

NOTES

Te Papa's Community Gallery

PRESENTING MIGRANT STORIES AT 'OUR PLACE'



AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND'S NATIONAL MUSEUM, Te Papa Tongarewa, opened in February 1998. Promoted as a focal point of national identity, 'a place to stand for all New Zealanders', Te Papa has consistently marketed itself as the inclusive, visitor-friendly 'Our Place'.¹ One of its long-term history exhibitions, *Passports*, is devoted to an overview of non-Māori migration to New Zealand since 1800. Within *Passports* is the 'Community Gallery', a space reserved for migrant communities to work in collaboration with Te Papa staff in order to tell their own stories. These community-generated exhibitions and associated events are considered by migrant groups to be important markers of their visibility within the nation. For this reason, the opening events of these exhibitions can be emotionally charged ceremonies, which some communities, supported by the relevant embassies and media coverage, see as public recognition of their standing in New Zealand society. This was certainly evident, for example, among older people at the opening of the Dutch community exhibition in 2000, some of whom had felt ignored or taken for granted for too long by 'Anglo' New Zealand.² Similarly, emotions ran high among senior Italian New Zealanders at the opening of their community exhibition, which they saw as marking the end of their perceived status as second-class citizens during and following World War II.³

Te Papa promotes these exhibitions as 'community' rather than 'migrant' exhibitions. This reflects their function: they are expressions of community in the context of diversity. This nomenclature also reflects the community consultation process underpinning these displays. While migration histories provide contextual background stories to the exhibits and are cultural and personal touchstones to the present, the exhibitions' primary focus is on the migrant communities within present-day New Zealand society. This research note discusses the practical realization of Te Papa's ongoing programme of community exhibitions.

Te Papa's mission statement directs the museum to be 'a forum in which the nation may present, explore, and preserve both the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order to better understand and treasure the past, enrich the present, and meet the challenges of the future'.⁴ The Museum of New Zealand Act 1992, furthermore, requires the governing board of Te Papa to 'have regard to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the people of New Zealand, and the contributions they have made and continue to make to New Zealand's cultural life and the fabric of New Zealand society' and also to 'endeavour to ensure that the Museum expresses and recognises

the mana and significance of Maori, European and other major traditions and cultural heritages and that the Museum provides the means for every such culture to contribute effectively to the Museum as a statement of New Zealand's identity'.⁵ These requirements provide the framework for Te Papa's corporate principles, which emphasize bicultural partnership between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti as well as meeting the needs and expectations of diverse audiences and communities. Te Papa's function as waharoa — an entryway for explorations of cultural identity — is another fundamental corporate principle, as is the recognition of the role of communities in enhancing the care and understanding of collections and taonga.⁶



Figure 1: Te Papa Community Gallery Exhibition, 'The Making of a Chinese New Zealander' (1998–2000), courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

The museum's exhibitions, as immediate expressions of these ideas, are generally long term and capital intensive. *Passports*, for example, was developed in the mid-1990s as the *Peopling of New Zealand* exhibition project, and has been running since Te Papa's opening. Through it, visitors learn about the factors that have driven migration to Aotearoa New Zealand from many parts of the world for over 200 years; personal stories and interactive devices communicate the 'big picture' stories of travel experiences, the risks and challenges faced by migrants, and the contributions those migrants have made to New Zealand's developing society. Immigration from other parts of the Pacific is given more detailed coverage in the adjacent *Tangata o le Moana* exhibition, which opened in 2007.

Early in the development of *Passports*, museum staff recognized that its broad focus should be complemented by the presentation of more detailed information on the experiences of the diverse ethnic or cultural formations within tangata tiriti. This idea was tested with focus groups representing the project's target audience of non-traditional museum visitors (migrant communities and Māori). Their responses were positive, as were those of other focus groups composed of regular visitors (most were tertiary-educated, female Pākehā) to the old National Museum in Buckle Street. They also wanted Te Papa to produce exhibitions about cultural diversity and migrants' experiences.⁷

These responses influenced Te Papa's decision to develop a 'community access gallery'. This was planned as a space of about 70m² for temporary exhibitions devoted to 'a detailed treatment of a particular ethnic community, religious group or migration stream. It will examine ideas, issues and themes closely associated with New Zealand immigration. The exhibit will function as a *community access gallery* which invites religious, ethnic and other immigrant groups to actively participate in the (re)presentation of their history and cultural traditions.'⁸ The gallery's governing principle was that it was to be a space where migrant communities could tell their *own* stories. These 'community exhibitions' were scheduled to run for about two-and-a-half years each, a much shorter duration than 'permanent' or 'long-term' exhibitions (usually ten to 15 years). This relatively fast changeover is a way to refresh and energize *Passports* and also functions to harness the frequently expressed wish of migrant communities to be showcased at 'Our Place'.⁹

The community gallery programme is intended to 'include as many different communities as possible over time, thereby reflecting the cultural diversity of New Zealand society'.¹⁰ Te Papa intended the gallery to be 'a unique, innovative space within a multi-cultural exhibition devoted to a celebration of cultural diversity'.¹¹ From the outset, active community participation in the form of consultation and advice, oral history research and the loan of artifacts was seen as vital to the success of the programme. 'Different ethno-religious groups' would be given the chance 'to actively participate in the telling of their own history', which in turn would 'empower these communities by transferring specialist skills and research'.¹² In following these prescriptions, Te Papa aligned its practice to recent museological literature that stresses the need for museums to develop positive relationships with communities and to negotiate their representation in exhibitions and public programmes on a basis of genuine power-sharing.¹³ Reflecting on their experiences working with the local Polish community to develop an exhibition at the Petone Settlers' Museum, David Mealing and Teresa Sawicka have noted that this approach 'provides a means of letting communities find their way into museums, to establish a sense of ownership and relevance, a level of comfort and confidence' and also fosters positive perceptions of a museum as a socially inclusive entity.¹⁴

Well-known international examples of community-based exhibitions about migrant experience include the Museum of Immigration and Diversity in Spitalfields in the East End of London which uses its premises — an eighteenth-century building inhabited in turn by Hugeneots, Jews, Bengalis and Somalis — to encourage its visitors to reflect on the diverse identities that have made

the people of modern Britain.¹⁵ A parallel example from the United States is the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York, a building which was home to an estimated 7000 immigrants from more than 20 countries between 1864 and 1935. The Tenement Museum exhibitions draw upon multiple, personalized narratives to encourage visitors to consider the relationships between historical and current immigration issues.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in Melbourne, the Museum of Immigration's 'Community Engagement Programme' works with Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities to create exhibitions and cultural festivals; this museum explicitly regards community contribution as 'key to the success of these projects'.¹⁷

Several successful exhibitions focusing on local migrant communities have been presented in Aotearoa New Zealand. Notable examples include those developed by the Otago and Petone settlers' museums, by Te Manawa at Palmerston North, and by the Waikato Museum of Art and History.¹⁸ Te Papa's point of difference from these exhibitions is its *national* mandate and the level of financial and human resources that Te Papa is able to commit to these non-revenue-generating projects. In return, communities feel that their mana is greatly enhanced from being showcased to a national audience.

To date, Te Papa has undertaken five community exhibitions: the latest, *The Scots in New Zealand*, opened in August 2007, and follows shows devoted to the Chinese, Dutch, Indian and Italian communities. A variety of motives have guided this selection. The choice of Chinese New Zealanders for Te Papa's first community gallery exhibition was based on their standing as the country's longest-settled non-European immigrants; awareness of the need to tell the increasing numbers of recent Chinese immigrants about their heritage here; and the existence of an active and well-organized group of local Chinese people who wanted their story told.¹⁹ The second exhibition, about Dutch New Zealanders, was timed to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Netherlands/New Zealand immigration agreement of 1950 which led to about 25,000 Dutch people arriving up to 1968.²⁰

It was the enthusiasm of the Wellington Indian Association and the activism of their Historical Committee that motivated Te Papa's invitation to the Indian communities for its third exhibition.²¹ The Indian communities' exhibition broke the mould of the earlier two. Whereas the Dutch and the Chinese displays presented conventional migrant history narratives — leaving the homeland, arrival/first impressions, settling in/contributions and generational differences — the promoters of the Indian project wished to emphasize the diversity of New Zealand's Indian communities, especially in terms of religion and places of origin. The mode of presenting this theme, developed in consultation with community representatives, was to focus on the wedding ceremonies of three religions — Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism — to illustrate the importance of religious belief and cultural practice in the lives of New Zealanders of Indian background. The fourth community exhibition, *Qui Tutto Bene*, about the experiences of Italians as New Zealanders, reverted to the more conventional model of presenting migrants' stories. However, community input directed Te Papa to pay attention to the cultural and regional diversity of 'Italians'. Community representatives also insisted that the still-painful episode of

wartime internments of local family men be given prominence in the exhibition. Countering this story were those of more positive wartime interactions between New Zealand soldiers and Italian civilians, and of the Sciascia whanau's recent journey in search of their Italian roots.²²

The current community exhibition, *The Scots in New Zealand*, is to some extent experimental in that it focuses on an important component of New Zealand's founding Pākehā population, and on the intertwining of 'Scottishness' with 'mainstream' New Zealand life. The well-known contributions Scots and people of Scottish descent have made to New Zealand science, education and public life are acknowledged, but the exhibition also deals with more sensitive issues arising from colonization, such as the processes which led to expropriation of Maori land. Scottish settlement in the Turakina district is presented as a case study of relationships between tangata whenua (Ngāti Apa) and settlers who had themselves suffered dispossession. There has been some visitor feedback critical of the small size of the gallery and the scope of the exhibition, a sign perhaps of the pervasive Scottish influence on Aotearoa New Zealand.²³

How does Te Papa select communities to be the subject of an exhibition and how does it develop positive working relationships to ensure that the communities' *own* stories are presented at 'Our Place'? To initiate the process, Te Papa uses a checklist of criteria to ascertain a community's suitability. Criteria that are assessed include whether the community has a mandated representative body and infrastructure that can help the exhibition development process, the community's research capability, and the availability of its resources to assist in effective community consultation and communication. Other factors considered include whether or not the community has already made any approaches to Te Papa requesting a presence in the gallery space, the general nature of its current relationship with Te Papa and an assessment of the quantity and quality of objects relating to the community currently held in public collections.²⁴

If a community scores well against the checklist, Te Papa makes a formal approach to one of its representative bodies, usually about two and a half years ahead of the anticipated exhibition opening.²⁵ Assuming that the proposal is accepted, the next step is to invite the community to send between 20 and 30 representatives from all over New Zealand to a 'Blue Skies' session. This is essentially an 'anything goes' facilitated session; the objective is for the community's representatives to outline for Te Papa the stories and themes they want to see on the museum floor. In a cross-generational group setting evoking memory and meaning, these sessions can be occasion for cathartic release of intense emotion and grievance. For example, members of Wellington's Chinese community expressed painful cultural and personal memories of the 1905 murder of Joe Kum Yung by Lionel Terry, of the Poll Tax, of police raids as late as the 1960s on 'drug dens' in Haining Street and of playground taunting in schools.²⁶ More surprising to the Te Papa team were the intense emotions of some Dutch immigrants of the early 1950s, who recalled their isolation following their 'pepperpotting' dispersal throughout rural and small-town New Zealand, their sense of loss of language and culture in line with

'assimilationist' policies of the day, and their enduring resentment of their official characterization as 'aliens', symbolized by the registration books they were told to carry at all times.²⁷

The experiences and emotions that are expressed in these sessions guide Te Papa staff towards the stories that need to be told, and provide leads to locate the objects and images that will help the team to present the community's interpretation to the public. Community consultation continues over the entire course of the exhibition development process. At the 'Blue Skies' consultation, the Te Papa team seeks nomination for membership of a Community Advisory Group (CAG). This is a group of six to eight people, with as broad an age, gender and geographical spread as possible. CAG members attend regular meetings at Te Papa where they are briefed on the progress of the project and have the opportunity to comment and offer critiques of exhibition content and design proposals. CAG approval and sign-off is a vital part of the exhibition development process; the CAG members take very seriously their responsibility as their community's 'voice'.²⁸ Their tendency to be essentially self-nominated from middle-aged and older people, and generally resident in the Wellington area, means that the CAGs have not been fully representative of their communities to date, although due to better funding, membership of the Scots CAG was more geographically spread than had been the case for earlier CAGs. Representation was particularly an issue with the Indian CAG, which was initially entirely Hindu, working on a project that required the development of close relationships with adherents of two other major religions.²⁹ The issue was resolved by the recruitment of separate Sikh and Muslim teams to act as CAGs for their respective communities.

Te Papa's model for developing its community exhibitions assumes active involvement by representatives of the community concerned and the development of close working relationships with Te Papa staff. As confidence develops between the parties, community representatives are in a position to ensure that the proposed exhibition avoids any stereotypical treatment of the community concerned, and that celebratory or authorized storylines focusing on 'success' be complemented by coverage of problematic aspects of a community's experience in New Zealand.³⁰ An interesting example of a CAG's activism occurred at a late stage in the development of the Scots exhibition, when Te Papa's marketing team proposed a 'Hero' (promotional) image of a piper in muddy gumboots. The Te Papa team saw the image as a humorous combination of New Zealand and Scottish icons. The CAG, however, vehemently rejected the image on the grounds of its clichéd nature, association with dirt and exclusive 'maleness'. It was replaced by a striking image of a young boy and girl in full flight at the 2007 Waipu Highland Games.³¹

Between formal meetings, CAG members are constantly asked to advise Te Papa staff about issues of representation, cultural authenticity and the cultural acceptability or otherwise of design proposals. CAG members act as Te Papa's 'live links' to the communities they represent. One vital function is to facilitate access for Te Papa staff to carry out research within their wider communities. CAG members are also involved in the sign-off process for the exhibition's text, sometimes a challenging and protracted exercise given the

conflict between Te Papa's exacting word limits and, for example, the need to explain key points of the Hindu belief system in 50 words or fewer.³²

Te Papa's exhibitions have had massive exposure to local and 'international visitor' audiences by New Zealand standards. Since its opening in 1998, 15.11 million (as at 5 January 2009) people have visited Te Papa.³³ Attendance figures for community gallery exhibitions have consistently reflected this scale of visitation; about one million people visited the Italian exhibition during its two-and-a-half-year life at Te Papa (and it was later exhibited at the Waikato Museum of Art and History). The figure is consistent with the 'visitor penetration rates' recorded for other community exhibitions; for example, in October 2001, 33% of all Te Papa visitors saw *Nieuw Zeeland – Going Dutch*, and in October 2002 43% went to the *Aainaa – Reflections through Indian Weddings*.³⁴

Associated events and cultural performances add popular appeal and enrichment to the exhibitions. Lectures and seminars allow a community's scholars to present their points of view on relevant issues to a general audience. For example, a mention of India's 'First War of Independence' (otherwise known as the 'Mutiny') at a seminar organized by the CAG on Indian history caused a noticeable stir among a largely Pākehā audience. The exhibitions can also become vehicles for second- and third-generation community members to re-engage with traditional culture and practice. During the *Aainaa* exhibition, the team heard anecdotal reports that New Zealanders of Indian descent, and Pākehā planning to marry into Indian communities, used the wedding ritual displays as learning aids.

Nonetheless, there have been some critics, both of the processes and the outcome of the community exhibitions. For example, the theory of consultative process underlying exhibition development is not always easy to apply in practice. Dr Pushpa Wood, a member of the Indian CAG, explored some of the tensions arising between CAG members, in their roles as guardians of their community's perspectives, and Te Papa as executor of the processes.³⁵ In a 2005 article, Wood noted her perception of the CAG members as being 'outsiders' who were invited in to comment and provide expert advice, while Te Papa's professional staff retained decision-making powers. She also noted the lack of clear criteria for appointment to the CAG, which resulted in the group not being truly representative of the Indian communities; instead, it was Wellington-based and lacking in youth, Sikh and Muslim representation.³⁶ Some of Wood's suggestions to remedy problems or representation and to enable a stronger sense of genuine power-sharing between communities and Te Papa were followed in the institution's processes for selecting and working with the Scottish CAG. In 2003 Te Papa also appointed a full-time community liaison person, charged with facilitating communication and maintaining positive relationships with community groups. Responses from the Indian and Scottish CAGs suggest that this appointment has had the desired effect.³⁷ Subsequently, Te Papa has also modified its terms of reference for community involvement in community gallery projects in a document which clearly lays out the complementary roles of CAG members and Te Papa staff.³⁸

Te Papa invests much effort in active engagement with a wide spectrum of

New Zealand's migrant communities. The parameters of these communities may be defined by associations through birth or lineage with an alternative national group or culture, or by common experience or characteristics, as in 'communities of interest' such as 'refugee background youth' (the subject of Te Papa's next community exhibition project). The community gallery programme enables Te Papa to develop exhibitions and public programmes which acknowledge and explore the increasing diversity of tangata tiriti and their on-going interactions with tangata whenua; in so doing, the exhibition team strives to create and sustain enduring relationships with the communities that participate in what becomes an on-going dialogue. The communities, in turn, have the benefit of a national platform from which to tell their stories and inform a wider public about their cultures, beliefs and experience of engagement with other components of New Zealand society. All parties involved in developing Te Papa's community exhibitions see their work as a positive contribution to promoting dialogue and understanding among the increasingly diverse cultures of modern New Zealand.

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1 Jock Phillips, 'Our History, Our Selves', *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH) 30, 2 (1996), pp.107–23.

2 This comment was made to the author by Mr Boyd Klap, the then Chairman of the New Zealand–Netherlands Foundation, at the opening event for the Dutch Community exhibition, *Nieuw Zeeland – Going Dutch*, Te Papa, 25 August 2000. See also Hank Schouten, *Tasman's Legacy: The New Zealand–Dutch Connection*, Wellington, 1992, p.170.

3 These comments were made to Te Papa's community relationships manager, Sue Superville, at the opening event for the Italian Community Exhibition, *Qui Tutto Bene*, Te Papa, 11 November 2004. See also L. Columbano-Green (Wellington) to Sue Superville (Te Papa), email correspondence, 15 November 2004, Te Papa Archives, Wellington (hereafter TPA).

4 See <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/AboutTePapa/AboutUs/WhatWeDo/The+Act> (accessed 31 October 2008).

5 *ibid.*

6 See <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/AboutTePapa/CommunityRelationships/> (accessed 31 October 2008).

7 Front-end evaluation document, *Peopling of New Zealand*, November 1994, pp.37–38, 59, Te Papa Records Management file MT/805, INAC 50/97, TPA.

8 *Peopling of New Zealand* 100% Design Document, October 1995, p.121, TPA.

9 It should be noted also that a parallel process takes place within the context of *Mana Whenua*, Te Papa's long-term tangata whenua exhibition, in which space is reserved for a sequence of iwi exhibitions.

10 *Peopling of New Zealand* 100% Design Document, p.121, TPA.

11 *ibid.*, p.122.

12 *ibid.*

13 See, for example, the essays in Sharon Macdonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Oxford, 2006; Stephanie Gibson, 'Te Papa and New Zealand's Indian Communities — A Case Study about Exhibition Development', *Tuhinga*, 14 (2003), pp.61–75; Pushpa Wood, 'Community Consultation: Te Papa and New Zealand Indian Communities — The Other Side of the Coin', *Tuhinga*, 16 (2005), pp.127–35.

14 David Mealing and Teresa Sawicka 'Living in Two Worlds: The History of a Process', *New Zealand Museums Journal* (NZMJ), 26, 2 (1996), pp.58–61.

15 See <http://www.19princeletstreet.org.ul/press/guardian.html> (accessed 22 September 2008).

16 See M. Russell-Ciardi, 'The Museum as a Democracy-Building Institution: Reflections on the Shared Journeys Program at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum', *The Public Historian*, 30, 1 (2008), pp.39–52.

17 See <http://museumvictoria.co.au/ImmigrationMuseum/About-Us/Community-Engagement> (accessed 10 October 2008).

18 Mealing and Sawicka, pp.58–61; Otago Settlers' Museum Chinese community exhibition 'Windows on a Chinese Past' <http://nzlive.com/en/otago-settlers-museum/windows-on-a-chinese-past> (accessed 10 October 2008); Waikato Museum of Art & History press release, 'Public help sought for proposed Italian migrant exhibition', 19 June 2007, <http://hamilton.co.nz/news/pageid/2145834851> (accessed 8 January 2009).

19 Speech notes compiled by Jock Phillips for the closing ceremony of the Chinese community exhibition, 2000, TPA.

20 <http://www.teara.govt.nz/1966/I/Immigration/Post1944/en> (accessed 5 September 2008).

21 *Peopling of New Zealand* 100% Design Document, p.108, TPA.

22 Minutes, Italian CAG meeting, 19 June 2003, TPA.

23 Te Papa Visitor and Marketing Research report 'The Scots in New Zealand', 21 September 2009, pp.4, 12–15, TPA.

24 Te Papa working paper, 'Recommendations for next Community Gallery Exhibition', 13 December 2004, TPA.

25 Wood, p.129.

26 Front-end evaluation document, *Peopling of New Zealand*, pp.36–37.

27 Minutes, 'Blueskies' meeting for Dutch exhibition, 1998, INAC 108/01, TPA. See R. Lochore, 'From Europe to New Zealand: An Account of our Continental European Settlers', Wellington, 1951, pp.101–107; <http://www.teara.govt.nz/NewZealanders/NewZealandPeoples/theVoyageOut/10/ENZ> (accessed 5 September 2008).

- 28 Gibson, pp.6–67; Wood, p.133.
- 29 Wood, pp.129–30.
- 30 Minutes, Italian CAG meeting, 19 August 2003, TPA.
- 31 Minutes, Scots in New Zealand CAG meeting, 20 April 2007, TPA.
- 32 'Terms of Reference for Community Involvement in Developing the Community Gallery Exhibition', 2006, TPA.
- 33 Te Papa Visitor and Marketing Research visitation data; updated daily, TPA.
- 34 Te Papa Visitor and Marketing Research paper, '*Aainaa* ... visitation trends and satisfaction since opening', November 2002, TPA.
- 35 Wood, p.130.
- 36 *ibid.*
- 37 Speech notes by Mr Ashwin Gulab, Indian CAG, for *Aainaa*, Indian Community Exhibition closing event, Te Papa, 25 September 2004, TPA; Minutes, 'Scots in New Zealand' Exhibition Team Debrief Meeting, Te Papa, 17 August 2007, p.4, para 6.2, TPA.
- 38 'Job Description for Community Relations Manager', 2003; Te Papa document 'Terms of Reference for Community Involvement in Developing the Community Gallery', 27 January 2006, TPA.