. You can pretty much get anything at a decent price. Also, you can get decent quality, but then they look after you only. So that's how I made friends, especially down Sigatoka way. Beautiful farms over there. So I look after them quite a bit.... Strawberries are no problem. One guy is growing them for me, no issues.

(Chef)

The localness of local supply could be very local indeed. One chef mentioned that he acquired all of his prawns, in fact 90 per cent of his seafood, locally, while another was adamant that 'there are no local prawns!'. Another chef had a local farmer who supplied him with cherry tomatoes 'in beautiful little punnets, fresh, fresh, fresh!', while another was not able to source cherry tomatoes locally at all.

What this points to is the importance of relationships between individuals in establishing and sustaining supply, with some chefs finding particular suppliers reliable and other chefs finding the same supplier unreliable. 'Looking after', for the chef quoted above, meant buying from his suppliers even if the quality, quantity or price was not ideal. They reported that there is a lot of local food available, but it tended to be in small quantities, which meant that to supply the hotel a chef had to establish relationships with a number of farmers, which was not always possible given the constraints of organising a large resort kitchen.

Even though many chefs had established successful relationships with individual local farmers, they were critical of farmers more generally, and blamed farmers and a set of practices and values they understood as local culture, for their inability to source the local food they desired. The Executive Chef of the Palm Breeze identified this problem as one of 'mind-set', implying that farmers lacked the attitudes and aptitudes necessary to transforming their farming systems and orienting them to resort-focused production. They mobilised a kind of cultural-deficit explanation, in which local culture inhibited the development of the kind of entrepreneurial subjectivities necessary for market-making.

Two chefs simply stated that lots of farmers were lazy. One thought this 'laziness' was the result of established agricultural systems: 'dalo, cassava – you just stick it in

the ground and it grows!’ and ‘no-one has taught them to grow something else, they need to learn’. With regards to iTaukei one chef said that they only grow a very specific set of crops: dalo, yam, cassava, vudi, banana and bele – ‘everything else that is sold by iTaukei is what you gather. They are not the best gardeners’. He suggested that it was not part of their culture to seriously engage in horticulture as their lands provided food like coconuts, breadfruit, moca, water cress and ota which could simply be gathered. By comparison, Indo-Fijian farmers were reported to be only used to growing sugar cane: ‘they think nothing else is possible’. Many local farmers, whether iTaukei or Indo-Fijian, were said to be only willing to grow culturally and historically embedded crops, anything else, ‘they don’t trust’.

The ‘mind-set’ problem applied to selling as much as it did to growing. iTaukei were said to only sell when they needed to. One chef recalled how the community in which his hotel was located regularly supplied him with about 20 kg of lobster. But as soon as the mataqali needed money for an event, things changed:

Then all the village men got together and decided to go diving and then they come up with 400 or 500 kg worth of lobster [laughs]. And they want to sell it *now!*. That’s the thing with consistency: they will only get [the product to sell] when they need the money.

A Fijian himself, he understood the situation and bought the entire catch, on-selling what was surplus to his requirements. Another chef had been regularly supplied with fish and as such had put the fish onto his menu. But the supply suddenly stopped:

So I called the guy and asked ‘what’s going on? I ordered 40 kg of fish for Wednesday and 40 kg for Saturday’. And he said, ‘oh no, I didn’t go fishing!’. And I went, ‘why didn’t you go fishing?’ He said, ‘oh, you paid me enough on Wednesday!’.

(Chef)

He explained this behaviour as an outcome of many iTaukei owning land and therefore not needing to earn a lot of money. Another stated, ‘In Fiji, you might have realised, people don’t think in the long-term’, why sell more tomorrow if I have enough money today? Others were confronted with the fact that the supplier had sold his produce elsewhere or supplied less than ordered: farmers frequently ‘over-commit[ted] and under-deliver[ed]’, in the words of one chef. ‘You can’t do business with people like that, as much as they are lovely and you want to be as patient as you can’, said one chef. Local farming, Laeis was told by a chef, ‘[has] to do with their kind of social needs, which doesn’t necessarily mix with business, tourism, peak seasons and all that’.

Chefs also complained that high quality produce was grown in Fiji, but it was not available locally. Instead, it was exported. This pertained to fruit and vegetables, as well as fish and seafood. One chef said that he had received second-grade eggplants, and had only later realised that A-grade eggplants actually existed. The

A-grade eggplants were not available on the local market because exporting them was more lucrative for growers. It was the same for fish: 'the people overseas are willing to pay big dollars for quality fish. Here? No!', said a chef.

So, it appears that there is local produce available of the quality and quantity desired by resort hotels, but it is not available on the local market for hotels to purchase (in part because the hotels are unwilling to pay for it). The account of the resort chefs suggests that local produce is not regularly or reliably provided for sale because of the mind-set (read culture) of farmers. However, this explanation is not borne out when farmers are asked why they do not produce for hotels.

### **The view of the farmers on non-assemblage**

Farmers who direct their operations towards the hotel market are unusual, and the Palm Breeze suppliers noted a number of reasons why many farmers do not engage in making such a market. Laeis talked to the three suppliers who regularly provided the Palm Breeze with fruit and vegetables, to find out why they had established supply relationships with the hotel, and why other farmers do not. The suppliers in question were not small-scale farmers, but traders. One supplied several resorts as well as supermarket chains, and the second sold to airport/airline caterers, as well as resorts. Both were among the biggest and most important traders in the Sigatoka Valley, sourcing produce from a large number of small scale farmers. The third had a 20-ha farm, but also acted as a trader and bought from other farmers if he could not provide an entire order from his own farm.

The traders faced some of the same challenges as chefs who source directly, namely inconsistency of supply in terms of quality and quantity. Likewise, they need to work hard to get growers to grow for hotels. One had convinced a farmer to grow lemongrass, basil and mint, only for him: 'It took me a good couple of months to get it through his head, but now he is laughing', meaning he is making good money. To persuade the farmer to grow what he wants, the trader supplied the farmer with inputs (seeds, fertiliser, pesticides) and bought all of his harvest at an agreed price. In order to sustain such supply chains, traders needed to pay farmers a 'fair share' of what the hotel pays. If farmers thought they were being exploited, they would no longer supply.

Traders also faced challenges from the hotel side. One said that resorts will suddenly change their order: 'they are using 300 kg of vudi a week, but before it used to be 3 kg a week!'. This is not only a challenge for him as a trader, but also produces uncertainty for farmers, who might suddenly find themselves without a market for what they have grown.

The farmer/trader said that he has a long list of fruits and vegetables that he could easily sell to hotels for a good price, but he has not been able to find farmers to grow for him. Most farmers, he said, echoing the words of the chefs, only plant what they are used to. Another stated: 'It's the mind-set, which I think the old generation had, and it is really hard right now to change the system in [the farmers'] heads'.

So we have a situation where it seems that all of the conditions for the assembling of a market are in place, but yet it has not assembled. Why? The

answer is actually quite simple and has little to do with the kind of cultural mind-set identified by chefs and traders. The answer does have to do with a mind-set, but the mind-set in question is more that of a rational economic and social actor than it is of a cultural deficiency and lack of education. Farmers choose not to supply hotels for reasons largely to do with reducing and mitigating economic risk – a decision that seems a perfectly rational choice.

First, farmers find that supplying a hotel is a lot of extra work, and choose not to undertake work they find a hassle. Supplying a hotel means careful sorting and cleaning produce and packing into crates that then need to be transported to the hotel in a closed vehicle. It means regular, reliable and punctual delivery of specified quantities. Hotels also have demanding standards, and may reject produce. By contrast, to supply the local markets ‘they just load in big trucks, 100 bags [of] eggplant, 100 bags of cabbage [laughs], just load it and ship it’, said one trader. Moreover, as the traders experienced, hotels can be fickle in their demands in terms of variety, quantity and quality, creating uncertainty and insecurity.

Furthermore, and in line with their preference for hassle-free production, farmers prefer to grow for export. Exporters pay the most. Exporters, however, require only a few items – eggplant, okra, papaya, curry leaves and a certain kind of chilli. For a farmer, putting all of their eggs in the export market is risky, as they are at the mercy of the importing country.<sup>8</sup> Supplying a wide variety of items to hotels potentially mitigates this risk. However, concentrating on growing a few key products is easier and more efficient, and perhaps it is more likely that the experienced grower will produce export quality produce more easily than they could a wide variety of things that the hotel might want. In weighing up the risks and rewards, exporting is seen as a better bet.

Not farming to supply hotels is a different kind of better-bet for iTaukei and Indo-Fijian farmers, and there were differences underpinning the decision to not supply. Historically, Indo-Fijian farmers grew sugar cane. Sugar cane, farmers agreed, is a ‘lazy man’s crop’. It is a perennial, drought-resistant plant that flourishes in a wide variety of soils and does not need irrigation, and only requires weeding and fertilising in the initial growth stages. The only ‘hard work’ required is harvesting the cane once a year. Moreover, sugar cane production has traditionally taken place under the authority of the Fiji Sugar Corporation, which set prices and supported farmers, providing certainty and security for growers. Successful production of the market-garden kind needed to supply hotels demands a diverse range of horticultural skills, planning capacity and ability to assemble a set of market relations, given the absence of an already-established set of supply conduits. Continuing to grow sugar (if possible) or growing one of the major export crops fits better with Indo-Fijian farming experience.

For Indo-Fijian farmers, many of who live precarious economic lives, reliable short-term economic return was paramount. Many do not own the land they farm and were understandably hesitant to invest in any long-term or expensive ventures involving things like irrigation, permanent crops such as fruit trees, or in new crops that they do not have expertise in growing and selling and where there is, therefore, a higher risk of failure. Moreover, the history of coups, noted above, led to the

displacement of Indo-Fijian farmers from their lands as iTaukei owners declined to renew leases. This insecurity of tenure has had two consequences. First, Indo-Fijian farmers have (sensibly) shied away from long-term capital investment into farming ventures (World Bank 2017), and second, they had not been interested or able to pass their farms on to the next generation (Crocombe, 2013, p. 199). As such, the kinds of long-term investments needed to forge and participate in a market supplying hotels are simply too risky.

iTaukei farmers, by comparison, as owners of land, do not need to take the risks associated with growing new crops, and to the frustration of some development professionals, seem to continue to prefer to invest in a traditional exchange economy rather than in a market economy. As a development practitioner engaged in promoting a tomato growing venture stated:

The iTaukei have an extremely strong culture. It is a strength, but like all strengths it is also a weakness. And so the obligation is very strong within the culture to be a groupist and not future oriented culture, the tendency is that it doesn't necessarily fit with the business concept. That's what we've got to change. Well, we don't have to change the people, we have to get them to culture-shift, to accept that business is a new way of life, and we will change and adapt. As long as they agree to the work ethic, we are in business.

Many farmers from both groups, if they do choose to grow for the market, appear to prefer the comparative simplicity and security of growing for export. It is not that they cannot (because of culture) grow for resort hotels, it is because they do not want to.

## **Conclusion**

There are a number of reasons for the failure of a market for the supply of produce to resort hotels in Fiji to emerge and these general reasons are widely known. From a hotel point of view, there is a lack of produce of the variety, quality and quantity they need. But they consider that there is potential for these problems to be overcome, and as a result, there are continuing efforts by hotel management and development agencies to create a market by encouraging farmers to produce for hotels. This, it is argued, will improve the incomes of local people and contribute to strengthening the Fijian economy. Despite persistent work, the desired market has failed to emerge and stabilise. Instead, we see the development of individual supply relationships between particular chefs and hotel managers and traders and growers. These relationships are inevitably fragile and contingent. The hotel-side explanation for the frustration of their repeated attempts at creating a market is the 'mind-set' of farmers, by which they mean a culture which inhibits the development of market-focused entrepreneurialism. The farmer-side explanation for the failure of the market to assemble is that fundamentally, also for cultural reasons, farmers are just not that interested in assembling it, because they have better options.

In making sense of market non-assemblage in Fiji, our strategy has been to locate the obligatory blockage point (OBP), and what (or more precisely who) we found that OBP to be were human subjects. Fijian farmers were not the kind of market subjects imagined and desired by the hotels, but what made them non-compliant and non-enrolled subjects was not the cultural-deficit-mind-set that hotel chefs and managers advanced in explanation. Instead, they were calculating subjects, deploying locally formed strategic rationalities to decide not to supply resort hotels. The calculations that they made were formed in arenas of cultural and economic life outside of the tourist industry, and it was the calculations that they made in those arenas that shaped their lack of engagement with the hotels. For iTaukei, it was embeddedness in a 'traditional' economy, animated by rationalities of reciprocity and kinship that shaped their decisions; for Indo-Fijians it was the experience of the uncertainty and insecurity generated by the history of the coups that shaped their assessment of risk. Culture as a concept might well be fuzzy and irritatingly difficult to define, but whatever it is, it is almost always one of the things that shapes the assemblage and non-assemblage of markets in particular places.

## Notes

- 1 Notable exceptions include Latour (1996) and Webb & Hawkey (2017).
- 2 A mataqali is a clan or landowning unit.
- 3 *Hibiscus manihot*, also known as slippery cabbage.
- 4 *Colocasia esculenta*, more widely known as taro. The leaves are used as a spinach substitute.
- 5 A local tree fern.
- 6 Taro leaves.
- 7 Plantain.
- 8 For example, between April and June 2017 New Zealand banned the import of Fijian produce due to bio-security concerns, resulting in significant losses for Fijian exporters and farmers (Fiji Broadcasting Corporation, 7 June 2017).

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