

*Poia atu taku poi: Unearthing the Knowledge  
of the Past\**

The word *poi* refers to a Māori dance or game performed with a ball-like object, to which a cord of varying length is attached. *Poi* refers to both the ball and the dance, which normally includes hitting and swinging the ball on its string, usually accompanied by music or a chant of some kind. *Poia atu taku poi*, *wania atu taku poi* (swing far my *poi*, skim onward my *poi*) are the age-old words used figuratively in *poi* compositions to send the *poi* on a journey over the land and its people; visiting mountains, rivers, forests, villages, *whānau* (families), *hapū* (sub-tribes), and *iwi* (tribes). The words demonstrate the importance of the connections a composer of *poi* compositions has with each of the above entities. *Poi* is recognised around the world as a performance item unique to Māori. This article questions the uniqueness of *poi* to the Māori people by showing that the origins of *poi* can be found in other regions of Polynesia. Specifically, this article will look at the beginnings of *poi* in Polynesia, tracing its movement from Western to Eastern Polynesia; the same path taken by Māori during their migration to New Zealand. This article will also look at games and dances from islands throughout Polynesia with forms and functions similar to those of *poi* to demonstrate the evolution of *poi* towards the forms known and used in contemporary Māori society.

MIGRATIONS

New Zealand is located geographically at the lowest apex of the boundaries that form what is commonly known as the Polynesian Triangle. The societies situated within this triangle are closely related to each other, sharing many linguistic and cultural characteristics. The patterns of Polynesian migration show a movement from West to East over a timeframe of around 3000 years. The movement within Eastern Polynesia was rapid and, so, the diversity of at

\* Note to readers: If requested by authors, it is the practice of this journal to italicise Māori words in text unless they are proper nouns (e.g. place names, names of tribes, names of people). Each Māori word will be translated in the text on its first occurrence; or where longer explanations are necessary these will be found in endnotes.

least some of the cultural practices between the islands is limited. However, Western and Eastern Polynesia differ greatly in some cultural domains, such as in that of language. Languages within Polynesia, as a whole, derive from what is known as the Austronesian family.<sup>1</sup> Languages within Western and Eastern Polynesia are, therefore, related but the diversity increases as geographical distance increases. For example, Rarotongan language is closely related to Tahitian and Māori but dissimilar to Tongan and Samoan. As will be developed later in this article, this linguistic relationship is important when investigating the origins of *poi*, especially in eastern Polynesia.

There are some cultural similarities between the Eastern and Western Polynesian cultures; as in the areas of games, sports and amusements. For example, *whai*, commonly known as “Cat’s Cradle”, involves the manipulation of a loop of string into various shapes representing aspects of daily life, and is an almost pan-Polynesian game. So too is *teka*, dart tossing, where the purpose is to throw the dart the furthest or aim it at a specific object. Previously, however, *poi* has rarely been described as a pan-Polynesian game. This article contravenes beliefs in its specificity to Māori people.

## ORIGINS OF POI

The early European visitor to Tonga, William Mariner, who lived amongst the privileged of Tongan society for four years from 1806, describes various games and pastimes of the Tongans, one of which includes a game called *hico*:

Hico, throwing up balls, five in number, discharging them from the left hand, catching them in the right, and transferring them to the left again, and so on... keeping always four balls in the air at once. This is usually practised by women: they recite verses at the same time, each jaculation from the right to the left hand being coincident with the cadence of the verse: for every verse that she finishes without missing she counts one. Sometimes seven or eight play alternatively.<sup>2</sup>

Modern Tongan spelling conventions replace the ‘c’ in *hico* with a ‘k’, *hiko*.<sup>3</sup> Ethnomusicologist, Richard Moyle’s<sup>4</sup> description of *hiko* is very similar to Mariner’s, describing the aim of the game as completing a text without dropping any of the stones or small fruits being juggled. Each rhyme completion constitutes one *ulu* or game. Players agree before the game how many *ulu* there are to be and those that match that number win the game.<sup>5</sup> Moyle provides various texts and translations of chants and songs that were and are still used by those who participate in *hiko*.

An interesting note is that one of the Māori meanings of *hiko*, in its repeated form *hikohiko*, is to “recite genealogy, indicating principal names on line and omitting others.”<sup>6</sup> In some cases, *poi* compositions incorporated these recitations of genealogy or *hikohiko*. *Poi* in traditional Māori society was used conjointly with *pātere*. A *pātere* is a type of *haka* (posture dance), usually composed by women, and designed to vent anger and frustration over malicious rumours being spread about the composer; the emphasis being on restoring her self-respect and dignity.<sup>7</sup> The composer sent her *poi* on an imaginary journey around places of importance, and included details of her *whakapapa* (genealogy), especially principal names, which aided

in proving the rumour's falsehood. Some of the texts provided by Moyle include a recitation of names and events not dissimilar to the content of *pātere*, suggesting a relationship between *poi* and *hiko*.

Of the various games practised in Tonga, Moyle notes that only *hiko* had a direct link to the supernatural and falls under the special patronage of Fehulini. Fehulini (also meaning "to move about"<sup>8</sup>) was a Tongan deity who appeared in the human form as a member of the opposite sex to whoever saw her or him. It is believed that those who became fond of Fehulini's affections would die and juggling would often be used to lure unsuspecting men to their death.<sup>9</sup> It was also considered *tapu* (sacred) to play *hiko* at night as such disrespect would enrage Fehulini, who would take the eyes of the offender and use them to play *hiko*.<sup>10</sup>

Another Tongan game that involves the use of a ball being swung up and down, is *hapo*; described by Edwin Ferdon as:

...a wooden rod some four feet long, at one end of which was fastened a strip of tortoiseshell whose ends had been bent to form a semicircular opening. At the opposite end of the stick a string was extended and attached to a small, round gourd. The length of the cord was just sufficient to allow the gourd to be tossed into the air and dropped through the tortoiseshell opening at the opposite end of the rod.<sup>11</sup>

Ferdon mentions another amusement consisting of "a two-foot length of cord to each end of which was fastened a hard round seed that he [William Anderson, a surgeon on Captain Cook's third voyage] estimated to be about the size of a musketball. The string appears to have been grasped at its midpoint... the trick was to whirl the seeds around rapidly without letting them strike each other."<sup>12</sup> The appearance of this amusement in Tonga in 1777 is significant in terms of determining the origins of *poi* in the Pacific, as the same action can be made using two *poi*. Ferdon refutes claims that *poi* is particular to New Zealand, arguing that the mechanics of the game described by Anderson (above) conforms to those of *poi*.<sup>13</sup> Ferdon further claims that the *poi* may have been "introduced to New Zealand from Tonga in historic, if not prehistoric, times, perhaps via a European vessel."<sup>14</sup> However, while this article concurs with the notion of *poi* originating in Polynesia, and perhaps even Tonga, it is highly unlikely that *poi* was introduced by European vessels, given the spread of *poi*-like games throughout Polynesia prior to European settlement.

While, the purposes of *hiko* and *hapo* differ to *poi*, the basic movements and motions of tossing or throwing small round objects, some attached to a piece of string, into the air in a circular motion can be compared to the mechanics of *poi*. Similarities are further suggested by looking at the various meanings of the term *poi* in H. Williams' *Dictionary of the Māori Language*, that is, a "Ball, lump, swing, twirl, toss up and down, make into a ball."<sup>15</sup>

In Uvea or Wallis Island, situated slightly north-west of Tonga: "Juggling (*hapo*) is an amusement for young girls. It is done nowadays with oranges, especially the bitter *moli uku*. The motions are made in time to a little song. Juggling contests are sometimes held among the girls, some of whom are said to be able to keep 4, 5, or 6 oranges in the air at a time."<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that the term *hapo* in Uvea and in Tonga have different meanings, but that they both still refer to a game that involves the tossing of a ball into the air.

Augustin Krämer<sup>17</sup> discusses three Samoan ball games, one of which is a game played with wild oranges that he calls *fuaga*. Krämer refers to the writings of John Stair who calls this game *O Fuanga*, which consisted of “throwing up a number of oranges into the air, six, seven, eight, and the object was to keep the whole number in motion at once.”<sup>18</sup> Other known names for the game are *tuae-fua*,<sup>19</sup> *tia’ifua*,<sup>20</sup> and *tifaga*.<sup>21</sup> According to C. Wilkes *tuafua* is played by five or six persons and “resembles the sport of the Chinese jugglers with iron balls. The first player sometimes takes as many as eight oranges, throwing them successively into the air, and endeavours to keep the whole in motion at once. They are very dexterous at this: if they miss three times the game is lost.”<sup>22</sup> According to Moyle, two other terms have also been recorded: *tuai fua* and *aupulaga*. Both of these terms, and *tuae-fua* provided by Wilkes, are unknown today and the game is commonly called *fuaga*.<sup>23</sup> *Fuaga* or *’aufua* derives from the verb *fua* which means to measure,<sup>24</sup> and is principally a girl’s game played in groups whilst sitting or standing. The aim of the game is to see who can juggle oranges or stones the longest. The measurement of progress is based on a points system derived from reciting or singing verses and, hence, is similar to the Tongan game *hiko*. Various examples of juggling narratives are cited by Moyle which cover a range of topics from simple children’s counting chants to more complicated retellings of Samoan myths and aspects of Samoan life. Moyle is skeptical that these narratives are anything other than the children’s interpretation of life in Samoa. He also believes that there are often illogical connections between the lines and that, in some narratives, the words are simply chosen for their rhyme and syllable count.<sup>25</sup> Moyle has tended to disregard the traditional relevance these chants once had and the impacts the loss of meaning may have had on the Samoan people as a result of the process of colonisation.

Krämer discusses another ball game, *te’auga*, where balls are juggled in a manner similar to *fuaga*, and thrown across the back of the juggler to other participants.<sup>26</sup> He refers to Stair who writes: “*O le Teaunga* was also played with a number of oranges, but in this game they were thrown up backwards.”<sup>27</sup> Wilkes includes a game called *tuimuri*, recorded by Krämer as *tuimuli*, and provides this description:

Any number of persons may play at it. They seat themselves in a circle, and divide into two parties. An orange is suspended from above, about two feet from the ground and each person is supplied with a small sharp-pointed stick. The orange is swung round, and as it passes each one endeavours to pierce it, some with great eagerness, others quite calmly, and others again with a wary coolness, all of which affords much amusement to the bystanders. The party wins who first succeeds in fairly hitting the oranges fifty times. It is played for mats, trinkets, etc., but more generally for a baked pig, which is eaten when the play is over.<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, further west of Samoa, in Fiji, there is a game called *veivasa ni moli*. *Veivasa ni moli* is “a game which consists of suspending a *moli* (orange, lemon etc.) by a string and trying to pierce it with the *vasa*, (a pointed stick) while it is swinging about.”<sup>29</sup>

Many of the Western Polynesian ball games already discussed can also be found in Central Polynesia. In the Northern Cook Islands, for example, the Pukapukan version of juggling called

*tilitili koua*<sup>30</sup> is played. *Tilitili koua* is a game played by both children and adults in which immature coconuts (*koua*) are juggled in time to a chant. In competition the aim of the game is to juggle continuously until the end of the chant. Unlike in Tonga and Samoa three *koua* are usually used with experts being able to juggle four.<sup>31</sup> This dramatic difference in number is probably due to the size and shape of the objects being used. In the Southern Cook Islands, ball tossing or juggling is known by a different name, *pe'i* and *pe'ipe'i*.<sup>32</sup> Here the objects used in the juggling are either the fruit of the candlenut tree (*Aleurites moluccana*), the seeds of the *tamanu* tree (*Calophyllum mophyllum*), or more commonly oranges; quite different from the *koua* used in the Northern Cook Islands. These balls were tossed vertically and transferred from one hand to another in an anti-clockwise direction, accompanied with chanted verses. To use seven or eight balls was to be an expert, while juggling four balls was considered easy. The aim of the game was to see who could keep a number of balls going for a good length of time.<sup>33</sup> There is no indication as to whether the chants were used as a points system as they were in Tonga and Samoa. The presence of juggling in Central Polynesia do, however, demonstrate shared cultural elements between Western and Central Polynesia.

In Tahiti, the term *pei* is “the name of an amusement in which stones or limes are thrown and caught.”<sup>34</sup> While little is written on the Tahitian game of *pei*, it can be assumed from the description given by J. Davies above, that it is similar to *pei* in the Southern Cook Islands. In Tuamotu<sup>35</sup> an informant named Paea tells of various games, sports and amusements (*makeva*) that he knew of in his youth (about 1895-1910).<sup>36</sup> One of the games Paea describes is juggling, which he terms *pei*:

...two to seven balls may be used but usually four, five, or six. A juggler is considered an expert if he can handle five or six. One ball is held in the left hand the others, up to four, are held in the right. With five or six, those that cannot be held in the hand are placed in the lap. The right hand tosses all the balls in it, then the left hand passes its ball to the right, catches the first ball tossed up by right hand and passes it quickly to the right hand, then being ready to catch the next ball, establishing a counterclockwise rotation. Some experts can reverse and make the difficult clock wise rotation. With each tossing of a ball from the left to the right hand, a word of a chant is pronounced. A typical chant from Vahitahi goes:

E au rai aku *pei*  
 Ara tahi, ara piti, ara toru (etc., until)  
 Ara iva, ara tinitini, manomano  
 Koua rere taku *pei* mai te rani e topa oh oh.<sup>37</sup>

*Pei* in Tuamotu uses balls made of either pandanus leaf or strips of plaited coconut leaf, which form the *popo* (ball). This is significant in that this is the first mention of balls being made of plants, similar to the *poi* balls of New Zealand. The game of *pei* is often also classified as a dance; Edwin Burrows provides an example of a chant used that he calls either a *haka* (dance) or a *pei*.<sup>38</sup> This is extremely interesting, as early observers of New Zealand *poi* have provided the term *haka poi* for a *poi* dance.<sup>39</sup>

A ball tossing game called *pei* or *kita'irama* is also recorded in Mangareva.<sup>40</sup> The term *kita'irama* derives from two words *kita'i* (to keep a number of balls in the air at once, to throw high) and *rama* (green fruit of the candlenut that formed the balls). *Pei* on the other hand is consistent with the name of the game found in Tahiti and the Cook Islands. Two terms provided, *pe'i* and *pei*, have often been confused with each other because various early dictionaries failed to recognise the glottal difference between the two words. *Pe'i* is the dance accompaniment of songs and *pei* is the action,<sup>41</sup> presumably, of throwing balls in the air although this is not stated. This is not too dissimilar to the term *poi*, which is often given the definition of being either the dance or the ball accompaniment. In a dictionary of the Mangareva language the glottal stop is not recorded but two definitions are provided: "1. a native dance, to dance with an accompaniment of singing, 2. to throw up little balls into the air with hands."<sup>42</sup> It would seem that the glottal stop disappeared, that the two vowels formed a diphthong and two meanings have been fused together under the one spelling; similar to the way the word *poi* has come to have various distinctive meanings associated with it.

*Pei* in Mangareva was very popular among the women only and often played at festivals and competitions, where the winner would receive a reward or prize. The winner was the person who could keep the same number of balls going the longest with an accompanying chanted song. As soon as a player dropped a ball, that player would retire until only one was left.<sup>43</sup> It appeared that *pei* was a favourite of chiefs who would command exhibitions and reward the winners. *Pei* was associated with the prenatal ceremonies of an expectant princess,<sup>44</sup> and as part of the entertainment for visitors at ceremonies associated with death<sup>45</sup> ; all of which shows the importance of the game within Mangareva.

Juggling in the Marquesas Islands was also a prominent game that included the recitation of genealogy. *Pei* "was a mother's game invented to teach children their genealogies and give the mothers a chance to boast of the number of their offspring."<sup>46</sup> It appears the game in this context was not as competitive as in other islands, but more good-humoured. The mothers would use either two candlenuts or two balls made of *fau* leaves (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*) bound with *pandanus* (*Pandanus odoratus/latifolius*) strips. This chant consisted of reciting the children's genealogy and mentioning important names of that child's *whakapapa*.<sup>47</sup> An example of part of a common chant follows:

1*	<i>Ui mai na tupuna</i>	1	The grandparents ask
5	"N'ai tenei pei?"	5	"Whose pei is this?"
	"Na matou"		"Ours"
	"N'ai 'otou?"		"Whose are you?"
	"Na Peke"		"Peke's" (father's name)
	"Na Peke?"		"Peke's?"
2	"Na Moho"	2	"Moho's" (father's father's name)
0	"Na Moho?"	0	"Moho's?"
	"Na Tutu"		"Tutu's" (great-grandfather's name)
	"Na Tutu?"		"Tutu's?" <sup>48</sup>

\* The numbers in the columns of the chants refer to the numbers of their composition lines.

The above chant is a recitation of the father’s line of descent, an important feature of Polynesian genealogy. The above chant is also similar to a Māori *oriori*, a traditional song which sometimes accompanies *poi*. These were lullaby-type songs “confined to the children of chiefs and the nobility and used to educate them in matters appropriate to their descent,”<sup>49</sup> which one could presume would have included lineage.<sup>50</sup>

E. Best provides an example of an *oriori* used as a *poi* song composed by Hine-i-turama who sang the lullaby to her child.<sup>51</sup> Comparisons to *pātere* can also be made as performances included the recitation of the composer’s *whakapapa*. While the functions of *pātere* and *oriori* are different from the function of chants used with *pei*, the similarities in terms of inclusion of genealogical information is too important to ignore. Genealogical chants are also included in Moyle’s research on Samoa,<sup>52</sup> but not under the section of juggling. The following example is similar to the above extract:

1	“O ai lou tama?” “O Pepe” “Pepe ai?” “Pepe Tū”	1	“Who is your father?” “Pepe” “Pepe who?” “Pepe Tū”
5	“Tū ai?” “Tū Sae” “Sae ā?” “Sae Tini” “Tini ā?”	5	“Tū who?” “Tū Sae” “Sae who?” “Sae Tini” “Tini who?”
1	“Tini Toloa”	1	“Tini Toloa” <sup>53</sup>

This type of mock genealogical chant, which moves from the present to the past, helped the children remember their genealogy. It was especially helpful for those children who had significant responsibilities as the future head of the family who would be required to recite their genealogy at formal occasions.

This can be likened to the situation in the Marquesas Islands, where the mothers would recite the father’s line of descent; and so too would Samoan children. While Moyle states that the example above stands apart from the so-called game songs because it had no specific name, no set sequence of movements, no competitive element, and could be played by only one person;<sup>54</sup> it may once have been used in juggling as it was in the Marquesas Islands. Similar to the genealogical chants in Samoa and the Marquesas Islands, at times, *pātere* also included the reciting of lines of descent in order to show the chiefly lineage of the composer.

*Pohutu*, another ball game that employs the balls used in *pei*, is also played in the Marquesas Islands, and closely resembles the *poi* balls. Attached to the ball is a chord that the player holds in order to bat the ball around with the free hand:<sup>55</sup>

*Pohutu* consisted of a bundle of *fau* leaves rolled up and bound with pandanus strips, the whole forming a ball about two inches in diameter. One of the pandanus strips was left projecting for some inches to form a handle. The game

was played by a single child who held the pandanus strip in one hand and batted the ball with the other, or by two children, one of whom held the strip while the other struck the ball. *Pohutu* were also used in the *pei* game in which genealogies were repeated. The *pei* game, as described by Handy suggests a close resemblance between the *pohutu* and the well known *poi* balls used by the Māori.<sup>56</sup>

R. Linton makes the connection between *pohutu*, *pei* and *poi* in 1923, whereas P. Buck in 1950 does not. Buck, however, is not alone in not connecting *poi* with the larger Pacific as other early writers on *poi* also fail to do so. Linton's observation is significant in that he associates *poi* with *pei*, which in the Marquesas Islands is juggling. From Linton's perspective, the Māori *poi* had a close relationship with juggling in the wider Polynesian area.

### AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

The culture that Captain James Cook and his crew encountered on their first visit to New Zealand was one whose origins stemmed from the tropical Pacific. Māori culture had adjusted and evolved due to changes in environment, climate and the resources they encountered on their arrival in the South Pacific nearly one thousand years prior. In terms of *poi*, what Cook and his crew observed was a game that had been transported from Eastern Polynesia and, thus, one that they had most likely encountered in its other forms elsewhere in the Pacific. They failed, however, to recognise it as a developed form of the pan-Polynesian forms described above and failed to recognise the changes *poi* had undergone in relation to circumstances. A change of resources and an increased complexity in production were likely to have caused *poi* to become a more valued and treasured item than the early explorers, who viewed it as a puerile amusement, had possibly thought.

Various writers on New Zealand history and, in particular, on Māori social life and customs have recorded their own observations of *poi*. Many of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century studies were based on mere observation and misperception; and very rarely was there any in-depth analysis of *poi*. New Zealand's early written accounts of juggling are limited to a report from Ernst Dieffenbach,<sup>57</sup> who wrote: "they have a game with four balls, exactly like that of the Indian jugglers, and they accompany it with a song."<sup>58</sup> Although this description is very brief and the name of the game is not recorded, it falls into line with the other records of Polynesian juggling discussed thus far. Other notable researchers who worked extensively in recording Māori ethnographies did not record Dieffenbach's observations of juggling, but this does not mean juggling did not exist.

It was not until the 1920s that Herries Beattie's<sup>59</sup> ethnological project on the Māori of the South Island validated Dieffenbach's observations. The project revealed that in various areas, namely Murihiku, Canterbury, Nelson and Westland,<sup>60</sup> *poi* was remarkably similar to the juggling style of Polynesia and yet quite distinctive from North Island *poi*. In Canterbury, an informant from the Tuahiwi region (north of Christchurch) told Beattie that "poi was throwing up and catching pebbles in various orders."<sup>61</sup> In Murihiku, two balls without strings were sometimes tossed up and caught. In fact, according to one Murihiku informant *poi*, in its juggling form, started at Opunake in Taranaki. Another alternative form of *poi* recorded in Murihiku involved

the players kneeling, sitting or standing facing each other with the balls being thrown back and forth to each other, similar to what was recorded in Nelson where *poi* was likened to boxing.<sup>62</sup>

The fact that juggling was only known to have occurred in the South Island (of Aotearoa/New Zealand) provides another connection between South Island *poi* and its origins in Eastern Polynesia. Contemporary linguists have discovered that dialects from the East Coast of the North Island and the South Island are extremely close to the languages of the Southern Cook Islands.<sup>63</sup> This is probably due to the migration of Māori from the East Coast to the South Island prior to European arrival. Linguists have also recognised that the South Island dialect has features which suggest close contact with the Marquesas Islands.<sup>64</sup> Both of these links are supported by the similarity of the South Island version of *poi* to games played in these other places, namely between Murihiku *poi* and Marquesas *pei*.

In Eastern Polynesia the term *pei* and various forms of the word (*peipei*, *pe'i*) are often associated with throwing or juggling ball-like objects in the air. An alternative meaning of *poi* also means to throw or toss something. *Pei* is also used as the name of the ball and likewise *poi* is also used for the term “ball”. The term *pei* suggests a strong linguistic link between Eastern Polynesia and New Zealand. There exists well-documented research of movement from ‘ei’ to ‘ai’ evidenced in dialectal variations, for example from *kei* to *kai*, and from *hei* to *hai*. It is also possible, therefore, that there was a further movement from ‘ai’ to ‘oi’, given the movement from ‘a’ to ‘o’ documented by E.Tregear.<sup>65</sup> In Western Polynesia, the same type of juggling occurred with the names *hiko*, *hapo* and *fuaga* being the terms used in Tonga, Uvea and Samoa respectively. The word *hiko* is used as an aspect of *pātere* and *oriori* in Māori; the recitation of principal names in order to dispel certain derogatory rumours, and , respectively, lullabies informing high-born children of their genealogy. Both are traditional accompaniments to *poi*.

## CONCLUSION

The assumption that the *poi* ball is unique to New Zealand is incorrect. As has been outlined in this article, the *poi* ball originates from Polynesia in a simpler form than what we know it to be today. In almost all of Eastern Polynesia, *poi* is a term for a type of dish where food such as *taro* and breadfruit are mixed with water and mashed into a pulp. In New Zealand the food dish *poi* was not a part of the staple diet of the Māori people, hence this meaning became obsolete. The term remained, however, and some of the meanings that are associated with *poi* now may be reminiscent of the tossing actions employed in making the food *poi*. The fact that the two terms, *pei* and *poi*, and their various similar meanings in New Zealand and Eastern Polynesia have undergone such little linguistic change strongly suggests that the *poi* ball is not unique to New Zealand as has been commonly thought.

The game where a ball is attached to a string and swung around is not unique to New Zealand. The “cup and ball” game popular in Tonga (*hapo*) is similar to the motions of *poi*. While the object of this game may be different to *poi*, the manual dexterity required of the wrist in order to manipulate the flight path of the ball attached to a string is similar to the actions needed to execute the *poi*. *Veivasa ni moli* in Fiji and *tuimuli* in Samoa may be quite different from *poi*

in terms of the aim of the game, but again the fact that a ball-like object is swung on a string connects the two. The Marquesan game of *pohutu* (a ball attached to a handle batted about) was compared with *poi* in 1923, but this intriguing comparison was never elaborated on or followed up by subsequent writers.

*Pei* in Eastern Polynesia did not develop into a dance accompaniment. It rather remained a game, sport and/or amusement, which the early explorers and subsequent missionaries categorised it as being. It is possible that once placed within such categories, it was never allowed to evolve into an autonomous performing arts genre of its own. *Poi* in New Zealand was seen as merely a game by early explorers, but the development of *poi* beyond being a game and its inclusion in the area of performing arts existed prior to European arrival. This article has examined the origins of *poi* in relation to claims that the *poi* ball is unique to Māori. *Pei, hiko, hapo, fuaga, tuimuli, veivasa ni moli* and *pohutu* can be seen as the progenitors of *poi* and a progression of these related games can be traced from Western to Eastern Polynesia, with a similar form being found in the South Island of New Zealand.

- 1 R Benton, "The History and Development of the Māori Language" in G McGregor & M Williams (eds), *Dirty Silence: Aspects of Language and Literature in New Zealand* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.
- 2 W Mariner, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands* (London: John Murray, 1817), 344.
- 3 CM Churchward, *Tongan Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 223.
- 4 R Moyle, *Tongan Music* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987), 216.
- 5 EV Collocott, *Tales and Poems of Tonga*, Bulletin 46 (Honolulu: Bernice P Bishop Museum, 1928), 100.
- 6 HW Williams, *Dictionary of the Māori Language*. (Wellington: GP Publications, 1971), 50.
- 7 M McLean, *Māori Music* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996), 41.
- 8 Collocott, *Tales and Poems of Tonga*, 100.
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