

A Breach on the beach: Te Papa and the fraying of biculturalism

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Abstract

In 1998, Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand opened to the public. The new national museum is strongly bicultural in terms of its architecture, organization, and management – and in the way it represents history and society in exhibitions. In the past year political developments have seen a decisive shift in public opinion away from tolerance of Maori land claims made on the basis of the Treaty of Waitangi. Given that the museum's founding policies and mission are organized around the authority of the Treaty, Te Papa now finds itself in a challenging position: in what ways do its current permanent exhibitions communicate "biculturalism" – the awkward marriage between Maori and Pakeha – the latter far from universally accepted as a proper noun describing New Zealanders of (mainly British) colonial descent? I explore those exhibitions that explicitly deal with issues of land and territory in order to gauge the extent to which Te Papa can engage with New Zealand's current shift in political mood.

Key Words: land rights; biculturalism; postcolonial museums; politics of representation.

In early 1998 New Zealand's new National Museum, Te Papa Tongarewa, opened to a rapturous public. After 13 years of planning and over NZ\$300 million in construction costs, the museum represented a grand government investment in the cultural life of the nation. From the mid-1980s, the Project Development Board, responsible for planning the museum, envisaged a strongly nationalistic institution that could both emphasize the richness and vitality of Maori culture, and convey the art and social history of Pakeha (or white New Zealanders/descendants of colonial settlers) in refreshing ways. Their solution was a bicultural museum; one whose management structure, architectural design, spatial layout, and exhibition topics would be clearly divided between Maori and Pakeha. In its first five years, Te Papa has been a runaway public success. The balances necessary to produce a 'total national institution' appeared to have been struck: between Maori and Pakeha; art, science, and cultural history; entertainment and education; novelty and tradition. With this achievement, it appeared that the museum might just be a harbinger for broader cultural harmony.

Yet recently, cracks in the unity of this vision have become especially apparent, with land claims being the catalyst. In May 2004 around 10,000 protestors – mostly Maori – gathered at Te Papa to march to the House of Parliament. They were demonstrating against the Government's unsympathetic response to demands for recognition of their interests in the country's foreshore and seabed, promised, Maori assert, by the Treaty of Waitangi.¹ The tumult began a year earlier, when the Court of Appeal determined that the Maori Land Court had the jurisdiction to hear these ownership claims. The Government countered that sovereignty remained vested in the Crown on behalf of New Zealanders. Tension grew as the opposition National Party, under new leadership, seized on the issue as evidence that Maori 'special interests' had gone too far. Insisting on 'one rule for all,' National declared new policies that included scrapping the Maori Affairs ministry, abolishing the seven Maori electorate parliamentary seats, and removing the semi-constitutional authority of the Treaty of Waitangi. This stance elicited broad popular support, causing Prime Minister Clark to make concessions

in order to ward off rising criticisms. She declared that the prevailing 'consensus over Maori issues' had been 'shattered,' and that a 'new balance' on Maori policy, 'based on needs rather than race,' was required (Braddock, 2004). Two decades of bicultural state policies based on a notional partnership between Maori and Pakeha have seen the establishment of affirmative action placements in health and education, the granting of official status to Maori language and religious observances, and the establishment of Maori advisory consultancies on 'Treaty obligations' in business, the public sector, and the arts – including Te Papa. These recent political developments appear to have exposed the limits of public tolerance for bicultural government programs.

The implications for this shift in consensus over biculturalism for a museum that promises to 'speak for a nation' may be great. In contrast to the previous National Museum – housed in a 1930s neo-classical edifice that sat atop a Wellington hilltop – Te Papa has embraced the role of being 'a place of encounter'. Te Papa was architecturally designed as the meeting of Maori and Pakeha 'halves' on a shoreline location. As Chris Prentice has noted, 'the familiar (post)colonial chronotype of the beach is conventionally posited as a colonial site of first encounters between peoples, cultures, geographies, and histories; and often the settings for re-encounters, re-enactments and revisions, in the postcolonial moment' (Prentice, 2004: 212). It is both fitting and provocative that Te Papa's basic mission – representing nationhood – is being decided at this physical location, and is now being controversially negotiated through the subject of 'the beach'.

Of the criticism that Te Papa faced in its first few years, the legitimacy of biculturalism as a founding principle was secondary. The more immediate target for critics was its dedication to its twin 'corporate principles' of 'customer focus' and 'commercial positivity'. In practice, this meant interactive exhibits, friendly 'hosts' in place of security guards, semi-educational fun rides, and entertaining, pop culture-based exhibitions. After several damning critical appraisals, and questions from the Prime Minister herself about the quality of its research and displays, Te Papa made significant concessions to those who sought a more traditional, sober approach.² *Parade*, an experimental art-in-society exhibit, was closed, conventional gallery space for the national art collection was enlarged, and a new director took the helm. This crisis resolved, it appears that, in its capacity as an overt and pre-eminent expression of nationhood, Te Papa's continuing and strident promotion of Treaty-based biculturalism may make it contentious once again, as relations between the museum, tribal Maori, and the broader public become further out of step.

I have been particularly well placed to witness the challenges Te Papa now faces. My doctoral thesis, completed in early 2003, is a critical review of Te Papa's policies and practices. It concludes with a warning that the turbulent politics of Treaty claims and reparations might render Te Papa's rigid bicultural scheme outmoded:

Museums, unlike other institutions, are built with the expectation of uncommon historical longevity. In the way that Te Papa stands for 160 years of New Zealand's colonial past, we might reasonably expect to project its existence for a similar period into the future. Yet, in its current state, Te Papa stands as an institutional time capsule. By not taking seriously the idea that it can understand New Zealand's past in a way that will speak to future generations, the museum does its constituents a disservice. In spite of – or perhaps precisely because of – its heavy reliance on entertainment and its deployment of biculturalism as a future-ideal, it remains questionable that the museum will outlive its mid-1980s origins (Williams, 2003: 304-305).

After completing my dissertation, I joined the Waitangi Tribunal as a researcher.³ My arrival coincided with the onset of the furore over Maori claims to freehold access to the foreshore and seabed. The Tribunal's major report, which asserted Maori rights to test the extent of their customary ownership over this area, was not well-received by Government. The Prime Minister asserted that it was based on incorrect assumptions about the ability of Maori to challenge the sovereignty of Parliament.⁴ The Tribunal's counter-response – that this stance breaches the Treaty – has also been disregarded.

The task of considering Te Papa's treatment of the Treaty and land issues against concomitant political developments opens up an important philosophical sub-thread that runs through this article, namely: how can we measure and conceptualize the distance between political realities and idealized representation? To what extent are social history museums compelled, or able, to communicate their vision of how 'things really are?' The relation between 'real world' political events and museum representation raises questions about the use of mirroring techniques (like symbology, analogy, modelling, and mapping) in the (re)construction of nationhood. Museums function as critically important modeling agencies and mapping centers to meld ontological meanings with cultural terrains. Since there is no given or agreed upon position concerning, say, how Maori and Pakeha 'belong to' the land, museums can assume the task of providing conceptual templates. Indeed, Te Papa's architecture, spatial organization, exhibition topics, signage and suchlike, are overtly geared towards producing a vision of the world 'out there'. The issue of the balance between museums' involvement in *describing* the social and political zeitgeist, and helping to actively *decide* it, is one of the unresolved tensions inherent in the so-called new museology, which intends to aid the discussion of a society's controversies and divisive issues, yet also be broadly identity-enhancing (see Vergo, 1989). Can a museum effectively do both? Can it entertain popular opinion when it might conflict with a progressive mission? To explore such questions, I will perform a critical review of the museum's representations of land and place. After introducing Te Papa's commitment to a particular territorial interpretation of biculturalism, I will analyze its thematically relevant exhibitions: *Te Marae, On the Sheep's Back, Bush City, and Signs of a Nation*. My discussion will be directed towards a conclusion that evaluates whether Te Papa is currently in a position to productively engage the public in the debate over biculturalism. If so, it may become a *more* vital space of encounter; if not, it risks becoming marginal and anachronistic.

Territory and Identity

Our Place, Te Papa's brand-name, positions the museum as a micro-environment for the nation, evoking ingratiating notions of home and belonging. Its thumbprint logo also communicates an infatuation with identity and the unique mark citizens have imprinted on the nation's geographical space. By eschewing a 'Museum' title, *Our Place* also downplays the distinction between the museum's traditional aura and the routine, domestic sites of daily life – a Te Papa publication calls the museum 'a mirror on New Zealanders' lives'.⁵ This imitative principle aims to efface the distance between the social life of the nation and its representation in the museum. The idea of a two-way flow between cultural representation ('expresses and recognises') and public participation ('provides the means...to contribute') is legislated in the museum's Act, which states that the Board shall:

Endeavour to ensure both that the Museum expresses and recognises the mana [authority] 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. (Department of Internal Affairs, 1992, s.8, b)

Embedded in this directive is the vital idea that Te Papa should *express cultural identity*, rather than, say, 'display heritage', 'showcase antiquities', or 'record history'. The chosen terms indicate a preference for the communicative and subjective over the representative and objective. As a starting point then, Te Papa is as interested in popular mythologies as any definitive or accurate history. The indeterminate, exploratory nature of *identity* allows it to frame core programs and exhibitions (and its own institutional life) as revelatory and future-oriented. A promotional postcard calls Te Papa 'an amazing adventure – one in which all New Zealanders are travellers', Te Papa promotes itself as a *vessel* in both senses of the word: a container for valued treasures, and a vehicle for collective self-understanding.

Museums are particularly visible in their spatial orchestration. The size and character of spaces, the relation between them, their tone, and the activities they support significantly determine visitors' received messages (particularly in terms of geographies of centrality and

marginalization). A key part of Te Papa's production of meaning involves the way it projects its own spatial geography onto a politically informed concept of land and territory. *Our Place* denotes not only a possessive national 'our', but also a bicultural 'our' built on Maori-Pakeha partnership. Te Papa calls biculturalism:

the partnership between Tangata Whenua [people of the land] and Tangata Tiriti [people of the Treaty], recognising the legislative, conceptual Treaty framework within which the museum operates. Te Papa acknowledges the unique position of Maori in Aotearoa New Zealand and the need to secure their participation in the governance, management and operation of the Museum (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2002: 9).

The architectural competition for the museum, limited to national teams, sought entries that would 'powerfully express the total culture of New Zealand' (Project Development Board, 1991: 1). The successful firm proposed a plan stressing separate Maori and Pakeha elements. This is most evident at the main exhibition concourse on the fourth floor. To the left, towards the sea, are *Te Marae* and *Mana Whenua*, the Maori art and culture galleries. Their siting, overlooking the harbour and aligned with the Taiti valley to the northeast, is considered vital. On the right-hand landlocked side are the *tangata tiriti* galleries. The *Interpretive Plan* states that 'the northern (Maori) part of the museum, aligned with the harbour axis, expresses the natural elements associated with papatuanuku [earth mother] / tangata whenua, while the southern (Pakeha) part is aligned with the urban grid of the city' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 1992: 87). This spatial dichotomy constructs the indigenous and Western in a highly familiar scheme that situates the natural world against the built form, the spiritual against the material, and ecological harmony against capitalist development. With this larger institutional scheme in mind, I now turn to *Te Marae* to explore how Te Papa manifests its theme of cultural encounter in practice.

Te Marae: A Place to Stand

Te Papa is the world's only museum to have a functioning marae.⁶ As Opening Day celebrations attested, *Te Marae* is a key space in Te Papa's scheme to 'support the encounter' between Maori and Pakeha through an arrangement that 'preserves and respects the differences in the cultures while promoting a common ground of conversation between them' (Jasmax, 1991: 16). The design brief stipulated that the marae would 'express biculturalism' and tell 'the story of the creation of Aotearoa/New Zealand' (Jasmax, 1992: 89). Te Papa advertises its location through Maori creation myth:

As the children of Rangi and Papa [earth mother and sky father] established themselves in this world, they each developed special responsibilities – Tawhirimatea, for the wind, Tangaroa, for the oceans, Tane, for the forest and so forth. Thus it is appropriate that our marae is situated here, at the confluence of these elements.⁷

A brief explanation of the customary role of the marae is useful here. Vital to Maori mythical history, the marae migrated with Maori to New Zealand about 1000 years ago, and has been part of Polynesian culture for 3000-4000 years (Tapsell, 1999: 115). It is the cornerstone of tribal culture and provides spiritual, economic, social, and political organization. Maori beliefs about cosmogony and the origins of creation, life and death, and tribal unity find elaborate revelation in the woodcarvings of the wharehenui (the meeting house that forms the centrepiece of the marae). The wharehenui as a living presence 'is richer than mere simile; it is beyond the idea of metaphor or representation in a European educated sense. For the Maori, the house is not like an ancestor, it is the ancestor' (Linzey, 1989: 317).

Te Papa's decision to build 'Te Hono ki Hawaiki' ('the link back to Hawaiki'), a new wharehenui, reflects how, first in the 1920s under Apirana Ngata, and then, from the 1970s until now, the building has been re-politicised as a symbol of ethnic distinctiveness. It has been claimed that the Maori cultural renaissance would not have gained its visibility without the meeting house as its focus (Sissons, 1998: 43). Over the past 30 years the rejuvenation of

Maori art and language has also been promoted by the state with the political goal of improving Maori socio-economic standards through cultural pride (see Sissons, 1993). Hence, the well-publicized construction of Te Hono ki Hawaiki both speaks of the Maori 'cultural renaissance' and gestures towards the state's desire to be seen as publicly supporting the program to embolden Maori culture.

Cliff Whiting (former joint-Chief Executive Officer) led young apprentice carvers from throughout New Zealand, in the construction of a whareniui that would look quite unlike any other:

The decorative three-dimensional figures are cobbled together from pieces of composition board, embellished with pieces of galvanised iron cut with tin-snips, and painted with aerosol shading in garish non-Maori colours such as peacock blue, purple, and pale emerald, surrounding an inverted Japanese archway leading into a shallow interior surmounted by a row of Turkish minarets leading up into an impossibly sapphire sky. (Haden, 1998: 6)



Figure 1: Te Marae Picture courtesy of Te Papa.

Carvings of mythical Maori creation figures, gods and ancestors are positioned beside settler figures such as a missionary, farmer, and schoolmaster. Its interior walls feature carved reliefs similar in appearance to stained glass windows, while the back section features medieval Gothic doorways.

While its appearance is unorthodox, the issue of the cultural ownership of the marae space is arguably more contentious. Traditionally, the marae is the key symbol through which tribes assert their customary possession over land (and recognize another's). The local tribe exercise rights of invitation and procedure that governs the conduct of outsiders. Te Papa, however, has initiated an arrangement whereby 'the shared genealogy of the museum's collection' allows all peoples to feel 'at home' on the marae. Its *Interpretive Plan* asserts that the 'concept of Mana Taonga will enable the marae to extend its mana, or spiritual power, over the

treasures of both cultures, and will allow both cultures to use the marae for events and ceremonies' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 1992: 17).

By ignoring Te Ati Awa and Ngati Toa, the tangata whenua of the Wellington region, Te Papa alienates those with proprietary authority over the land, and undermines the local custom and knowledge that makes each marae unique. A marae without attachment to a local tribe exists in a kind of customary non-space. Te Papa has allowed much protocol to be waived: visitors can enter the space without being invited by local tangata whenua; those who visited Te Papa before its opening were welcomed to enter the marae during the traditionally tapu (sacred) carving process; visitors are not asked to remove their footwear; women are

afforded equal status to enter and speak as they wish; it is made available for corporate events where alcohol and food is present.

Te Marae is not so much a source of information about Maori origins, but a place for the universal unearthing of 'cultural roots'. Te Papa states that 'accepting the spiritual nature of Hawaiki enables this marae to be a place for all to stand.'⁸ The mythical, geographically ambiguous location of Hawaiki (from where earliest Maori voyaged – scholars deduce it may be the Cook or Society Islands) aids a metaphorical understanding: Hawaiki is anyone's spiritual home. Aspects of *Te Marae* develop this notion. In one corner a huge slab of pounamu (greenstone) sits in a font of water. Visitors are encouraged to run their hands over it, smoothing its surface, before being directed to water receptacles to remove tapu spirits. A desk teaches visitors about whakapapa by encouraging them to record their own genealogy for others to observe. Visitors write their affiliation to country, tribe, mountain, river, canoe, and parentage, before making a charcoal rubbing of a marae carving (a chief, missionary, teacher, etc) that most closely resembles their personal identity. Once the page has been made, the visitor is deemed to have a 'formal connection to the marae'. (Judging from visible entries, many struggled to conceptualize their identity through the categories on offer – tribe and canoe being particularly troublesome). The compromises inherent in *Te Marae* illustrate the wider issue of the inclusion of normally restricted indigenous custom in a national museum. The built-in paradox of the marae as both a place of privileged access and genealogical inscription, and a tourist site that seeks to promote Maori culture, means that it is simultaneously private and public, secret and publicized, nurturing and performative.

In its efforts to make the marae comfortable for Pakeha, Te Papa risks compromising the claim that Maori origins exist in deepest time, in a cosmogony unknowable to Pakeha. The autochthonous and animistic spirit-world that characterizes Maori creation myth (which also provides Maori with a principled category of claim to the seabed and foreshore) is situated in an alternative temporal and conceptual space from Enlightenment historical narratives. It disrupts the basic scientific order that posits the existence of nature prior to people. Yet geological and anthropological evidence attests that New Zealand is a land that has only very lately coevolved with humans. For most Westerners, the counter-intuitive nature of Maori claims to primordial existence means that they are typically accepted as poetic or fantastical, rather than evidential. Because the carvings in *Te Marae* do not claim authenticity stemming from their age, they risk being interpreted as making only pictorial reference to Maori creation stories. Confidence in the spiritual aspect of *Te Marae* requires a cognitive leap from the idea that it *resembles* a marae to the acknowledgment that it houses living spirits and *is one*. A Western perspective usually sees cultural considerations as symbolised additions to principles of building construction; an assumption that there are meanings 'behind things' makes culture and built form, subject and object, or mind and body separate (Rodman, 1993: 251). Visitors may believe *that Maori believe* in living ancestors, but do not know it themselves.

If it requires too great a leap of faith for some to accept that Maori believe that ancestral spirits inhabit carved objects and natural phenomena (like a meeting-house – or tides and beaches), *Te Marae* may not change their mind. 'Te Hono ki Hawaiki' is de-contextualized not because it has been salvaged from history after an earlier life, but because it began its life divorced from any original geographical and historical embedded-ness outside the museum. Its elevated location on the fourth floor (within a host institution) sequesters it from the outside world and makes it symbolic aspects, such as cosmogonic character representations of the winds, oceans and forests, more remote. Because *Te Marae* is so clearly seen as an exhibition space within a building, and because (for most visitors not invited to any special event) it has no welcoming ceremony, *Te Marae* lacks a clear encounter dramaturgy.

The thrust for accessibility in *Te Marae* is especially significant when we consider that the marae has historically been one arena where Pakeha culture stands at a disadvantage. *Te Marae* makes Maori culture available to all by conceptually organizing the ancestral presence that animates tribal histories towards a broader, inclusive category of shared genealogy. By deploying customary ideas in a democratic scheme, universalist ideas about roots are privileged over a specific, local Maori life-world. At this point, then, we might judge Te Papa's representations of a Maori worldview to be partly reconciliatory, given that they promote common cultural understandings over radical difference, and partly pedagogical, in

that they teach visitors to find some spiritual factor in their own history. Judging from *Te Marae*, Te Papa is less interested in communicating radical support for Maori political interests, based on incommensurable cultural worldviews, than in gaining broad public appreciation for a softer 'position of difference'.

Farmers at Heart: On the Sheep's Back

On the Sheep's Back, an exhibition about sheep farming, once New Zealand's signature industry, is comprised of several displays. 'Shear Hard Work' features images of men shearing in gumboots and black singlets, wool samples, an old wool press, and a photomontage of record-breaking shearing feats inside a reconstructed wooden wool shed. 'Grassy Empires' outlines, somewhat scantily, the importance of sheep for the colony's livelihood. Visitors learn, for instance, that from 1861 to 1995 sheep numbers increased from 2.7 to nearly 49 million, and the area of sown grass grew more than one hundredfold. 'Home is where the Art is' celebrates 'the home-spun creativity of New Zealanders working with wool.' It shows items like tea-cosies, Maori cloaks, socks from the First World War Great National Sock Appeal (which yielded 30,000 pairs), and woollen flowers made by a schoolgirl in 1885. In 'Woollen Yarns,' fashion garments from contemporary designers are displayed alongside pristine woollen suits stockpiled on remote Stewart Island in case of shipwreck. This section also features a competition for the best tale about a woollen bush shirt. One man used his to bury his favourite sheepdog. Another, trapped in a flooded creek, apparently turned his into a raft by tying it up and somehow inflating it.



Figure 2: Detail of *On the Sheep's Back* Picture taken by author with permission.

On the Sheep's Back makes wool the emblematic base for a broad field of meaning that encompasses Pakeha material comfort, rural social life, and communion with the physical environment. The exhibition uses wool and farming to convey the perspective that a distinctive Pakeha pattern of life and identity emerged as a result of interaction with the environment. This farming hypothesis posits that Pakeha reliance on land for work, leisure, and, less tangibly, cultural identification has played a large part in steadily producing a people who were not simply transplanted, but became a new breed. 'We're all farmers at heart,' exhibition designer Jock Phillips asserts, 'farming culture has deeply penetrated the New Zealand identity' (Poot, 1998: 117).

While the exhibition claims to be about *national* identity, Maori form a gaping absence. They are not explicitly excluded from the theme of working the land (and a high proportion did labour as farmhands and shearers), yet Maori names, images, or objects that might relate modern Maori labour history are (with the exception of the cloaks) absent. Te Papa upholds their 'real' relationship with the land as environmental, rather than agricultural. The restated theme of tribal narratives in the Maori gallery is spiritual connection with land. As we shall see, Te Papa does not (and perhaps cannot) reconcile farming culture in *On the Sheep's Back* with its attention in *Signs of a Nation* to the swathe of injustices that flowed from Treaty-sanctioned land acquisition. This incommensurability is captured in a revealing exchange between Ronald Trotter, former Chairman of the Board, and Georgina Te Heuheu, a Board member:

Georgina Te Heuheu: "How do we make biculturalism underpin our exhibitions? If we're talking about peopling ourselves, then we have to bring Maori into the equation. While the sheep runs were being developed, Ngai Tahu [the major South Island tribe], over 20 years, lost all their land."

Sir Ronald Trotter: "I came from a tough Scottish farming stock who came out in 1860 to the South Island where there were none of Tipene's [Tipene O'Regan, leader of Ngai Tahu] people – it was too cold for them – and if we don't give pride to that, well, we wouldn't be here. I mean we wouldn't be the country we are today. If we only stole things – and god knows they never thought they were stealing – then that's part of our understanding on the other side." (Cottrell and Preston, 1999)

The exclusion of a Maori perspective (not to mention Te Papa's general avoidance of the nineteenth-century Land Wars) masks the political, social, and economic dominance that allowed Pakeha to enjoy unhindered ownership and access to land. Capitalist settler society inevitably destroyed non-capitalist modes, which persisted in cultural forms, but collapsed as a viable alternative way of living due to a lack of material base (Denoon, 1995: 131). As Tom Brooking puts it, 'the simple idea that moral claim to land ownership was undermined if it was not used productively, in the end proved more destructive than bullets, racial stereotyping or social Darwinism' (Brooking, 1996: 162). The unacknowledged point is that national wellbeing – and by extension, national identity – has relied on Maori loss.

Farming represents a single industry where the dynamics of living standards and way of life are particularly entangled. It is strategically useful for displaying community and a 'natural' social history. Values of community, interdependence, and allegiance to place are more harmonious with Te Papa's 'our place' theme than urban values of individualism, competitiveness, and transience. The material organization of urban life makes its exhibition more difficult; while relations of consumption are highly evident, modes of production in cities are often invisible. Yet given that New Zealand is highly urbanized – the 2001 census defined 85% of the population as city-dwellers – a rural focus for settler history might be seen as mystifying (Department of Internal Affairs, 2001). Why focus attention on land rather than built cultural heritage, particularly when progress is more easily demonstrated through the development of cities – from the makeshift town to the metropolis? One explanation lies with the pattern of New Zealand's urbanization. Its cities, typically large and low density, may lack an idiographic cultural geography. Cities also possess profoundly modern geographies, sitting atop or concealing what might be perceived as the 'true character' of the land.

Reconstituting Nature: *Bush City*

Yet if *On the Sheep's Back* focuses on farming's restraining of the land, the space in which Te Papa communicates the theme of exalting the wilderness has its own problematic interpretation. *Bush City*, Te Papa's recreated outdoor habitat island, compresses vivid geomorphic forms along intersecting paths, just metres from the sea. Visitors can stroll past lush native fauna, cross a swing-bridge over a freshwater stream, enter a dark limestone cave with moa bones heaped at the bottom, climb an imitation lava flow, and visit a dripping wetland. As the nature trail develops, the vegetation thickens and the museum's exterior is obscured from view.



Figure 3: Swing bridge in *Bush City*. Picture taken by author with permission.

The exclusively native composition of *Bush City* emphasizes Te Papa's strong Maori accent, and draws on the strong link in the public imagination between conservationist and indigenous values. A micro-environmental project like *Bush City* can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture supportive of Maori sovereignty over land, indigenous species, and ecosystems. Indeed, it is appealing to draw a symbolic correlation between the re-flourishing of a self-sufficient, native ecosystem and Maori culture. Viewed as a kind of postcolonial bush garden, *Bush City* can be interpreted as a corrective to the colonial impulse that saw much of New Zealand replanted in the botanical image of Britain.

However the artificiality of *Bush City* unsettles this equation. A sign along the path informs visitors that the bush has been reconstructed to resemble the Wellington shoreline 200 years ago. The ecological recreation of these biotic realms – on what is reclaimed land – makes *Bush City* not only hyper-real, in the way it condenses natural features, but also *unreal*, in the sense that it is a recreated environment that no longer naturally exists. This

simulated microcosm transcends and denies time, by winding back history, and also space, since the reality of the location is replaced by an idealized habitat. Ideologically, the exhibition wipes away the impact of exogenous species and re-envisages pre-European purity. While *Bush City* may honour the Maori ability to maintain a connection with land despite despoliation, it also suggests a desire to cover over the geographical scars of colonization. By recreating native bush from 200 years ago (rather than, say, 2000), the tacit awareness that Maori lived in such spaces suggests harmonious coexistence – despite evidence that Maori burnt off huge portions of native forests (and made extinct the moa whose bones rest at the cave's bottom). Pakeha are equally not without blame in this area. While it may have been colonial governments that were responsible for the creation of New Zealand's first national parks, the paradox is that conservationism emerged partly as a response to the ecological mistakes and excesses of colonial rule. Moreover, conservation laws were only possible because of the huge land area under direct European control – 85% of the country by 1914 (Park, 1999: 183).

In the present, land and environmentalism remain the pivotal topics for Maori-Pakeha conflict that most evidently connect the nation to its colonial origins. The central disagreement is best conceptualized as one between *being in place* and *being out of place*. The emergence in the 1970s of a Maori resurgence that focuses on land for its cultural, spiritual, legal and political impetus, and of a Pakeha nativist movement that seeks to cultivate a unique local culture on home soil, has heightened (though seldom harmoniously) the general social awareness of the bond between identity and territory. Maori and Pakeha often conceive of their relationship with homeland in diametrical opposition. Radical Maori criticize the ecological outcomes of settlement, such as mining, deforestation, and urbanization, as the figurative rape of papatuanuku and the desecration of the base of the Maori worldview. Pakeha conservation legislation is duly criticized as being part of a Romantic European tradition that artificially separates people from nature (see, for instance, Greenland, 1991: 93). In opposition, contemporary Maori land rights claims are linked, for many, with the protection of a static and subsistence existence. For many, a Maori assertion of a principally environmental relationship with the land upholds a suspicion that they were incapable of extracting a surplus from the land, and that the nation's agricultural-industrial development could only begin with the settlers. Land claims that go back to the nineteenth century indicate for some that Maori are too embedded in place, and hence, non-modern. While a rational modern mentality pursued a relationship *with* the land, particularly in the form of extraction and surplus, an irrational, primitive mentality was *in* and *of* the land (Gibson, 1992: 6). In their objection to Maori claims for reparation for colonial wrongdoing, manifest most recently in the foreshore and seabed issue, Pakeha often implicitly reject their own historical sense of place. Those who consider themselves 'innocent' of the actions of colonial forefathers inhabit a position *out of place*. That is, they rupture any tie between bloodlines and land, and instead imagine an individualistic 'born-again' relationship with history and place. Spatially, an idealization of New Zealand as a 'farming land' makes *On the Sheep's Back* a microcosmic simulacrum of a national whole, since farmland no longer provides the material and geographical basis for most New Zealander's lives. As a result, despite its familiar nationalist iconography, the exhibition may produce for many Pakeha an uncanny sense of dis-location. As we shall see next, the relation between the cultural attitudes of the public at large, and politico-judicial claims becomes further confused when the legal and political basis of the nation is itself the exhibition topic.

The Treaty: *Signs of a Nation*

Signs of a Nation, Te Papa's physical and cultural crux, is more overtly political and stridently pedagogic than other exhibitions. Combining architectural motifs of both the cathedral and the marae (including a soaring, wedge-shaped ceiling with interlocking brown and white 'finger' beams), the exhibition is located at the meeting of the Maori and Pakeha galleries. Its spatial metaphor works with the idea that interpretation depends on 'which side you come from.' Dominating the space is a soaring glass Treaty replica, yellowed and tattered. Visitors learn that, after being nearly lost in a fire in Government offices just a year after its signing, the Treaty was forgotten, before being rediscovered in 1908, rat chewed and water-damaged.

On each side of the replica are tall wooden panels inscribed with the full text. On one side is the Maori version; on the other is the English. Seats in front of the panels provide a place for visitors to contemplate its short articles. A display that places an English translation of the Maori text alongside the English text shows how the two versions did not match, and asks the reader to judge which offered Maori more (the evident conclusion being the Maori version). At the entrance is a thicket of audio tree-poles featuring a variety of conflicting views about the Treaty: *'Nobody owns the fish in the sea.'* *'These protestors – you never know what they want.'* *'The Treaty is just a gravy train for the rich Maori elite.'* *'We need to stop this bickering, we are one people – at least that's what Governor Hobson said.'* *'We can support a symphony orchestra, but a full time Maori culture group wouldn't even be considered.'*



Figure 4: Treaty facsimile from *Signs of a Nation*. Picture taken by author with permission.

The exhibition is promoted as providing a contemplative space removed from daily life where visitors can discuss and debate the Treaty. A text panel reads:

The Treaty of Waitangi is a living social document. Debated, overlooked, celebrated. A vision of peaceful co-existence, or the cause of disharmony? An irrelevancy, or the platform on which all New Zealanders can build a future? The meaning of the Treaty changes depending on who's speaking. Engage with our founding document. Hear a range of voices from past and present. The floor is open for discussion.

However, aspects of *Signs of a Nation* expose the difficulty in making Treaty-based biculturalism – at heart a state program to manage difference – an appealing topic. The scale of the Treaty display discourages scepticism towards its relevance to contemporary life and suggests the Treaty's semi-constitutional status – at a time when its status in law is uncertain. While

drawing viewer attention to the original text may help the public to appreciate the original intentions of the Crown, it does little to elucidate what the 'spirit of the Treaty' – the key phrase in contemporary political decisions – might entail. The audible articulation of a range of widely-held ideologies in the talking poles (which were in fact fabricated by the exhibition designers) suggests that the Treaty's interpretation is largely reliant on public input. This masks the fundamentally governmental and bureaucratic nature of the Waitangi process. It is, in fact, the larger issue of the Treaty's existence in law and policy that has recently proven to be reliant on public opinion.

Te Papa had made this citizen-as-decision-maker premise explicit in the mezzanine space, which once featured the interactive touch-screen 'Power Game.' The opening screen showed the House of Parliament and a message: 'You are the Prime Minister. Can you stay in power?' The following screen reads, 'Your reaction to the Treaty Report will decide if people vote for you.' Next, the user is presented with a hypothetical scenario. In one, the user is told that decades ago army barracks, then a public hospital, were built on sacred Maori ancestral grounds. Maori claim that this infringes article two of the Treaty ('undisturbed possession of lands'). On the next screen, the user is presented with four different policy envelopes: from a conservative opinion columnist from *Kia Kahu Maori News*; from the Ministry of Finance; from Te Kohanga Reo (Maori language education); and from the right-wing 'True New Zealand Movement'. The viewer may choose, say, the Minister of Finance's envelope. 'Te Papa TV' broadcasts the decision: 'Land benefits all, no action needed, says PM.' Votes are counted, based on the policy envelope choices of previous users. The Finance Minister policy choice loses the election!

In this instance, the crudeness of Te Papa's citizenship training is stark. Imagining oneself as Prime Minister, the visitor is given great authority – and culpability. A basic link is forged between one's private political opinions, and representing the good of the nation. In this, the state becomes, quite simply, any citizen in a public capacity. It is notable that other visitors have overwhelmingly chosen policies favourable to Maori interests (hence, in a self-perpetuating process, those who follow this line also win elections). While the result may be explained by the receptivity to reconciliation that a journey through Te Papa encourages, or it might reflect the political preferences of those who visit the museum, it runs contrary to the tide of public opinion, and again suggests that the Treaty process is one which the public at large has a direct hand in shaping.

The crux of the difficulty of *Signs of a Nation* is that individuals identify with the nation rather than the state. Neither Maori nor Pakeha would typically view the Treaty as a popular national symbol. Yet, consistent with the museum's postcolonial stress, it is the only 'birth of a nation' moment on offer. Neither Captain James Cook (references to whom are thinly scattered) nor Abel Tasman (only mentioned in a temporary Dutch community gallery) are positioned as ancestral Pakeha heroes. Te Papa appears to dispatch these explorers back to Europe; they may have discovered New Zealand, but they are not of it. A focus on the Treaty resituates national beginnings in domestic time, and communicates the idea of two 'nations' mutually meeting and negotiating with one another (rather than one people discovering and subordinating another).

To counter an understanding that would make Maori the passive subjects of colonization, the objects in glass display cases behind the Treaty emphasize that Maori encountered European arrival with their own objects, symbols, and concepts equal to those of Europeans. The historic objects are organized according to the three Treaty articles. The 'Government/Kawanatanga' display contrasts Maori icons such as an 1830s United Tribes flag, native bird feathers, a greenstone weapon, and a Rakau whakapapa (staff with notches for reciting genealogy), alongside Crown items such as the national flag, a ballot box, and an 1841 Seal of the Colony. A video shows a range of historical dramatizations of Maori and Pakeha talking about the effect of the Treaty on their lives. Visitors can see Maori women peeling vegetables and discussing the Queen's impending 1954 visit; contemporary Maori rugby players comparing Treaty relations to sport; a young Maori woman likening 1970s Prime Minister Norman Kirk's appreciation for the land to that of Maori; a Scottish female colonist indignantly describing their own claim to the new country; and post-war Maori shearers doing the same thing. In 'Land and Cultural Heritage/Te Whenua me Nga Tikanga tuku iho' we see the iron

ruler, surveyor's chain and theodolite, and gold pocket watch that were tools of land appropriation. Contrasting Maori objects that speak of a continued connection with land include an eighteenth century whenua pot (for burying placenta) and a nineteenth-century carved pouwhenua (signpost). In 'Citizens' Rights/Mana Tangata' the shared experience of Maori and Pakeha is signified by a copy of the Magna Carta, a barrister's wig, a bayonet, wire-cutters, and a First World War Maori battalion helmet.

Judging from this display, the principle of an 'equal encounter,' crucial to a revisionist understanding of New Zealand's past, is difficult to make evident. The simple juxtaposition of two sets of objects (with each item given only a title and date) only minimally represents two different and competing streams of history and worldviews. Comparisons are coloured by the value distinctions regarding the significance of objects. Are Maori claims to land better represented through whenua pots or muskets? When wooden or flax implements are contrasted with those of iron or cotton, how might Te Papa dispel the assumption that one people technologically superseded another? Given such problems, Te Papa textually imposes the desired interpretation. A text panel emphasizes mutual impact:

When Maori and Europeans first encountered each other, it was a meeting of cultures and traditions as well as of peoples. Each culture took away what it found to be useful and interesting. For example, Maori were quick to appreciate the value of materials like iron, while Europeans collected specimens and made images of everything from plants and mammals to Maori artefacts. As a result of these encounters, both cultures began to be changed.

To further affirm this equality-in-difference, the panel contains a quote from Captain Cook: 'The green talk (greenstone) axes that are whole and good they set much value upon and never would part with them for any thing we could offer!' The need for editorial intervention indicates that objects alone may not be particularly effective at conveying the rupture between pre-contact and early colonial Maori society (represented through traditional taonga such as a whenua pot) and the subsequent social and economic effects of land alienation. Viewers can, at best, imaginatively construct some kind of conflict out of, say, the surveyor's chain and the traditional signpost. Yet neither artefact speaks far beyond its use value. Visitors unfamiliar with, say, the organization of tribal social structures and landholdings, will not learn this from the accumulated objects. Moreover, the objects are located within a highly ambiguous temporality. While mention is made of the contemporary legal struggles documented by the Waitangi Tribunal, absent are 150 years of struggle between early conflict and its present-day restitution. Decades of Maori toil and poverty that forms a substantial link between pre-contact society (represented by traditional taonga) and current claims are almost entirely missing, skewing the relation between past and present.

At the end of the gallery is a window with painted white godwits that appear to soar towards Wellington's hills. Viewers are told that the birds symbolize the nation's open future under bicultural partnership. A nearby video presentation shows diverse New Zealanders speaking about the significance of biculturalism and the Treaty in their lives. The use of video testimony in communicating public opinion appears, in a highly designed environment like Te Papa, somewhat indoctrinating. Instead of aiding an understanding of the topic, the sound bites largely advertise anti-racist cultural cosmopolitanism. In sum, despite its attempts to make the 'Waitangi process' publicly engaging, *Signs of a Nation* gestures towards the circulation of political opinion, but provides few channels for it. Between the speaking poles at the entrance, the grand Treaty facsimile, and the interactive 'Power Game,' visitors receive mixed messages about how they can 'have their say'. The exhibition forges a metaphoric relationship between the lack of discursive common ground in the versions of the Treaty, and the lack of a single institutional or legal body that can conclusively 'end' the differences – and hence, the viability of differing, variable public opinion. At this juncture, the Treaty has been proven decidable, not through some ethical or legal judgment, but through political whim. Hence, Te Papa's dedication to the Treaty as the key principle in the nation's cultural and political life appears a product of its time, at least inasmuch as it assumed that the public at large would come to embrace it in some pedagogical manner.

Conclusion: Principles of Difference?

We might anticipate that a museum like Te Papa would aim to produce new cultural meanings formed in reaction to those from the colonial era. For instance, we might expect Te Papa to forgo essentialist and backward-looking Maori representations in favour of those which award greater expression to the complexity and heterogeneity of Maori social life. Likewise, we might expect to see the influence of Maori on Pakeha cultural life. Yet what we find in both cases confounds expectation. In a recent article, Michael Goldsmith has criticized those who have illustrated the very different tones and historiographical themes Te Papa applies to its Maori and Pakeha areas. While he admits that the museum operates as a compensatory space by according Maori much greater prominence than they had previously enjoyed in the nation's cultural and political life, he asserts that this asymmetry is a natural reaction to inequalities resulting from colonial domination:

Criticisms of Te Papa that Maori culture is displayed too uncritically and Pakeha culture too frivolously are at one level irrelevant. There is no real double standard. *It is intrinsic to postcolonial biculturalism that it never accord equal treatment to the two sides of a bicultural relationship.* Biculturalism always carries moral and symbolic inflections that are differently weighted for the component halves. (Goldsmith, 2003: 4)

Goldsmith's argument is that some might regret or criticize this cultural formation, but they cannot dismiss it, as it is founded on powerful cultural assumptions. But this point only goes so far: given that biculturalism is hardly an invulnerable constant, for whom and at what juncture does it consistently 'carry' certain moral inflections? Assuming these ideas are open to negotiation or contest, is it right for a public opinion-influencing institution to attempt to maintain them, even against their political transformation?

This point raises important museological issues. One involves what a national museum should do, and to whom it is answerable. The extent to which it is promotional, or plainly representative is, in New Zealand at least, a matter that the institutions negotiate internally (with their mission in mind), and with government, corporate sponsors, and source communities. Further, how close to the core of a society can museums get? And is exposing a contentious core really what museums can do best? Another issue concerns the distinction between political outcomes and cultural representation. That is, New Zealand may dispose of biculturalism as a political program, but continue to accept it as something that is a natural part of the social and cultural – especially the cultural – landscape. That is, politics refers to the distribution of goods (something that affects all citizens), whereas culture is, in some ways, a good that 'adds value' (to use a commercially focused phrase Te Papa would favour) for all New Zealanders. Ethnicity may work as an organizing principle 'behind the scenes' in the departmental organization of the museum, and in identifying the audience. However the rigid segmentation of Maori and Pakeha ethnicities in exhibitions that focus on *culture* – as lived life – disallows the museum from truly making the notion of 'encounter' work.

Te Papa's efforts to govern difference are geared towards encouraging Pakeha openness towards a range of Maori conducts and intellectual resources, rather than an explicit critique of settler culture. The acts of exploring *Te Marae* and rubbing the pounamu, entering one's personal details in the whakapapa desk, or reading the Treaty in *Signs of a Nation* strongly suggests that Te Papa encourages a kind of 'performative civics' based around being bicultural. Te Papa's next challenge is to move beyond the identity dictate in order to make less principled, more cross-cultural (thematic instead of ethnic-based) insights about New Zealand's history. While biculturalism suggests a movement past traditional ideas associated with the unitary nation state, Te Papa's treatment of Maori and Pakeha as non-intersecting cultural totalities is rooted in an older colonial museum form. The nation's history, in all its variance and colour, is limited to and constrained by a basic opposition between Maori and Pakeha. Ultimately, Te Papa's history spaces create meanings that are anti-historical, in the sense that meaning is controlled and subordinated through a variety of tactics that attempt to construct for the visitor an artificial biculturalism.

Notes

1 The 1840 Treaty was an agreement between the British Crown and Maori chiefs. For the purposes of the Treaty, the British recognized those Maori who signed it as representing the whole of Maoridom. The Treaty consists of a preamble and three articles. Article I signs the rights of sovereignty in New Zealand over to the British Crown. In the Maori version, something quite different (*kawanatanga*, or governorship) was granted to the Crown. Article II reserved Maori *tino rangatiratanga* - full sovereign authority - over their lands, forests, fisheries and '*me o ratou taonga katoa*' (everything they valued). Article III stated that everyone in New Zealand would have the rights and privileges of British subjects.

2 See Griffin *et al.* (2000:31). Key negative reviews include Dalrymple (1999), Dutton (1998).

3 The Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 by the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. The Tribunal is a permanent commission of inquiry charged with making recommendations on claims brought by Maori relating to actions or omissions of the Crown, which breach the promises made in the Treaty of Waitangi.

4 'Foreshore plans will lead to countless new claims, says Brownlee,' *New Zealand Herald*, March 8, 2003.

5 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (1998) *Te Papa – Our Place: A Souvenir*, Wellington: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

6 For a virtual tour of the marae: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 'Te Marae,' n.d., *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa*, accessed January 11, 2000, <<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/marae>>.

7 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 'Te Marae,' n.d., *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa*, accessed August 19, 2001, <<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/marae>>.

8 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 'Te Marae,' n.d., *Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa*, accessed April 11, 2001, <<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/marae>>.

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