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The role of a museum (Te Papa) in the rejuvenation of taonga puoro

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in the rejuvenation of taonga puoro (Māori musical instruments). The purpose of this study is to examine the Museum’s relationship with taonga puoro practitioners.

This thesis documents the foundation of the Haumanu taonga puoro revitalisation group and their relationship with Te Papa. Therefore I have selected instrumental figures – Dr. Richard Nunns and Brian Flintoff, to elucidate their insight on this topic. The late Hirini Melbourne remains a constant and treasured presence throughout the process for Nunns and Flintoff. However, the focus of the thesis is to identify what has Te Papa done and can do better, to help facilitate the rejuvenation of taonga puoro, based on the years of developing a relationship with the Haumanu group. Furthermore, within this context, I examine my own practice as a Māori Curator at Te Papa.

The central question to this study is the role of Te Papa, in terms of its relevance to one particular sector, the Māori cultural practitioners and revivalists. The challenge is: how much is Te Papa willing to risk, in relaxing control - to be relevant to the needs of this community?

Four key research questions are explored: what has Te Papa done to help facilitate the rejuvenation and maintenance of puoro, what could Te Papa be doing more of to nurture the rejuvenation and maintenance of puoro; what are the key factors that support an achievement of these objectives: and, what are the challenges for the future.
Te Papa documentation from 1995 to 2014 is also a primary source. As a Māori Curator at Te Papa, I reflect on my role and the tensions between personal, cultural and professional roles that the rejuvenation of taonga puoro creates.

The thesis argues that cultural revitalisation, as a process of ‘liberation’ (Kreps 2003a) has a transformative power, to redefine the significance of taonga in museums as cultural and spiritual inspiration for present and future generations. The ‘creative potential’ (Royal 2006) paradigm opens up a future for knowledge development that museums should be a part of. This potentiality has cultural and social benefits, which is identified as a restorative healing process, a philosophy of health and wellbeing, a form of ‘hauora’ (healing).

This inductive research shows that the role of a museum is important to practitioners’ but there are contradictions and paradoxical issues to museum practice that make situations complex. This research reveals that ‘taonga puoro, taonga hauora’ is a model that can transform museum practice by operating not just to preserve materiality, but the intangible aspects of a peoples’ living culture.
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This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Richard Nunns, Brian Flintoff and the Haumanu group; past, present and future.

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Ka huri ki te hunga ora, e ngā manu kākākura, tēnā koutou katoa. Tēnei he mihi atu ki a koutou e ngā kai pupuri taonga.

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Ahakoa taku iti, he iti nō te kōpua kānapanapa
Although my contribution is small, it comes from a deep well spring.
Ngāti Kahungunu proverb.
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The name ‘Haumanu’, meaning ‘breath of birds’, was given by the late Dr. Hirini Melbourne to a movement of people passionate about rejuvenating the sounds and traditions of taonga puoro, Māori musical instruments. Brian Flintoff (personal communication, 15 December 2014), recalled that Hirini specified the name for the group by joining ‘Hau’ and ‘Manu’ together as ‘Haumanu’. The name also is a metaphor for the revival of taonga puoro.

‘Taonga’ are highly valued objects, knowledge, practices, places, resources and cultural aspects that link to ancestral history, customs, spiritual beliefs and worldview. Taonga are tangible and intangible expressions of what is uniquely Māori, embuing a sense of cultural identity and belonging.
Glossary

Ātua – spiritual deity
Hapū – pregnancy, sub-tribe
Hau kainga – home people
Hine Raukatauri – Female spiritual entity of flute music
Hongi – formal greeting, pressing noses
Ihi – essential force
Iwi - tribe
Kaitiaki – guardians
Kahu huruhuru – feather cloak
Karakia – prayers
Karanga – female call
Kaumatua, kaumātua, elder, elders
Kaupapa – agenda/philosophy
Kawa – marae protocol (Marsden 1975) marae etiquette (Walker 1975)
Kete – woven basket
Mamae – pain, emotional hurt, loss
Mana- spiritual authority and power. Enduement of objects with spiritual power through the indwelling spirit over it (Marsden 1975)
Manaakitanga – hospitality, kindness
Māoritanga – corporate view that Māori hold about ultimate reality and meaning (Marsden 1975)

1 Walker, Ranginui ‘Marae: A Place to Stand’ in Te Ao Hurihuri; The World Moves On
Mātauranga – knowledge, mātauranga Māori – ancestral knowledge passed down
Papatūānuku – Earth mother
Pātaka – carved, elevated storehouse
Pounamu – nephrite, New Zealand jade, greenstone
Poutokomanawa – carved ancestor, centre-posts of a wharenui
Taonga – cultural treasure, tangible and intangible
Tangata tiriti – non-Māori, people who live in Aotearoa New Zealand by right of the Treaty of Waitangi
Tangata whenua – people of the land, indigenous people
Tapu - sacred state or condition of a person or thing placed under the patronage of the gods (Marsden 1975)²
Taumata – top of mountain. Meaning goal achieved
Te Papa Tongarewa – Te Papa Kuru Tongarerewa, Te Arawa mōteatea referring to a precious type of pounamu pendant. Name given by Te Arawa elders to the Museum of New Zealand.
Tikanga – appropriate behaviour, values, customs
Tohu – spiritual sign, indicator
Tohunga – chosen one, appointed (Marsden 1975)
Waiata – songs
Waka – canoe
Waka tūpāpaku – receptacle for deceased’s remains

² Māori Marsden; ‘God, Man and Universe’, in Te Ao Hurihuri: The World Moves On; King, Michael (edit) 1975; Hicks Smith and Sons Ltd, Wellington
Wairua – soul, sacred spirits (Te Kapunga Dewes 1975)³

Whakapapa – genealogy

Whakatauki - proverb

Whānau - family

Wana – be excited, inspiring awe

Wehi – to be awesome

Taonga puoro – Māori musical instruments

Hue - gourd

Karanga manu – bird caller

Kōauau – cross-blown flute

Nguru – semi-closed, cross blown flute

Pahū – drum, gong

Pūpū harakeke – flax snail shell

Pūrerehua – bullroarer

Pūmotomoto – long flute associated with the transferal of knowledge and prayer to babies

Pūtātara – conch shell trumpet

Pūtōrino – bugle flute

Tōkere – castanet type instruments

Wenewene – finger holes on kōauau and nguru

³ Te Kapunga Dewes, ‘The Case for Oral Arts’, ibid
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