

Submission

This is a submission made to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of nonrecurrence who, has been mandated to “*identify, exchange and promote good practices and lessons learned, and to identify potential additional elements with a view to recommending ways and means to improve and strengthen the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.*”

It is submitted that this submission will assist the Special Rapporteur to complete his report to the 76th session of the General Assembly with particular reference to the examine the question of the adoption of transitional justice measures to address the legacy of serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in colonial contexts in the little-known experience of the people of the Cook Islands. The Cook Islands (Cook Islands Māori: Kūki 'Āirani) are a self-governing island country in the South Pacific Ocean in free association with New Zealand.

The gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in this colonial context were likely committed or connected to a number of Member States including but not limited to Peru, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand.

Victims and affected communities have not been effectively consulted in the design and implementation of any measures such that it is only this submission by an affected community that is capable of bringing these events to the Special Rapporteur’s attention.

Consent is given to the Special Rapporteur to publish this submission.

Representative Actor

This submission is made by Mr Wilkie Olaf Patua Rasmussen, a relevant stakeholder: He is a Lawyer working in the Cook Islands and a former Member of Parliament for Tongareva (Penrhyn Island). He was also Minister of the Crown. He is also an anthropologist by vocation and has conducted research into the history of slavery in the colonial context of the people of the Cook Islands as set out below. He supports and is supported by “Te Au Huanga o te Hiti Tangata Tongareva. (The families of the people of Penrhyn)”. The people of Tongareva are based on the Island in the Cook Islands and around the various Islands of the group, in New Zealand and Australia. There are others in other parts of the world.

As set out below, no mechanism has been initiated by any responsible Member State to promote truth, justice, reparation and guarantees for this shocking piece of history and there is currently no formal action through civil society. Accordingly, it is submitted that Mr Rasmussen is a representative actor for the purposes of this process.

Summary of events which engage the need for Member States to promote the truth of the events in Polynesia and the need for justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

The Peruvian slave raids of 1862-63 struck the islands of Polynesia with the force of one of the regions tsunamis.¹ The repercussions, were traumatic with overwhelming consequences for the islanders, where communities were reduced by two thirds causing destruction of social structure and a devastating effect on culture, identity and heritage.

During a seven-month period between September 1862 and April 1863, 33 vessels called at 51 islands in Polynesia, kidnapping thousands of men and women by violence and treachery under the pretence of ‘recruitment’ and setting course to Peru where they died on route or were lost forever with no meaningful repatriation and disastrous effect on those still left on home islands.²

No mechanisms have been established in Polynesia, or specifically the Cook Islands, to hold anyone accountable for this gross violation of human rights and serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Mechanisms to hold persons accountable have yet to be established for the following reasons: (1) the slave trade’s absolute decimation of the Polynesian population – on many islands, over 50% of the population were recruited;³ (2) the unwillingness of States to reckon with their own history and possible complicity;⁴ and (3) because this slave trade succeeded only through the efforts and involvement of many parties.

The first ship, *Adelante*, fitted out with iron gratings and hatches to prevent escape, armaments, insufficient food and guards, was chartered by a Lima company formed by J.C. Byrne from Ugarte y Santiago. Byrne held a ‘permit’ to voyage to the South Western Islands of the Pacific to obtain a ‘trial shipment’ of colonists to engage to serve in Peru for five years.⁵ A total of 472 people (from a population of 700) were taken from Tongareva to Peru⁶ and those who survived were sold for significant profit leading to the wholesale decimation of the island populations.⁷

Contemporary research views this violent and deceptive migration as slave trade.⁸ Missionaries often collaborated with labour recruiters.⁹

Surrounding States did not provide any assistance, either: the United States was engaged in the Civil War, Hawaiian officials were ineffective and “Britain, which had important interests in

¹ Henry E Maude, *Slavers in Paradise* (ANU Press, 1981) (‘Maude’) (intro pxix)

² Henry E Maude, *Slavers in Paradise* (ANU Press, 1981) (‘Maude’).

³ *Ibid* 192.

⁴ See, eg, Jordan Hayne and Georgia Hitch, ‘Scott Morrison says slavery comments were about New South Wales colony, apologises for causing offence’, *ABC News* (online, 12 June 2020) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-12/pm-apologises-offence-caused-slavery-comments-clarifies-remarks/12348716>>.

⁵ Maude 5.

⁶ *Ibid* 6; Jonathan Milne, ‘Blackbirds: Shackled inside the slave ships to Peru’, *Cook Island News* (online, 5 July 2020) <<https://www.cookislandsnews.com/weekend/blackbirds-shackled-inside-the-slave-ships-to-peru/>> (‘Milne’).

⁷ *Ibid* 6-7, 51, 192.

⁸ Brij V Lal, ‘Book Review Forum: H. E. Maude, *Slavers in Paradise: The Peruvian Labour Trade in Polynesia, 1862-1864*’ (1983) 6(2) *Pacific Studies* 60, 64.

⁹ Maude 76-7, 174-5.

Polynesia, procrastinated, not deciding until the traffic was virtually over, whether or not the islanders were entitled to British protection.”¹⁰ Although the French government helped secure the abolition of the traffic,¹¹ these attempts were self-serving: firstly, the French were attempting to impose Emperor Maximilian on the throne of Mexico and Peru stood with Mexico against these attempts;¹² and secondly, French citizens, subjects and protected persons from Polynesia were affected by the slave trade.¹³ Thus, France’s attempts to stem the flow of trade from Polynesia to Peru could be said to be strategic.

According to Wilkie Rasmussen, “[t]he effect on our island [Tongareva] was quite catastrophic. We now have missing pieces in our ‘akapapa. There have been generations that have been cut off from their heritage.”¹⁴ Further,

If culture is ‘the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations’, what were the effects of the loss of so many people in places like Tongareva? The sudden departure of more than half the population meant losing a wealth of knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours that would not be passed on to future generations.¹⁵

There was a brief attempt to repatriate 207, or approximately 10% of the 2116 Polynesian people who had landed in Peru and 1009 of those who arrived too late (after the licence system was suspended) to be allowed to land. Of the total of 3125 brought to Peru, only 157 reached a Polynesian island alive (46 were Gilbertese) and only 15 landed in their home island.¹⁶

The effect of the Polynesian slave trade by those professing to be racially and culturally superior was plainly a colonial experience and amounted to near genocide.

Answers to the Questionnaire issued by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

No measures at all have been adopted in the Cook Islands to provide reparations to victims of the slave trade between September 1862 and April 1863. There are several challenges in this regard. Firstly, there is the lack of awareness of this issue outside of Polynesia. Pani, who was one of a few who returned to the Cook Islands after he escaped the ship he was enslaved on, has barely been acknowledged in written histories.¹⁷ This lack of awareness translates to a lack of funding to research to preserve the history of what happened to people from the Cook Islands who were taken away, never to return.

Secondly, without funding for research, it is impossible to embark a mission of identifying who was actually responsible for the Polynesian slave trade. At the time, the conclusion of the slave trade in Peru took place overnight when the Peruvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Juan Antonio

¹⁰ Harold E Davis, ‘Book Review Forum: H. E. Maude, *Slavers in Paradise: The Peruvian Labour Trade in Polynesia, 1862-1864*’ (1983) 6(2) *Pacific Studies* 60, 65 (‘Davis’).

¹¹ Davis 65

¹² McCall 61-2.

¹³ Maude 150.

¹⁴ Milne.

¹⁵ Rachel Yates, ‘Language, culture and the impact of ‘Slavers in Paradise’’, *Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Blog* (Blog Post, 4 August 2017) <<https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2017/08/04/cook-islands-language-week-language-culture-and-the-impact-of-slavers-in-paradise/>>.

¹⁶ Maude 164

¹⁷ Milne.

Ribeyro, realised that the scheme was an economic failure.¹⁸ It was not in Peru's interests to further place responsibility on anyone for the slave trade.

Removal had a particular effect on the women and children left behind. This deserves bespoke research as to the gender perspective of this particular slave trade which, thus far, does not appear to have been tackled at all.

Henry Maude's research published in 1981 began an exercise in historical record from his personal effort but time has not led to formal promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

While Peru granted 'licences' to recruit Polynesians, the actual recruiters could also be held responsible and, by connection, corporate entities who may still exist. The relevant ships appear to have sailed under a range of flags, including Australian. So too the London Missionary Society, and by extension, Britain appears to have had significant input into this appalling exercise. The long but important process of untangling who is responsible for this slave trade can only commence with research funding and support from bodies like the UNCHR.

Despite the devastating long-term effects of this colonial slave trade under the guise of 'recruitment', save for the work of Henry Maude, some other academics and Mr Rasmussen, investigation is a major challenge, no meaningful opportunities have thus far been encountered and sanctioning has not occurred. Accordingly, the answers to the questions are as follows:

1. No mechanisms have been established in the Cook Islands or by responsible Member States to hold accountable persons accused of committing or bearing responsibility for this gross violation of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law in this colonial context.
2. No measures have been established in the Cook Islands or by responsible Member States to inquire on and establish the truth about these gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in this colonial context. No victim or affected community have been effectively consulted in the design and implementation of such measures and no gender perspective has been adopted.
3. No measures have been established in the Cook Islands or by responsible Member States to provide reparation to victims of these gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in this colonial context. No reparation has been provided. No victim or affected communities have been effectively consulted in the design and implementation of such measures, and no gender perspective has been adopted.
4. No measures have been established in the Cook Islands or by responsible Member States to memorialize these gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in colonial contexts. No victim or affected communities have been effectively consulted in the design and implementation of these measures, and no gender perspective has been adopted.
5. No measures have been established in the Cook Islands or by responsible Member States to guarantee non-recurrence of these gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in colonial contexts. If

¹⁸ Maude 147-8.

such mechanisms were not adopted, please explain why. No victims or affected communities have been effectively consulted in the design and implementation of such measures, and no gender perspective has been adopted.

Enclosures

1. Rachel Yates, 'Language, culture and the impact of 'Slavers in Paradise'', *Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Blog* (Blog Post, 4 August 2017) < <https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2017/08/04/cook-islands-language-week-language-culture-and-the-impact-of-slavers-in-paradise/>>.
2. Jonathan Milne, 'Blackbirds: Shackled inside the slave ships to Peru', *Cook Island News* (online, 5 July 2020) < <https://www.cookislandsnews.com/weekend/blackbirds-shackled-inside-the-slave-ships-to-peru/>>.
3. Summary of Henry Maude's research <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/114682>

Web Links to Resources

RACHAEL YATES

Language, culture, and the impact of ‘Slavers in Paradise’

By: [Rachel Yates](#)

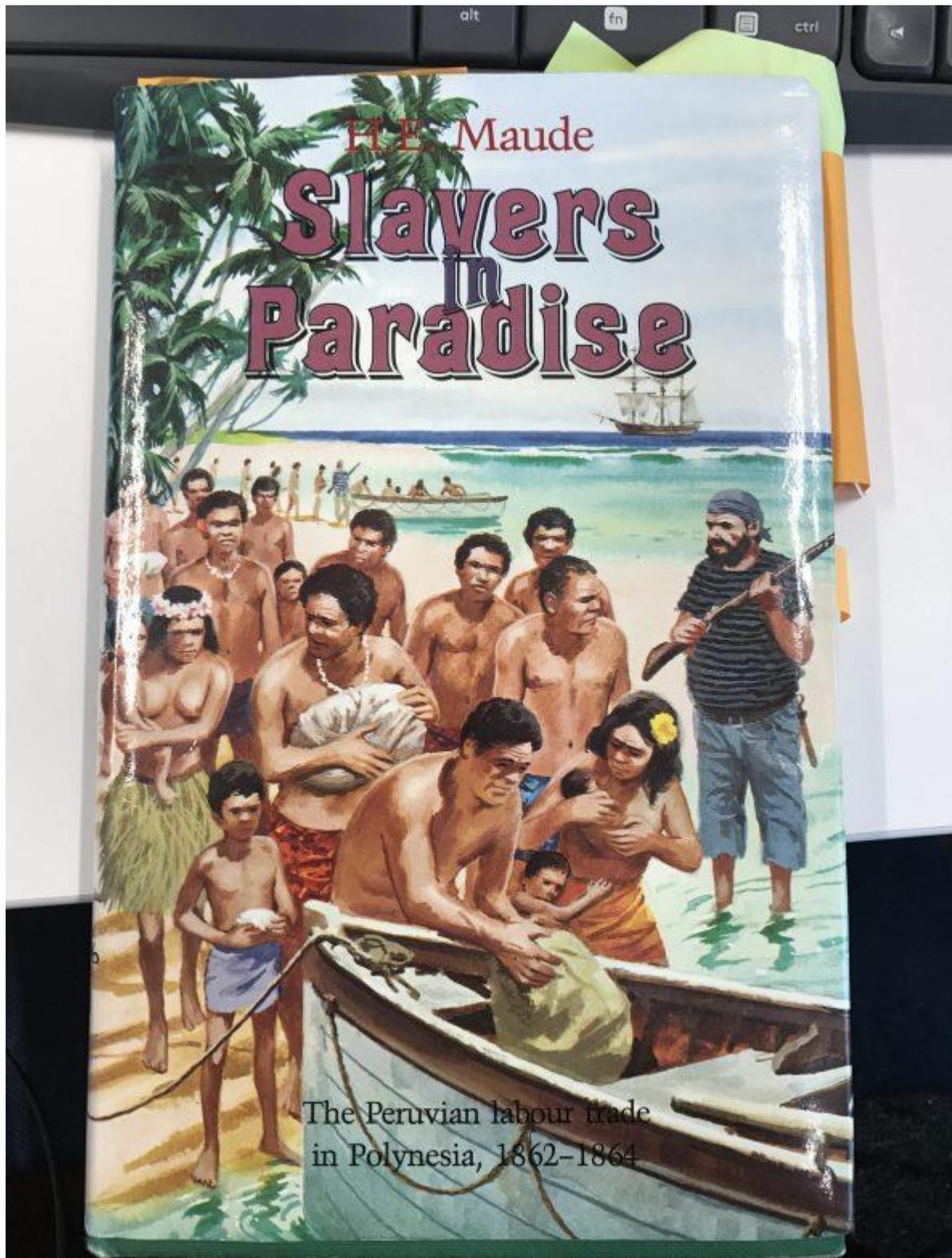
On: 4 Aug 2017

Language, culture, and the impact of ‘Slavers in Paradise’

Curator Pacific Cultures Rachel Yates takes a look at the book *Slavers in Paradise*, and a lesser-known episode of Cook Islands and Pacific history.

As part of the lead up to [Te ‘Epetoma o te reo Māori Kūki ‘Āirani \(Cook Islands Language week\)](#), I made a list of potential reads, mainly historical non-fiction books featuring writers or stories from the Cook Islands that I would dedicate time to reading as part of the week. This brought me to H.E Maude’s *Slavers in Paradise* (1981), about the Peruvian slave traders and their short but devastating presence in Polynesia in the second half of the 19th century.

It’s a heart-breaking yet gripping read and in many instances I found myself unable to read long passages at any one time. On one occasion I had to put the book down after reading about helpless fishermen, working to provide for their families, being chased down on the open sea by larger faster ships and taken unwillingly to Peru.



Maude, H. E. (1981). *Slavers in Paradise: The Peruvian Labour Trade in Polynesia, 1862-1864*. Canberra. Photograph by Rachel Yates

In the 1800s, many of Peru's exports came from large plantations producing sugar, cotton, grains, and olives, etc. as well as coastal guano mines. They were lucrative industries requiring a large labour force, provided in the form of slaves.

These industries experienced huge change when, in 1854, slavery in Peru was abolished and business owners struggled to find workers to continue production of these large enterprises. Under pressure from landowners, the Peruvian government passed a law in 1861 enabling the importation of workers including Chinese coolies and Polynesians.

Slavers in Paradise looks at the traumatic events of recruitment (which included people leaving their home islands by choice, being misled and also those who were forced and kidnapped) by Peruvian ships in the Polynesian region.

Theoretically, Polynesians were taken to Peru as migrant workers and were classified as colonists who willingly entered the country on the premise that they would work in reasonable conditions, be paid, and returned to their homes. In actuality, they were slaves. They became the property of others and were subject to their rules and conditions for not only the work required of them but their lives.

The Cook Islands play a significant role in this heritage as the practice began in the Northern Cooks in 1862 when an unscheduled stop in Tongareva (Penrhyn), the northern-most atoll, led to the first recruitment of people from the region.

The first vessel, *Adelante*, and her crew were en route to Melanesia in pursuit of workers and wanted to call by Tongareva's lagoon after hearing about the abundance of resources such as pearl shell that could be found there. Upon arrival though, they were met by locals eager to leave their homes for a number of reasons; including that at the time, the coconut palm, one of the main sources of food, was being ravaged by a disease leaving their crops inedible, and there was a real concern that famine would force them to relocate.



[Beach Penrhyn. From the album: Views in the Pacific Islands](#), 1886, Penrhyn Atoll, by Thomas Andrew. Te Papa (O.037817)

The London Mission Society had an important presence on the atoll and from their perspective, work abroad was an opportunity to bring income back to the community and build impressive churches to rival those on Manihiki, Rarotonga and other islands of the Cooks.



[Church Tukao Manihiki. From the album: Views in the Pacific Islands](#), 1886, Manihiki, by Thomas Andrew. Te Papa (O.037810)

From this inaugural trip, 253 people from Tongareva arrived at Callao, Peru: 83 men, 83 women, 30 boys, 19 girls and 19 infants, three of whom were born on-board. They were purchased (officially recorded as payment of passage) at \$200 for men, \$150 for women, and \$100 for boys.

A significant financial gain was made by the shipping company and within three weeks at least five Peruvian ships left for the Cook Islands and neighbouring Pacific nations with the sole purpose of making profit by providing a labour force for Peru industries.

Over the period when ships were frequenting the area, from the Northern Cooks a total of 472 recruits from Tongareva, 145 from Pukapuka, and 115 from Rakahanga left for Peru. In contrast to this, the Southern islands of Mangaia and Atiu only recorded 11 men leaving. The rocky volcanic terrain on these islands acted as a natural environmental defence against kidnapping, and the populations were well provided for in terms of food and resources, so there was no real incentive to leave. The 11 recorded as being captured from these islands were all men who for one reason or another went on-board the ships and were trapped there.



[Mangaia Island shipwreck](#), circa 1914, Cook Islands, by George Crummer. Te Papa (C.003105)



[Arrival of supplies on Atiu Island](#), circa 1914, by George Crummer. Te Papa (C.003104)

Maude's book covers a range of locations including Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Tonga, and the trade's extension to Kiribati in Micronesia. More than 3,000 Pacific Islanders reached the shores of Peru – I have included Table 8 below from the book (p.193), which shows the break-down of Pacific people recruited for Peru and the means by which they left.

The number of Pacific Islanders recruited for work in Peru and an analysis of the methods employed in recruiting^[1]

		Recruited without deceit	Recruited by misrepresentation	Kidnapped	No evidence
<i>Cook Islands</i>	Tongareva	427	45		
	Rakahanga		108	7	
	Pukapuka		145		
	Atiu			1	5
	Mangaia			5	
<i>Niue</i>			50	59	
<i>Samoa</i>	Upolu			3	
	Savai'i			4	
<i>Rotuma</i>				3	
<i>Tokelau</i>	Fakaofu			140	
	Atafu			37	
	Nukunonu			76	
<i>Tuvalu</i>	Nukulaelae		250		
	Funafuti		171		
	Nukufetau				3
	Nanumea				21
<i>Tonga</i>	'Ata			144	
	Niuafo'ou		30		
<i>Marquesas Islands</i>	Uapou	5		14	
	Hivaoa			6	
	Tahuata			1	
<i>Caroline Island</i>					4
<i>Tuamotus</i>	Fakarava		30		
	Katiu		25		

	Motu Tunga	54		
	Kauehi	11		
	Tahanea	31		
<i>Rapanui</i>	507		650	250
<i>Kiribati</i>		161 ^[2]		151
TOTAL	939	1111	1150	434

^[1] In this table an attempt is made to analyse in statistical form the methods adopted by the Peruvian recruiters to fill their complements: whether by invitation without involving deceit or coercion; by misrepresentation as to the place, nature or term of employment for which the islanders were being engaged; or by outright kidnapping.

^[2] Some of these were stated to have been kidnapped but the number is unknown.

Tragically, of these 3,000-plus people, only 148 were repatriated back to the Polynesian region and 111 were Kiribati who arrived in Tongareva. The majority of those that left their islands on ships for Peru died (over 90%). Many failed to acclimatise to harsh working conditions in Peru, immune systems were weakened and some were lost to diseases such as smallpox and infections from dysentery.

The collated data tables, records, and oral histories assembled by Maude gives us an insight into the devastation left behind after the loss of life. If culture is ‘the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations’^[1], what were the effects of the loss of so many people in places like Tongareva? The sudden departure of more than half the population meant losing a wealth of knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours that would not be passed on to future generations.

Reflecting on loss in the context of language, a line of scholarship I will never forget from undergraduate studies many years ago comes from Samoan scholar [Galumalemana Tuiletufuga Hunkin](#) who wrote that ‘the relationship between language and culture is like oxygen to human survival’^[2]. Language is a central feature of culture and a way in which we can connect to our ‘mana and the vaerua (soul) of who we are as peoples’^[3]. New Zealand is home to the largest Polynesian city in the world yet the statistics detailing the use of Pacific languages are startling with the last three censuses showing a steady

decline in the number of Pacific people speaking a Pacific language. Initiatives like Pacific Language Weeks help put the spotlight on Pacific cultures, and allow people to connect to their heritage.

This week we have been celebrating Te 'Epetoma o te reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani (Cook Islands Language Week), here are some links below – Tāmata'ia! (Give it a go!)

- <http://www.thecoconet.tv/how-to/cook-islands/your-introduction-to-cook-island-language-1/>
- <http://www.mpp.govt.nz/language-culture-and-identity/pacific-language-weeks/cook-islands-language-week/>
- <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/learn/for-educators/teaching-resources/cook-islands-language-week-resource>

Here are some sources if you want to read more about the Peruvian labour trade in the Pacific Region:

- Dunbabin, Thomas James. *Slavers of the South Seas*. Angus & Robertson, 1935.
- Hamilton, Scott. *The Stolen Island: Searching for 'Ata*. BWB Texts, 2016.
- Maude, Henry Evans. *Slavers in paradise: the Peruvian labour trade in Polynesia, 1862-1864*. Australian National University Press, 1981.

Meitaki Maata (Thank you)

References:

- [1] "[Culture](#)." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed July 30, 2017.
- [2] Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, Galumalemana. "Pasefika languages and Pasefika identities: Contemporary and future challenges." *Tangata o te moana nui: The evolving identities of pacific peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (2001): p. 197.
- [3] Ministry of Pacific Peoples. Te Papa. "[Te 'Epetoma o te reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani Cook Islands Māori Language Week: Education Resource 2016](#)" Accessed July 30, 2017.

JONATHAN MILNE

Blackbirds: Shackled inside the slave ships to Peru

Sunday 5 July 2020 | Written by [Jonathan Milne](#) | Published in [Weekend Share](#)



Tongareva's Wilkie Rasmussen looks back over his own family history, their ara tuakaha book. 20070243 / 20070241

As the world commemorates the abolition of slavery, leaders like Donald Trump and Scott Morrison have downplayed that brutal history. Yet there are Cook Islands families who still feel the pain.

Tongareva was first Polynesian island from which the slavers begged, borrowed or stole their grim human cargo. 472 people left Cook Islands' northernmost atoll. Barely any returned.

One who did was Pani. His story has barely been acknowledged in the written histories – but it is remembered by his people on Tongareva.

He managed to escape the slave ship when it anchored off a French Polynesian island, and swim ashore; it was years before he was able to get a passage back home on a British frigate.

He returned with grim accounts of a ship that bore a striking resemblance to those slave ships that brought Africans to the Americas. He and his people were shackled below deck, he told them.

Wilkie Rasmussen is descended from the same family as Pani; he comes from the same village. In his office in Avarua, he keeps some of his family's handwritten *ara tuakaha* books, their histories and genealogies.

“There were told to get down in the hold – it was a double-deck vessel, the *Adelante*, and they were shackled.”

To be clear, the people of Tongareva went aboard willingly, on this first occasion.

Their island had been devastated by a coconut blight and they were struggling to feed their children; churchmen from the London Missionary Society encouraged them to embark for the cotton plantations of Peru, to earn money to build the big coral churches they aspired to.

But once they boarded, their dreams were quickly shattered. Historian Harry Maude says the 151-ton barge *Adelante* was the first of the slave ships to plunder Polynesia, and it provided a model for those who came after. It was more a Man-o-war ship than a merchant trading ship.

The hold was divided into three compartments with iron gratings over the hatches to prevent escape, two swivel guns were mounted to sweep the deck, two more on top of the poop. The hatches were guarded day and night by sailors armed with muskets, blunderbusses, revolvers and cutlasses.

More ships like *Adelante* followed. As word spread, Cook Islands Ariki and Orometua started turning them away – and then the slave traders began resorting to kidnapping. They would drug young men and women with brandy and opium, then throw them in the hold.

Cook Islander researchers in Australia believe some also ended up on Australian sugar plantations – despite Prime Minister Scott Morrison's denial of slavery in the Big Country.

Rasmussen tells of families being torn apart in slave auctions in Callao, Peru.

“The conditions were pretty horrible. They were made to work in conditions they were not used to. I can just imagine the fathers and daughters being auctioned off and separated – the hurt.”

He hopes that government will in due course pay for research on what happened to those people from Tongareva, Rakahanga, Pupapuka, Atiu and Mangaia, taken away and never heard from again.

And he thumbs through his family's ara tuakaha. "It's almost as if whole pages are missing from the Tongareva book.

"In the times of our grandfathers and grandmothers, the pain was very visible and they talked about it quite a lot."

"The effect on our island was quite catastrophic. We now have missing pieces in our 'akapapa," he says. "There have been generations that have been cut off from their heritage.

"There was a grave injustice done, and that is deeply embedded in the Tongareva psyche. That will never go away."

The forgotten slaves and how their people were robbed of their very soul

OPINION: The slave ships' raids cost Cook Islanders a wealth of knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours that would not be passed on to future generations, writes Rachel Yates, Te Papa museum's curator for Pacific cultures.

Harry Maude's *Slavers in Paradise* (1981), about the Peruvian slave traders and their short but devastating presence in Polynesia in the second half of the 19th century, is a heart-breaking yet gripping read.

In many instances I found myself unable to read long passages at any one time.

On one occasion I had to put the book down after reading about helpless fishermen, working to provide for their families, being chased down on the open sea by larger faster ships and taken unwillingly to Peru.

In the 1800s, many of Peru's exports came from large plantations producing sugar, cotton, grains, and olives, etc. as well as coastal guano mines. They were lucrative industries requiring a large labour force, provided in the form of slaves.

These industries experienced huge change when, in 1854, slavery in Peru was abolished and business owners struggled to find workers to continue production of these large enterprises. Under pressure from landowners, the Peruvian government passed a law in 1861 enabling the importation of workers including Chinese coolies and Polynesians.

Slavers in Paradise looks at the traumatic events of recruitment (which included people leaving their home islands by choice, being misled and also those who were forced and kidnapped) by Peruvian ships in the Polynesian region.

Theoretically, Polynesians were taken to Peru as migrant workers and were classified as colonists who willingly entered the country on the premise that they would work in reasonable conditions, be paid, and returned to their homes. In actuality, they were slaves. They became the property of others and were subject to their rules and conditions for not only the work required of them but their lives.

The Cook Islands play a significant role in this heritage as the practice began in the Northern Cooks in 1862 when an unscheduled stop in Tongareva (Penrhyn), the northern-most atoll, led to the first recruitment of people from the region.

The first vessel *Adelante* and her crew were en route to Melanesia in pursuit of workers and wanted to call by Tongareva's lagoon after hearing about the abundance of resources such as pearl shell that could be found there.

Upon arrival though, they were met by locals eager to leave their homes for a number of reasons; including that at the time, the coconut palm, one of the main sources of food, was being ravaged by a disease leaving their crops inedible, and there was a real concern that famine would force them to relocate.

The London Missionary Society had an important presence on the atoll and from their perspective, work abroad was an opportunity to bring income back to the community and build impressive churches to rival those on Manihiki, Rarotonga and other islands of the Cooks.

From this inaugural trip, 253 people from Tongareva arrived at Callao, Peru: 83 men, 83 women, 30 boys, 19 girls and 19 infants, three of whom were born on-board. They were purchased (officially recorded as payment of passage) at \$200 for men, \$150 for women, and \$100 for boys.

A significant financial gain was made by the shipping company and within three weeks at least five Peruvian ships left for the Cook Islands and neighbouring Pacific nations with the sole purpose of making profit by providing a labour force for Peru industries.

Over the period when ships were frequenting the area, from the Northern Cooks a total of 472 recruits from Tongareva, 145 from Pukapuka, and 115 from Rakahanga left for Peru. In contrast to this, the Southern islands of Mangaia and Atiu only recorded 11 men leaving.

The rocky volcanic terrain on these islands acted as a natural environmental defence against kidnapping, and the populations were well provided for in terms of food and resources, so there was no real incentive to leave. The 11 recorded as being captured from these islands were all men who for one reason or another went on-board the ships and were trapped there.

More than 3,000 Pacific Islanders reached the shores of Peru. Of those taken away, 743 were from Cook Islands: 472 from Tongareva, 115 from Rakahanga, 145 from Pukapuka, six from Atiu and five from Mangaia.

Tragically, of the 3,000-plus Pacific people taken, only 148 were repatriated back to the Polynesia, and 111 of those were Kiribati who were dropped off in Tongareva.

The majority of those who left their islands on ships for Peru died – more than 90 per cent.

Many failed to acclimatise to harsh working conditions in Peru, their immune systems were weakened and some were lost to diseases such as smallpox and infections from dysentery.

The collated data tables, records, and oral histories assembled by Maude gives us an insight into the devastation left behind after the loss of life.

If culture is “the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations”, what were the effects of the loss of so many people in places like Tongareva?

The sudden departure of more than half the population meant losing a wealth of knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours that would not be passed on to future generations.

Reflecting on loss in the context of language, a line of scholarship I will never forget from undergraduate studies many years ago comes from Samoan scholar Galumalemana Tuiletufuga Hunkin who wrote that “the relationship between language and culture is like oxygen to human survival”.

Language is a central feature of culture and a way in which we can connect to our “mana and the vaerua (soul) of who we are as peoples”.

SUMMARY OF HENRY MAUDE'S RESEARCH

Slavers in Paradise: the Peruvian labour trade in Polynesia , 1862 – 1864

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Slavers in paradise : the Peruvian labour trade in Polynesia, 1862-1864

[Maude, H. E.](#)

Description

This is the story of the barques and brigs that sailed out of Callao in Peru, calling at every Pacific island group except Hawaii, kidnapping thousands of men, women and children by violence and treachery and transporting them to slavery and death. It is an absorbing narrative of the conflict between human greed and bewildered innocence, set in the romantic isles of the South Seas. It tells of how the unsuspecting islanders were captured, leaving in many cases only the aged and the children to...[\[Show more\]](#)

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