

Review (History in Other Media)

Tangata o le Moana. The Story of Pacific People in New Zealand. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Cable Street, Wellington. Reviewed on 9 and 30 December 2007.

[<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/WhatsOn/LongTermExhibitions/tangataolemoana.htm>.]

IT IS ESTIMATED that by 2051 Pacific people will make up 12% of New Zealand's population. In 1946 that figure was just 0.1%. How do peoples of the Pacific contribute to the growing sense of New Zealand as a Pacific place, and what are their stories, treasures and achievements? These are the two questions that structure *Tangata o le Moana*, Te Papa's new long-term Pacific cultures exhibition which opened in October 2007 and will remain on display until 2012.

Nestled into a corner of the fourth floor (New Zealand's backyard?), the exhibition's main entrance lays out the epic story of Polynesian navigation leading to the eventual settlement of Aotearoa. There are vaka (canoes), images of Kupe sites and a 'secrets of Navigation' interactive video. Two short documentary clips introduce the contemporary voyaging movement — including Matahi Brightwell's *Hawaiki nui* — and provide Maori perspectives on Pacific connections. In a six-minute hologram-projection, young Moana narrates the 'Journey to a New Land' as told to her by 'my Koru' and 'my Kuia'. All one could really ask for here is less awe and more detail about current directions in research. Fishhooks and a vocabulary wheel, for example, vividly display well-established Maori–Eastern Polynesian connections, but the lone DNA sample tells the visitor very little.

For visitors following the exhibition in the chronological sequence intended, early 'Pacific Visitors and Settlers' (1769–1898) come next, led by Tupaia and his servant, Taiaoa. A 'little known lives' display lists Pacific Islanders known to have arrived in New Zealand after 1700. In the absence of specific artefacts, homage is paid to three visitors — Jem, Joel and Saturday — in the form of objects created by artists Michel Tuffery, Karlo Mila-Schaaf and Sofia Tekela-Smith: a knife, a bible with poem, and a t̄ḡfui (scented garland). A Rarotongan cloak gifted by Te Aia Mataiapo in 1872 represents nineteenth-century exchanges. Portraits of the 'martyrs of Melanesia' from the Melanesian mission provide a fleeting reminder of the connections established by early evangelical endeavours.

The theme of 'Empire in the South Pacific' includes displays dealing with Banaba, New Zealand and Samoa and colonial collections. The centre piece is a selection of objects from the W.O. Oldman Collection (acquired by the New Zealand government in 1948), presented as testimony to New Zealand's role in preserving Pacific heritage while also being a colonizer. 'The Empire on Show' cabinet displays items made by Cook Islanders for the International Exhibition of Arts and Industries in 1906. Relations with Samoa are represented by Le Ageagea o Tumua, the fine mat presented to Helen Clark in acknowledgement of her 2002 apology for the events that occurred under New Zealand's administration. A tiny panel sketches New Zealand rule in Samoa, including the influenza epidemic, the Mau and the story behind the name of the fine mat. A video documenting the experiences of Banabans, whose island was mined for phosphate by what would become the British Phosphate Commission (a joint British, Australian and New Zealand consortium), provides the only real examination of the legacy of empire and colonialism (including New Zealand's) in the Pacific.

'Two way traffic' introduces twentieth-century trade and tourism, the world wars and

post-war migration. 'Eventually', we are told, 'New Zealand's overbearing attitude began to wane'. The strongly titled 'Pacific blood on the battlefield' display provides a roll call and photographs of the Pacific people who joined the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion in World War I; the central panel documents the warrior tradition in the family of Theodore Moepai Marama, from the Great War to Vietnam. Finally, postcards and TEAL posters lead the visitor to 'New Waves', the experiences of post-war migrants and their journey from 'Oceania to Suburbia'. At a set of listening posts, talking heads describe arriving, settling in, 'living with the locals' and establishing community organizations. A 'Case Histories' interactive matches display cabinet items with stories; a Fijian badge, for example, links to Sitiveni Rabuka and Fiji's 1987 coups.

The remaining third of the exhibition deals with 'Kiwi style — Pacific style', fashion and music, and 'Pacific Art in the World'. Prominent works on display include John Puhitai Pule's 1998 'Burn my head in heaven' (six ink on paper panels) melding Niuean myth, history and migration. Material links are evident in jewellery inspired by designs from Samoa and the Marshall islands, 'Lei it on'. Fashion on display includes a '21st century Cyber sister' garment by the Pacific Sisters and a Fijian kava ceremony costume. 'Sounds Pacific' draws attention to Pacific Islanders in the music industry and includes a popular 'Pacific Beat' interactive. One of the conceits here is the idea of New Zealand as an international launching pad for Pacific art, but more could have been said about the international reception of such work.

The exhibition ranges widely, but given the stated emphasis on '*The story of Pacific people in New Zealand*' it seems that too much space has been given to the pre-1945 parts of the exhibition and not enough to the post-1945 era. The stories of early settlement, Christian missions and the colonial era could be examined more fully in their own right, while items such as those from the Oldman collection would be better showcased in independent displays. The conditions from which the post-1945 migrants have come deserves more attention, as do the contributions of Pacific people in New Zealand church life, literature and sport. More biographies and profiles are needed, for instance, in the 'blood on the battlefield' display. Also sidestepped is the question of relations between the migrant communities that have been established over the last 60 or so years and Maori, the descendants of the very earliest Pacific Islanders to reach these shores. This is despite the minor controversy that preceded the opening, involving the decision to recreate Glen Jowitt's 1981 photo, *Double Afro*, when it was discovered that the man in the original was Maori and not a Pacific Islander.

Near the exhibition's rear entrance is a final set of questions: 'do Kiwis as a whole accept "Pacific-ness" in their idea of themselves? Do they see New Zealand as a Pacific place? And is there something uniquely Pacific developing here that Kiwis and people globally can connect to?' Understandably, the exhibition avoids examining how Pacific peoples have been seen or represented by other 'Kiwis', but what about Pacific communities in other places? The third question is an invitation to ponder the idea of exceptionalism, but the visitor is unlikely to have learnt much about Pacific people elsewhere — in Sydney or Los Angeles, for instance. In what ways are New Zealand's Pacific communities different? The first two questions, though, are ones that Maori and Pakeha visitors may well be led to ask of themselves. As put more succinctly in one promotional pamphlet: 'do New Zealanders consider themselves Pacific islanders? Do you? Come and decide for yourself?'

ADRIAN MUCKLE

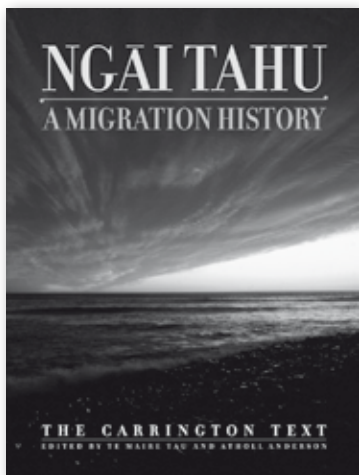
Victoria University of Wellington

New Zealand Journal of History **Graduate Essay Prize**

Peter Hoar, a PhD student in the Department of History at The University of Auckland, has won the inaugural *New Zealand Journal of History* Graduate Essay Prize.

The winning essay, 'Hearing the Past: Can We Write Sound History?', was described by the judges as an 'an ambitious piece of work' that 'presents a challenge to historians, both in New Zealand and beyond, by pointing to the lacuna in our knowledge of the past: that is, we prioritize the written and the visual mediums (among others), yet pay little or no attention to how history sounded'.

The Management Board of the *New Zealand Journal of History* congratulates Peter on his success. We would also like to acknowledge the other entries for the prize, and thank Professors Giselle Byrnes and Kerry Howe, members of the *Journal's* Editorial Advisory Group, for agreeing to judge the prize.



'Me pēhea rā ahau e whiti ai ki tērā wāhi?' Ka rongo mai a Te Huataki ki te kupu a Tiotio. Ka kīia mai e Te Huataki, 'Nā, he ara mōu. Ko tōku tuarā.'

'How can I cross to that marvellous place?' Te Huataki listened to Tiotio and said, 'There is a way and it is by way of my backbone.'

This magnificent narrative tells of the migration of Ngāi Tahu into the South Island. Making their way by sea and land as far as Rakiura, the people established their genealogical right to the land, as Te Huataki acknowledges in the words 'by way of my backbone'.

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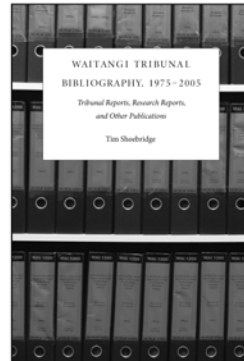
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