

**Museum Kapahaka:
Performing and Creating Maori Identity**Aruna Panday

Abstract:

Since 2003, Maori have been performing a cross between a cultural performance and kapahaka three times daily at the Auckland War Museum. I argue this act is a new form of representation of indigenous people by indigenous people to a neo-colonial audience. Museums are sites of urban and national identity-building and intend to control representation of a community and its members. Typically museums are repositories of artifacts. The inclusion of live human performers is somewhat tricky. At once it is seen as an essentializing reminder of the colonial experience. However, it is more complicated than this, for the performers have absolute control over their performance and its presentation. Here they use their bodies to promote their product—themselves and their culture—in a marketable, accessible way that avoids becoming a spectacle (unlike other similarly-marked tourism performances). Moreover, the decontextualized performance authenticates the decontextualized Maori artifacts in the museum, thereby authenticating the museum itself and giving European value to an aspect of Maori heritage.

KeywordsMaori, museum, identity, neo-colonialism

He aha te mea nui o te ao?
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata!

Massive limestone pillars frame the entrance of the Auckland Domain, which in Canada would be called a park or garden. On their way to the Auckland War Memorial Museum, pedestrians traverse the hilly volcanic terrain and verdant grounds seeing the occasional car, football players and a plethora of tree ferns and other trees native and introduced to the country. A behemoth of an edifice, it is constructed of limestone and its many pillars are a rendition of neo-classical architecture. At the base of the building, a signboard welcomes the visitor and promotes the museum's Maori Cultural Experience. Climbing up the stairs to the entrance, one takes pause to look back at the perfect view of the city: sky, buildings, greenery and the Pacific are beautifully juxtaposed and seamed together. At the entrance, there is a placard with the Maori Cultural Experience performance schedule. I enter the three-story high main hall of the building and looked around aimlessly. There is a sense of vast space in the polished limestone interior highlighted with what is presumably black volcanic material. The entrance fee is by "contribution" (\$10 minimum suggested) and as I engage in the act of formal donation, the ticket agent asks me if I would like to see the Cultural Experience. I hem and haw—how would this be different from the kitsch tourist show I had seen in Rotorua the week before? I reluctantly accept and shell out the required \$20 in the name of fieldwork.

In *Colonialism's Culture, Anthropology, Travel and Government*, Nicholas Thomas states: "Maori¹ culture now possesses a degree of prestige and legitimacy unprecedented in the period of colonization...the notion that New Zealand should be a 'bicultural' society is gaining acceptance. But in what form is Maori culture recognized and celebrated?" (1994, 183-4) In this paper, I am interested in attempting to better understand the lived experience of culture. Museums are "powerful site[s] of cultural authenticity surrounded by conflict and change" (Clifford 1997, 113); what role do they play in celebrating or in Othering? This paper looks at a live performance, the *Maori Cultural Experience: Our People Our Culture*, which has been taking place at the Auckland War

Memorial Museum (colloquially known as the Auckland Museum) since 2003. The museum decided to incorporate a cultural performance into its daily program. It held auditions and awarded the contract to the Ngati Whatua O Orakei group, who belong to the *mana whenua* (home tribe) of Auckland. I argue this cultural performance in a majority museum (Clifford 1997) is not only an educational performance, but is at the same time also a new kind of museum exhibit—reminiscent of various colonial displays of colonized bodies—and it is a new form of representation of indigenous people by indigenous people to a neo-colonial audience. The paper is presented in three sections. In “Setting,” the Auckland Museum is introduced, the role of museums tackled and principles of curatorship discussed. “Artifacts, *Taonga* and Bodies” unpacks the meanings and issues of objects. Finally, “Performance” looks at the history of performance in Aotearoa New Zealand and how it is transformed in the Auckland Museum.

SETTING

In 1851, coinciding with the rise of the ethnographic museum in Germany, the Auckland museum was established. It is organized in a quasi-evolutionist fashion: the ground level houses the main entry, café, Pacific galleries and the Maori Court; level one tells the story of the country's natural history, and level two presents New Zealand's involvement in various wars. None too subtly, European history is positioned indexically higher than the indigenous people.² Historically, museums were regarded as part of urban and national identity-building (Penny 2002, 40), and showcased glorious histories and celebrated national figures (Bourdieu (1968) 1993, 237). A majority museum, such as the Auckland Museum, strives to reflect the cosmopolitan ambition and nationalistic slant of its city and country (Penny 2002, 17), yet in that aspiration it often misses “a density of local meanings, memories, reinvented histories” (Clifford 1997, 129). As such, this knowledge becomes contested and decentered (Ibid) especially by those whose stories are on display.

Walking through glass doors (perhaps symbolic of the transparency of Maori culture, or perhaps an invitation) into the Maori Court, the first things that impress the visitor in the subdued light are the massive pieces of carved wood. Looking

right, there is a large map of the Pacific detailing migration timelines and routes into Aotearoa New Zealand. Directly in front there is a large black unpolished volcanic rock basin with water in it. There is no explanation for the basin, but from conversations with Maori one learns the space is considered to be sacred because of the *taonga* (treasures) within. As such, the visitor is meant to touch the water when leaving so as to leave the spirits of the ancestors behind. An elaborately carved *waka* (canoe) runs one-third the length of the space. Facing the entry is a replica of a *marae* (meeting house) decorated with elaborate carvings representing various apical ancestors. At the entry of the *marae*, a sign reminds visitors to take off their shoes before entering, yet I saw tourists go in without doing this. In a space in which one ought to be sedate, I witnessed children roughhousing while their guardians did nothing to stop them. Glass cases display material artifacts including weapons, clothing, cooking implements and musical instruments. Two videos play continually: one explains Maori cosmology and the other introduces pre-European-contact Maori music. Large signs are in English and Te Reo (Maori language), artifact information signs are mainly in English (listing acquisition, history of the pieces, symbolic meaning and sometimes historical photos), and large information placards, explaining concepts like *whakapapa* (genealogy), are in English only.

Museums are ritual sites for the secular state that aim to preserve “official cultural memory” (Duncan 1995, 1). Thus, control of a museum means control of “The representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community” (Duncan 1995, 2). In spite of collaborations with Maori, in an ongoing denial of indigenous peoples’ coevalness, and in typical neo-colonial fashion, the Auckland Museum maintains control of the method of representation in the European style of the building, the neo-evolutionist layout of the exhibitions and the *decision* to include a Maori performance as part of the attraction. Ruth Phillips questions the purpose of collaborative exhibits, asking, “Does the growing popularity of collaborative exhibits signal a new era of social agency for museums, or does it make the museum a space where symbolic restitution is made for the injustices of the colonial era in lieu of more concrete forms of social, economic, and political redress?” (Phillips 2003, 158) I argue that the answer would be some of both. Co-production, it is argued, produces a better exhibit, one

that is more accurate in its representations. Paul Tapsell (Te Arawa), the foremost scholar on museum studies in Aotearoa New Zealand, argues that to co-produce an exhibit that will be better appreciated by all sorts of visitors—international, *Pakeha* (white) and Maori—the curator should understand Maori values and engage the *tangata whenua* (local people) (Tapsell 2011, 87).

Until the 1980s, Maori interaction with museums was on the museum's terms. For instance Te Papa, in Wellington, invented the term *mana taonga* to mean that "anyone who enters its museum doors and is represented by *taonga* Maori (treasures of Maori origin) or *taonga* Pakeha (treasures of non-Maori origin) may exercise the right to stand upon its *marae* as *tangata whenua*" (Tapsell 2006, 93). Not heeding the advice of elders, the Crown also went ahead and invented a kind of rotating *marae* based not on ancestral land, but on *taonga* (Tapsell 2006, 92). Tapsell sees this as a disregard of the Treaty, for the Crown, in creating its own Maori rules (*mana taonga* and non-tribal *marae*) is dictating what it means to be Maori without consulting local tribes (Tapsell 2006, 94).

The 1970s and 1980s were a period of political change and revolution towards oppressive mono-cultural state governance. Three exhibits that challenged these old ideas but also created new challenges were: *Te Maori*, *Taonga Maori* and *Maori*. *Te Maori* emphasized the past over the present as it was composed of mainly traditional and neo-traditional sculptures. The show had a performance component—a dawn opening ritual—to transform the secular space into a Maori space and give the appearance that the exhibit was under indigenous control (Thomas 1995, 29). According to Allan Hanson, *Te Maori* aided in strengthening Pakeha respect for Maori thereby advancing the Maori "agenda of *Maoritanga* and the notion of a bicultural New Zealand" (Hanson 1989, 896). *Taonga Maori* was characterized by a "Radical aesthetic decontextualization that excludes non-traditional contexts of production, colonial processes and European influences of all kinds" (Thomas 1994, 184). Finally, the British Museum's *Maori* exhibit of the early 1990s lacked information about the political and intellectual involvement of Maori in Aotearoa New Zealand, and any mention of debates around artifact repatriation that was a concern for Maori (Salmond 1988, 17). While it was exciting and groundbreaking to showcase Maori culture and history, up until

the late 1990s these representations were presented in an essentialized and romanticized fashion. This cultural essentialism created Maoriness in terms of difference from the Pakeha and alienated the Maori from modernity (Thomas 1994, 185).

From 2000 to 2008, Paul Tapsell was the Tumuaki/Director Maori at the Auckland Museum. In 2006 he wrote that the Auckland Museum recently “chose to explore the relationship with the *tangata whenua*, and today that museum has a complementary and effective Maori governance system which leads the world on issues of indigenous partnerships” (Tapsell 2006, 96). This governance system draws on the principle of *kaitiakitanga*—that is, guardianship, trusteeship, resource management, and authority of human, environmental and material entities over a geopolitical region by the local group. The Auckland War Memorial Museum Act 1996, Section 16(1) established the Taumata-a-Iwi (the Taumata). Section 16(18) of the Act stipulates the function of the Taumata:

to assist the Board to ensure that the Board’s policies in relation to the matters set out in paragraphs (a) to (d) of this subsection accord property with Maori values as well as matters provided for in the Treaty of Waitangi, the Taumata-a-Iwi shall review prepared policies and make recommendations to the Board in relation to those matters.

As a result, of this directive, a *kaupapa* (guiding Maori charter) was created to provide directives for upholding the *kaitiakitanga*, for example the hiring of Maori specialist staff in upper and middle management (Tapsell 2002, 291). Though this is a good model of indigenous-museum cooperation, there are problems: the Taumata is accountable to the Board but the Board is not accountable to the Taumata; the act did not intend 50/50 collaboration and little equal partnership exists; there are Board members who do not understand Maori interests and finally, the Taumata has minimal decision-making power compared to the Board and therefore it is not possible to exercise *kaitiakitanga* fully (Kawharu 2002, 300-301).

Mindful consideration certainly guides the presentation of the Maori Court and the Maori Cultural Experience performances. The space is presented as sacred (the presence

of water) and Maori (the use of Te Reo and the inclusion of ancestral lineage in the map) but it is not obvious to the average visitor; the space lacks signage or a docent to explain these things. Moreover, there is no follow-through, for example by security, to maintain that sanctity when it is violated.

Museums contain artifacts, but what is an artifact? I argue that in addition to the traditional preservation of material culture and current semi-interactive multi-media exhibitions, that people may also be constructed as artifacts. The next section explores this idea.

ARTIFACTS, *TAONGA* AND BODIES

In the European tradition, the things that are stored and displayed in museums are artifacts: human-made things that have some sort of cultural or intellectual interest. Artifacts have multiple uses: to study human development (British Museum 1910, 43), to exhibit anthropological investigation, (Dias 2007, 92), to empower indigenous people and the public with alternative historical interpretations (Graburn 1991), to construct nation and citizenship (Phillips 2003, 155), and to perform state power (Saunders 2007, 19). In the Maori tradition, these items are *taonga*. Roughly translated, *taonga* means treasure, that which is material but also that which is abstract, such as a song. One cannot hold onto *taonga*, they must be circulated in order to circulate wealth and to create bonds between individuals and groups (Mauss (1954) 1970, 9-10). Maori do not admire *taonga* merely for their beauty and workmanship because, more importantly, they are infused with a *mana* (spiritual power) derived from their ancestors (Hanson 1989, 896; Mauss (1954) 1970, 7).

The Myth of Objectivism says: The world is comprised of objects; we understand the world by experiencing objects, and we understand those objects in terms of categories and concepts (Lakoff 1980, 186); plainly speaking, knowledge is rooted in experience. Museums are repositories of objects. They are places for people to experience objects, generally outside of their everyday habitat, to increase their knowledge of the world. As “live *taonga*,” the Maori Cultural Experience group decides the details of its outfits, song choices and who will perform that day. If, however, the group members decided to wear their street

clothes (which they would in a non-museum, non-competitive performance) the museum administrators and the audiences would surely not accept this “inauthentic” and “untraditional” performer into their imagination of how a Maori ought to be properly represented and understood.

There are three components to *taonga*: *mana*, *tapu* and *korero*. *Taonga* have *mana* that is ancestral power, prestige and energy. It accumulates in *taonga* as it is passed along. The presence of *tapu* maintains the sanctity of *taonga*. *Tapu* means protected, sacred, set apart, and it indicates the presence of ancestors. *Taonga* are mnemonic aids for elders who know the *korero* attached to them. *Korero* means oratory, to speak knowledge, orally transmitted knowledge, historical utterances and narratives associated with ancestors. *Korero* is the most important aspect of the *taonga*: without it, the *taonga*'s *mana* and *tapu* may be weakened. Elders control a *taonga*'s *tapu* and *korero*; they control to whom it is transmitted and who hears it, either publicly or privately (Tapsell 1997, 326-329).

Taonga concerns all aspects of a tribal group's belongings, the tangible and intangible such as *whakapapa*, *wahitapu* (sacred enclosures) and ancestral lore (Kawharu 1989, 321). *Taonga* elicit emotional responses because they are intimately related to *whakapapa*, kin ties and relationships between descendants and ancestors, and they represent these connections (Tapsell 1997, 326). *Taonga* can exert, on an audience, *ihi*, *wehi* and *wana*. *Ihi* is spontaneous physical reaction and spiritual power. *Wehi* means to strike fear, to tremble and to excite. *Wana* is authority, integrity and unquestioned competence. At one performance, I sat in the centre of the front row. When the young athletic men took to the stage and began vigorously performing the *haka* I had seen them execute several times, I began to have a corporeal reaction, where previously I had had none. My body had the sensation of extreme anger yet my mind was calm and focused. The full force of their energy certainly elicited *ihi*. *Taonga* incite passion so that they can fulfill their function to maintain a connection with the land (Tapsell 1997, 332) and to be a receptacle of the past to be revealed to the living (Salmond 1994, 118).

When we think of circus freaks, models and Karl Marx, we know the body is a source of labour and may be a

commodity, a thing to which value is ascribed, cultural artifacts, as it were, which may also stand for something else. In Europe in the latter third of the nineteenth century until just after the first World War, it was popular and common to exhibit non-Europeans (Penny 2002, 211) in activities that may also be seen as cultural experiences. Perhaps this exhibition reflects national anxieties, for “The body of the Other is a site where anxieties about the normality, boundaries, and stability of identity of the Self crystallize” (Narayan 1993, 500). The body is the site for active expression that embodies cultural and historical possibilities (Butler 1988, 521), and it is often used agentively as a site of power and intentionality. The performers at the Maori Cultural Experience use their bodies (like any other actor, dancer or musician) to sell, promote and transmit their product: knowledge, experience and/or entertainment. Celeste Bunten has termed this type of bodily performance in this type of context “self-commodification.” She defines it as: “A set of beliefs and practices in which an individual chooses to construct a marketable identity product while striving to avoid alienating him- or herself” (2008, 381). Embodiment and performance of the Other in a cultural-tourism context is generally hegemonic (Ibid, 382). Phenotype, tribal affiliation, costume and use of native language authenticate the identity of the performer. This gives value to the performance and generates a “Heightened awareness of (and, consequently, efforts to preserve-maintain) authenticity and tradition” (Ibid, 384). This strategy of self-exoticizing to present a less complex version of oneself as the Other creates a commodity that tourists can easily digest (Ibid, 387).

Repeatedly Maori asked me rhetorically, “What is unique about Aotearoa?” Their response, without hesitation, was “The Maori.” When I asked Pakeha this question, there was generally a pause and an eventual response invoking nature with a few suggestions of Maori. Wataara Black, who works at the Maori Tourist Heritage Board, stated, “International visitors to this country come here for two things: scenery and to see something of the indigenous culture.” (Te Maori News 1995, 4). For the majority of those tourists, Maori culture will be presented to them in the form of “staged authenticity” (Taylor 2001, 22). This authenticity, real or staged, promotes distance between the viewer and the viewed, and this distance induces desire and increases the value of the tourist production (Taylor 2001). Human geographer John Taylor sees this self-commodification

as a distancing from Pakeha culture, which has traditionally been responsible for creating the dominant representations of Maori (though these images are still rampant in Aotearoa New Zealand especially in “Authentic Maori Villages” and in postcard representations). It also undermines those Pakeha-Maori representations (Taylor 2001, 16) and empowers Maori to produce representations of Maori.

That non-European people have been constructed as artifacts is not a new thing. That they choose to present themselves in a museum setting and control how that is done *is* new. Moreover, the Maori version of artifact, the *taonga*, makes the Maori performers and their performance *taonga*. Therefore, we begin to see that the people themselves *are* the treasures and the performance is a new kind of exhibit. In the next section, I will explore this further in the context of the performance.

PERFORMANCE

The blowing of a conch shell and the arrival of the costumed Maori (one of the performers is in fact indigenous Hawaiian) in front of the *marae* in the Maori Court signaled the beginning of the show. Once the attendees had gathered there was a formal welcome first in Te Reo, then translated into English. The women wore *heke* (flax) skirts and black tops with a kind of poncho, and had feathers in their hair, while the men were shirtless and wearing skirts. In the dimly lit theatre, stills of the *taonga* and photos of people in traditional costumes doing *poi* dance or in various *haka* poses appeared on screen accompanied by a soundtrack of Maori aerophones and synthesizers. When the video ended, the theatre was pitch black and again a conch shell blew. A spotlight appeared, lighting a woman who sang the *karanga* (call of welcome prayer).

Thus, the Auckland Museum audience is formally welcomed as guests in the same way that visitors to the village in the past, or to the *marae* today, would be welcomed. The host explained they would be “presenting aspects of our culture through song and dance.” What ensues is a type of *kapahaka* performance. *Kapahaka* refers to a combination of songs, action songs, *haka*, *poi* dance, and other components (such as hand movements like the *wiri*) that are performed together and often in competition. Each Cultural Experience performance is slightly

different: the general structure and explanations of the performance are consistent, but the songs differ depending on the mood of the group and the audience. The head of the group, Jane, explained to me that even the other performers did not know what they would be doing until she had announced it to the audience. For Jane the most important part of this performance is the *korero* when she explains the performance to the audience. For example, she explained that only men do the *whetero*, or protrusion of the tongue. The *whetero* is a component of the *haka*, a male posture dance that was used to prepare mentally, physically and emotionally before going to war. "The last time," she said, "the *haka* was done 'for real' was in the Vietnam War."

In the nineteenth century tourists flocked to Rotorua, in the centre of the North Island, attracted by the thermal waters of the volcanic region, and a tourism industry, including cultural tourism, developed quickly. Concert parties began over one hundred years ago. Standard repertoire consisted of *poi* songs and *haka* performances at hotels, tourist venues and social functions. Many Maori entertainment groups performed locally and internationally. In the late 1930s, Princess Te Puea Herangi organized the first *kapahaka* (team *haka*) as a means of preserving Maori song and dance that were being threatened and lost as a result of the effects of colonization (Kouka 1999, 11). Today, *kapahaka* is thus a performance by Maori for Maori, whereas concert parties (cultural performance) are for entertainment and tourist purposes. *Kapahaka* is generally performed at *hui* (meetings) or competitions and festivals. Cultural shows usually take place at hotels where, after filling up on a good spread of traditional Maori fare, guests are entertained by a performance of *haka* and *poi* with some minor introduction to the pieces and an element of audience participation.

The cultural show at the Auckland Museum is heavily promoted in every single tourist brochure I saw as "the best" cultural experience in New Zealand. This may be for several reasons: perhaps because it is economically beneficial, or because moving toward collaborative exhibitions may be a strategy to promote a bi-cultural "unified" Aotearoa New Zealand, or maybe because as a result of increased urbanization there is no longer a strong Kiwi identity linked to

sheep farming and nature, so in the search for new symbols to represent themselves they look to the Maori.

The Cultural Experience at the Auckland Museum is not like other performances: there is no dinner; there is no audience participation; it is in a formal theatre built specifically for that purpose; it is in the museum; performers have real tattoos or *moko*, and there is an elaborate explanation at the beginning of the performance and preceding each piece. Uncommonly, performers at the Auckland Museum emphasize the *korero*; it is an indispensable and integral part of their performance. Jane insists on this, for “this is the only encounter that most of these people will have of the Maori and my responsibility is that they understand our traditions, and not see us as backward and primitive, and also get their money’s worth.”

When I press the group members and boldly ask if they sometimes feel that they are selling their culture, and temper that with asking if they are preserving it in this performance, the response is one that reflects the need to educate people about Maori traditions. Jane said:

When I’m onstage and I’m narrating, the sort of thing that I’m trying to get across is to try and educate. I think for me it’s really, really important for people that when they come and see a show, they understand everything they are seeing so they can have a better understanding of who we are and what we as a tribe portray. A lot of cultures or a lot of people, you know a lot of other indigenous people, like to hold a lot of this stuff close to them and not share it. Whereas I’m quite opposite: I think that if we try and educate people and share who we are as Maori and what we’re all about, then we won’t be judged as much.

In presenting a taste of “traditional” Maori music performance, the group does its best not only to present an aesthetically pleasing piece of entertainment but also to showcase to tourists and school groups a picture of Maori as a people with history and tradition that is “unique” (Jane 2008) and worthy of respect. This affirms Phillips’ statement that collaborative exhibitions serve a need to “Repair the psychological damage that has been done in the past to individuals forced to negotiate negative stereotypes by creating

new exhibits that disseminate more accurate (and usually positive) images of contemporary ways of life” (Phillips 2003,8). Duncan states:

To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community. What we see and do not see in art museums—and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it—is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity. (1995, 2)

Ngati Whatua O Orakei has complete control over its programming and it challenges old notions of performance and museums. Only Maori can protect *taonga*, Paul Tapsell writes: “Even though our *taonga* exist in national museums they remain under the *mana*, the authority of those who belong to the land on which these buildings stand. It matters little who may have placed our *taonga* in those museums—what does matter is how they are spiritually protected. Only the *tangata whenua* are qualified to fulfill that role” (Tapsell 2006, 95). Given this concept, and that of the performer as *taonga*, it is not much of a stretch to imagine this as a narrative pushing for not only a bi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand but one where Maori affairs are no longer the purview of the Crown.

The cultural performance at the Auckland Museum is doing something different from the standard *Hangi* and *Haka* shows that continue the sensibility of the concert parties. Yet, it is also not quite the *kapahaka* of the Maori community: the context is different, for in *kapahaka*, there is no explanation and the *kapahaka* audience actively participates. For example, at the Wellington regional competitions in 2008, I witnessed audience members (*whanau* [kin], friends and/or fellow competitors) performing a support *haka* to show appreciation for the skill demonstrated.

Ultimately, the museum performance seems to be somewhat of a self-conscious hybrid that, like all hybrids, fills a need that cannot be met by its predecessors. This finally suggests there are many consequences to this performance for the museum, the *taonga*, the performers, and Aotearoa New

Zealand itself in a continuing process of adaptive and fluid processes of performance and representation.

CONCLUSION

These Maori performers—all of whom are either attending university or have university degrees and therefore presumably have an understanding of the context of their performance—are challenging traditional understandings of the museum. First, they make the museum a space of lived performance rather than merely a receptacle of dead artifacts. Secondly, they take the performance of their musical art and make it not just for “aesthetic contemplation” (Duncan 1995), but reintroduce the historical meanings of the *waiata* (songs) and *haka* by setting up the performances with *korero*. Thirdly, they make the space sacred in the invocation of ancestors with the *karanga*. Lastly, they appropriate and change the meaning of the space by using it for their own aims and purposes, which may be part of a heavily politicized power dynamic in a redistribution of authority that generates a realignment of power (Ames 2003).

Museums are best understood as a forum for cultural politics (Phillips 2003, 1) and hierarchies that are continually responding to changing histories and presents. Majority museums house the best and most authentic cultural forms of exemplary or representative objects. For the city and the nation the museum belongs to, there is a sense of ownership of the objects within (Ibid, 121). The Auckland museum houses the world’s largest collection of Maori artifacts, and while in the past ownership of the objects may have been called into question (as is standard with museum acquisitions), the live group of Maori performers performing in the Maori Court, more potent than the Taumata (though this group is indubitably significant), authenticates and vitalizes the decontextualized artifacts in the collection. This also impedes a calling-into-question of ownership of the artifacts, for the mere fact that the local tribe shows its acceptance/approval of the Auckland Museum’s housing of these treasures is a sort of reciprocal relationship; the museum speaks for the rights of the Maori and the Maori make the museum a worthy visit, a co-production of an exhibit that can be understood by all its viewers.

The identities invoked in the cultural experience are of self-exoticising, self-commodifications of “folkloricized identities” (Thomas 1994). At the same time, these “Native-primitivist idealizations can only be politically productive...if they are complemented by here and now concerns” (Thomas 1994, 189). The here and now concerns for Ngati Whatua O Orakei are having a job that allows its members to have flexible schedules to attend classes and earn money to pay school fees, and most importantly for these artists to perform Maori culture for outsiders *well*. I thought that perhaps by doing these dances several times a day in a secular setting the dances would lose some of their sacredness for the performer or the performers would not give them quite the same intention as they would in a Maori setting. I found the exact opposite was the case, for as Rangi said, “it’s very sacred stuff, it’s treated as such.”

In the commodity performance as a new form of representation in the museum context, the Maori performers authenticate the artifacts, but by being situated in an artifact space the performers become objects and objectified. Taking control of their representation, Maori present themselves and their culture as *taonga* in the Auckland Museum. As *taonga*, their *mana*, *tapu* and *korero* are invoked in their performance, thereby recontextualizing their decontextualization in the creation of a museum exhibit rich with nuance and new meanings.

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Endnotes

¹ Aotearoa's *tangata whenua* (indigenous people), the Maori, have lived in Aotearoa for between eight and twelve hundred years. European explorers made first contact in the late seventeenth century and began colonial settlement in the mid-nineteenth century in the land they called New Zealand. In 1840, a representative of the Queen of England and forty-three Maori Chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi (the Treaty). This Treaty is at the heart of Aotearoa New Zealand's development as a nation. In this paper, the part of the Treaty of interest is Article 2. Here, the Queen guaranteed all Maori undisturbed possession over the (*taonga*) properties that they may collectively or individually possess. The use of the term *taonga* implies both tangible and intangible treasures must be protected. For more details visit, <http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/treaty/>

² Although Maori battled valiantly, New Zealand fought on the side of its colonial master, the United Kingdom. Furthermore, at their base, these were European wars.

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