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. 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.

Modern Tongan spelling conventions replace the ‘c’ in hico with a ‘k’, hiko. Ethnomusicologist, Richard Moyle’s 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. 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.” 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. 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”8) 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.9 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.10

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.11

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.”12 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.13 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.”14 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.”15

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.”16 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\textsuperscript{27} discusses three Samoan ball games, one of which is a game played with wild oranges that he calls \textit{fuaga}. Krämer refers to the writings of John Stair who calls this game \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{28} Other known names for the game are \textit{tuae-fua},\textsuperscript{19} \textit{tia’ifua},\textsuperscript{20} and \textit{tifaga}.\textsuperscript{21} According to C. Wilkes \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{22} According to Moyle, two other terms have also been recorded: \textit{tuai fua} and \textit{apuulaga}. Both of these terms, and \textit{tuae-fua} provided by Wilkes, are unknown today and the game is commonly called \textit{fuaga}.\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Fuaga} or \textit{‘aufua} derives from the verb \textit{fua} which means to measure,\textsuperscript{24} 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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{25} 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, \textit{te’auga}, where balls are juggled in a manner similar to \textit{fuaga}, and thrown across the back of the juggler to other participants.\textsuperscript{26} He refers to Stair who writes: “\textit{O le Teaunga} was also played with a number of oranges, but in this game they were thrown up backwards.”\textsuperscript{27} Wilkes includes a game called \textit{tuimuri}, recorded by Krämer as \textit{tuimuli}, and provides this description:

\begin{quote}
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.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

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

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 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. 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. 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. 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.” 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 an informant named Paea tells of various games, sports and amusements (makeva) that he knew of in his youth (about 1895-1910). 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 clockwise 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.

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. This is extremely interesting, as early observers of New Zealand poi have provided the term haka poi for a poi dance.
A ball tossing game called pei or kita’irama is also recorded in Mangareva. 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, 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.” 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. 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, and as part of the entertainment for visitors at ceremonies associated with death; 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.” 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 odorus/latifolius) strips. This chant consisted of reciting the children's genealogy and mentioning important names of that child's whakapapa. An example of part of a common chant follows:

| 1* | 1 | The grandparents ask  |
| 5  | 5 | “Whose pei is this?”  |
|    |    | “Ours”  |
|    |    | “Whose are you?”  |
|    |    | “Peke’s” (father’s name)  |
|    |    | “Peke’s?”  |
|    | 2  | “Moho’s” (father’s father’s name)  |
| 0  | 0  | “Moho’s?”  |
|    |    | “Tutu’s” (great-grandfather’s name)  |
|    |    | “Tutu’s?” |

* 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,”⁴⁹ which one could presume would have included lineage.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ 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,⁵² but not under the section of juggling. The following example is similar to the above extract:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“O ai lou tama?”</th>
<th></th>
<th>“Who is your father?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“O Pepe”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Pepe”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Pepe ai?”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Pepe who?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Pepe Tū”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Pepe Tū”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Tū ai?”</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Tū who?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Tū Sae”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Tū Sae”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sae a?”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Sae who?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sae Tini”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Sae Tini”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Tini a?”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Tini who?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Tini Toloa”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Tini Toloa”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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;⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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.56

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,57 who wrote: “they have a game with four balls, exactly like that of the Indian jugglers, and they accompany it with a song.”58 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’s59 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,60 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.”61 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.\textsuperscript{62}

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.\textsuperscript{63} 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.\textsuperscript{64} 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.\textsuperscript{65} 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 tāro 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. Veiwasa 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.

8 Collocott, *Tales and Poems of Tonga*, 100.
10 Collocott, *Tales and Poems of Tonga*, 100.
20 Krämer, *The Samoa Islands*, 382.
24 Ibid, 105.
26 Krämer, *The Samoa Islands*, 382.
30 Ibid, 361.
31 Ibid, 361.
33 Ibid, 250.
35 The Tuamotu Archipelago is situated slightly east of Tahiti.
37 Ibid, 233.
39 E Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Māori: An Account of Various Exercises, Games and Pastimes of the Natives of New Zealand, as practised in former times; including some information containing their Vocal and Instrumental Music* (Wellington: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1925), 54.
41 Ibid, 185.
42 E Tregear, *Dictionary of Mangareva (Gambier Island)* (Wellington: Mackay Government Printer, 1899:69), 322.
48 Ibid, 302.
54 Ibid, 133.
56 Ibid, 388.
57 E Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand; with contributions to the Geography, Geology, Botany, and Natural History of that Country* (London: John Murray, 1843; reprint, Christchurch: Capper Press, 1974).

58 Ibid, 56.


60 Murihiku encompasses the southern regions of the South Island up to the Waitaki River; Canterbury (East Coast of the South Island); Nelson (Northern part of the South Island); and Westland (West Coast of the South Island).


62 Ibid, 484.


**Karyn Paringatai**, from the Te Whānau-a-Hunaara hapū of Ngāti Porou, is a Lecturer at Te Tumu, the School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies, at the University of Otago in Dunedin, Aotearoa/Zealand.