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Representations of history and nation in museums in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand: the National Museum of Australia and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



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Abstract

This thesis examines museum development in the two post-colonial settler societies of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, investigating the evolution of new histories as museums seek to aid the construction of post-colonial national identities. Drawing on a wide body of evidence on an under-researched topic, the thesis is arranged in two parts. The first presents a survey of how traditional images of national identity have been created, sustained and more recently challenged during the histories of Australia and New Zealand - illustrating that the question of non-indigenous national identity is a problematic one. It then provides a historical narrative of museums in both countries. Highlighting the differences and similarities between the two countries and focusing on the development of historical collections, it explores how museums have perpetuated traditional interpretations of nation, and how in recent decades various factors have combined to challenge conventional museum practice, making the role and function of museums at the beginning of the twenty-first century particularly complex. The second part focuses on the new National Museum of Australia in Canberra and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. It combines an examination of their history with an analysis of how they attempt to convey ideas of nation and national identity. Both museums have opened recently, at a time when national museums around the world are confronted with an increasingly prominent and challenging political and social role in society, and an especially difficult, perhaps impossible, task of representing all the different histories that constitute the 'nation'.

Keywords

National Museum of Australia; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; museums in Australia; museums in New Zealand; identity (psychology) in Australia and New Zealand

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