

POEM

YOU ARE PEOPLE OF MOANA

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When we were cherished under the favourable eye of Taaroa,¹
we were people of Moana.
Then came the caravels and galleons,
on board was Jesus, tobacco, muskets, bottles, iron axes, and books.
The currents shifted and we became what we are not, micronesia, melanesia, and polynesia.

We were called savages and heathens,
our gods and spiritualities were considered lotu² of the darkness.
They told us we need the light, but the light did not obliterate the darkness,
it shone so bright and blinded us.
We no longer see our lands, ocean, cultures, and people,
all we see now are paper, copper, and silver currency.

We now see the house of God,
but are oblivious to the forests and reefs.
We teach our children to speak the languages of Bligh, Cook, and d'Urville,
and forsake the tongues of the Moana.
We measure our intelligence by confining our minds to four walls,
and as a result, forfeit the wisdom of the birds, insects, waves, taro, and stars.

Mother Moana now cries out to us,
Oh, you whom I have borne out of the fenua.
Sons and daughters of the eel and flounder,
you who fashion nioje³ and malena,⁴ orators of Taaroa e!

¹ Taaroa is the Maohi Nui word for God. In other Moana languages he is referred to as Tagaloa or Tagaroa.

² In Tuvaluan, lotu means intensity, passion, and depth. It connotes the engrossing interest in something from which one cannot differentiate oneself. This is the same word used for church and worship. Lotu is not a noun but a verb.

³ Nioje is the word for tapa, gatu, or masi to the Omie people from Oro Province, Papua New Guinea.

⁴ The malena in Vaitupu culture is a plated waist-string of the bleached skin (tā) of coconut leaflets, with a few locks of human hair hung from it. It is worn by young girls as a primary step of their initiation to womanhood on the day of their menarche.

Return now to the tafato,⁵ and bring ashore an ulufonu,⁶
For you are people of Moana.

⁵ Tafato signifies the deep, dark, ocean.

⁶ This literally means the 'Head of the Turtle.' This part of the turtle is reserved as royal cuisine presented only to the kings and chiefs. Today, it is given to the faifeau (pastors). In the celebrative accosting through communal caterwauling, ulufonu symbolises an honourable entreaty to enter sacred spaces.