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*The Tourist State* is an exploration of how the New Zealand State has performed its identity through the creation of its tourist industry. Two specific times at which this has been visible have been the so-called liberal era (1890-1914) and the period from 1998 to the present. In the first instance, New Zealand touted itself as the social laboratory of the World, and “Maoriland” paired progressive liberalism with Māori culture, becoming a brand by which the State sold itself both internally and globally. During the second moment, Aotearoa New Zealand has once again very successfully marketed itself as one of the most popular global tourist destinations through its “100% Pure” advertising campaign.

The thesis of the book is that national identity and internal identity politics in Aotearoa New Zealand are not merely reflected in tourism. Instead, the State constitutes itself and negotiates its difficult identity politics through tourism, more specifically through the performance of tourism. The author thus extends performance methodologies to the study of the State. She does so through shifting the focus from representation of nation to performance: the materialisation and expression of the State. Werry contends that tourism is a mechanism of liberal statehood, an incessantly contested process that is the cumulative effect of a myriad of performances.

Werry uses a number of case studies to successfully put forward the case for a performance approach to tourism studies. Chapter 1 is an account of the creation of a tourist destination at the thermal springs in Rotorua at the turn of the 19th century. The thermal activity in the region had to be domesticated through the reassurance of elaborate architectural schemes such as the grand Government Gardens. The surrounding Māori villages were to a large extent “sanitised” and brought in line with a tourist vision of “Maoriland”. Werry states that in Rotorua “liberalism’s establishment of whiteness as tacit racial norm required the imposition of a local and specific rule of difference that established governmentality’s targets: white hygiene and self-management, and Māori discipline, surveillance, and containment” (p. 41).

In Chapter Two, Werry uses the biography of a single guide in Rotorua, Makereti (known as Guide Maggie). Makereti conformed to an idealised state model of indigeneity. She was of mixed European and Māori descent and managed to successfully negotiate the tourist encounter with subtlety and discernment through an appeal to the universalism of class. Werry uses the example Makereti, whom tourists found to be the perfect blend of cosmopolitan refinement and exotic otherness, as key to exploring the centrality of “conduct” in understanding how bodies are performed and regulated in line with a State’s vision of itself.

Chapter Three explores the relationship between tourism and statehood within the broader frame of global geopolitics through a discussion of the trans-Pacific tour of the United States’s “Great White Fleet” and its welcome by the New Zealand State in 1908. The spectacle of the welcome pageantry is described as a microcosm of the
identity politics at play at the time. Despite attempts at containment by the State, it was an occasion that was used by Māori leaders to put forward their claim to equal global citizenship. The appropriation of Māori pageantry by the State is described as lending the majority non-Māori state the mantle of romantic autochthony. In Werry’s terms, through this appropriation it acted as a “ventriloquist state”. On the other side, the United States used extensive press coverage of its tour to further its claim for an “American Pacific”.

Chapter 4 documents the use of the concept of Māori culture and lifeways (Māoritanga) to help sell tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand. This proposition was first explicitly put forward in the form of promotional film, The Tourism Edge, in 2005, interpreted as either rapacious neo-colonialism or a welcome re-calibration of ontological priorities.

At the heart of current government tourism policy is the concept of the “Free Independent Traveller”, an ideal, high-yield, tourist who engages with Aotearoa New Zealand in its entirety, thus maximising revenue. The “100% Pure New Zealand” campaign has as its central concept “freedom” and relies on a dominant trope from the past, that of pristine nature or terra nullius, that risked alienating Māori stakeholders. However, through the branding of Māori experiences, blending old-fashioned concert party performances with mass-appeal new theatrical techniques, Māori businesses have successfully imposed themselves in the tourist economy. Non-Māori businesses however have the more demanding task of navigating the tensions “between making Māori culture ‘deliverable’ and honoring tribal demands for privacy, autonomy and control over cultural property” (p. 184).

The final chapter deals with “the mutually constitutive processes of film-making and state making, mediated by touristic imperatives” (p. 191). The success of Whale Rider and The Lord of the Rings trilogy marks the “nullification of race” and a form of “postraciality” embraced by the New Zealand State. The economic impact of the Lord of the Rings in New Zealand was substantial; Werry argues, however, that the film’s deeply problematic racial semiology should be kept in mind. The film “mythologises whiteness” (p. 200) to an almost absurd extent. The newly re-invigorated New Zealand film’s industry subsequent support for Whale Rider is described by Werry as a tactical move “forwarding and fashioning the indigenous subject as the engine of collective futurity and prosperity” (p. 212), as opposed to the portrait of Māori modernity as tragedy portrayed in Once Were Warriors. Despite the international success of Māori actors and films, Werry warns that “to claim postracial mobility is to participate in a global economy of fantasy still structured by race and to reinscribe the racial distribution of opportunity and value on which that economy still rests” (p. 227).

Throughout the book, Werry paints a complex and nuanced picture of a new nation negotiating its internal identity and politics through the creation and successful dissemination of its tourist industry. By extensive references to theories of nationalism, spectacle, tourism and performance, Werry weaves a careful path, showing the multiple agencies at play in a nation “performing itself” for both and internal and external market.